

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
May 27, 2020

While almost all New Jersey Department of Agriculture employees are working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the department is functioning as normal as possible while performing its regular business. We have placed COVID-19 information related to agriculture on our website at nj.gov/agriculture and have been updating that site regularly.

CARES Act for COVID-19 – The Food and Nutrition Division has received approximately \$224 million under the CARES Act for COVID-19 related claims. These funds can be used on reimbursements from March through September 2020. They may not be used for any administrative purposes. We are currently working with the Office of Management and Budget to set up these accounts.

Jersey Seafood Marketing – The Agricultural and Natural Resources Division held a call with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection staff about the possibility of funding a Jersey Seafood marketing program with funds that were awarded to the DEP from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for charter commercial fishermen, charter businesses, qualified aquaculture operations, subsistence/cultural/ceremonial users, processors, and other fishery-related businesses.

Grant Programs – Marketing and Development Division staff are fulfilling required obligations under our grant programs, the Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG), Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS), Produce Safety, Livestock, Risk Management (RMA), Rural Development and Wine Industry Grants. These include research and development, timely submission of reports and preparing for and participating in Grants Committee meetings. In addition, we are monitoring Grant Proposal Awards and preparing proposals.

Animal Emergency Planning and Preparedness – Efforts to mitigate the impact that COVID-19 has on animals and people continue. The interactive disaster assistance map on the animal emergency website is updated to ensure the information on livestock feed stores and the county Office of Emergency Management information is accurate. The animal emergency preparedness coordinator participated in a working group intending to compile livestock feed assistance options, if any, that feed stores are offering. At this time, no feed store has voluntarily disclosed assistance options. A list of pet food pantries in New Jersey has been developed, which is now present on the NJDA website and the animal emergency website at <https://www.animalemergency.nj.gov/>.

Phytosanitary Certificates – The Plant Industry Division issued 10 federal phytosanitary certificates for shipments of 81,002 dormant flower bulbs, three shipments of 10,290 seedling ornamental trees and shrubs, and two shipments of 1,000 seedling annual flowers to Canada. A total of seven state phytosanitary certificates were issued for domestic shipments of 111,162 Solanaceous plants, 750 grape seedlings, and 440 assorted perennial plants to California, Nevada, and Puerto Rico.

Commodity Inspection and Grading – The Marketing and Development Division's Commodity Inspection and Grading staff are conducting all requested USDA Terminal Market and Shipping Point inspections (an average of 260 per month); scheduling and conducting USDA on-farm Third Party Audits; conducting all required FDA contract inspections; conducting requested on-farm fertilizer inspections; updating Animal Feed and Produce Safety Inventory, reviewing farm Produce Safety plans and preparing risk evaluations. In addition, we have completed invoicing of USDA Fruit and Vegetable certificates for all completed Terminal Market and Shipping point inspections.

Live Bird Marketing Inspections – During the month of April, animal health technicians (AHTs) conducted unannounced inspections at 17 registered New Jersey live bird markets and sampled nine markets for avian influenza by sampling poultry. Additional activity during the month of April included: the quarterly closure of 23 live bird markets. Quarterly closures consist of cleaning and disinfecting the entire market, followed by a minimum of 24 hours of “down-time.” Following the “down-time,” environmental samples are taken at the market for testing at the N.J. Animal Health Diagnostic Lab; the inspection of one poultry distributor. Records were reviewed as well as ensuring compliance with 2:9-4.2(c), reviewing vehicle cleaning and disinfection logbooks; Avian Influenza testing of one poultry distributor. This includes environmental sampling of the poultry distributor vehicle and premises; Avian influenza testing of approximately 17 backyard flocks.

Food Distribution For June – The Food and Nutrition Division sent surveys to School Food Authorities to determine if they would be interested in a June allocation of USDA Foods, which is not standard practice. The response was largely in favor and the Food Distribution Unit is working on its release. The allocation will offer a large volume of fresh produce along with its traditional center of the plate offerings.

Spotted Lanternfly Research – As federal research into any possible biocontrol for the spotted lanternfly begins, the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Rearing Laboratory is partnering with the USDA to begin work on starting a lab colony. Eggs collected in the fall have been stored outside all winter. Work will begin with them once they hatch.

Soil Conservation District Inspections – With the issuance of Executive Order No. 142, allowing for the resumption of all non-essential construction, all Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) returned to a regular inspection schedule on May 20. All SCDs continue with adjusted office scheduling to limit staff office presence at any given time. Many staff continue to work from home. All field staff are required to wear PPE and adhere to all guidelines regarding social distancing. Office staff follow a strict cleaning protocol at the end of each day.