

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
September 23, 2020

Animal Health Diagnostic Lab Receives \$1.8 Million FDA Grant – The FDA approved \$1.8 million in funding to support the Animal Food (Livestock and Pet) surveillance for E. coli, Salmonella, and Listeria. The funding will be used to test samples collected by the Division of Marketing, Bureau of Commodity Inspection. The Lab Flexible Funding Model funding is approved for up to five years. The funding will help maintain animal food testing infrastructure, including supplies, equipment, quality assurance, and some personnel cost. The funding will help develop the capacity to study the foodborne pathogens using state of the art Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) technology. NGS is a modern technology to sequence the DNA of microorganisms in a high throughput manner.

School Nutrition Programs – Food and Nutrition Division staff have been working with the New Jersey Department of Education to obtain the breakdown of the set ups that schools have chosen for the School Year 2020-21; fully virtual learning, hybrid or on site. Staff can then work with that information to provide guidance about their feeding options and to share this information with the USDA in future reporting requests.

National Sea Grant Law Center Seaweed Consumption Research – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff are participating via webinar attendance and email correspondence in a National Sea Grant Law Center initiative to determine the current regulatory system for seaweed aquaculture and eventual human consumption. The first webinar, hosted in late August, covered federal level regulations and authorities. A September interactive webinar/web forum is focusing on state-level efforts. Currently, there is no seaweed aquaculture in New Jersey, but interest in this sector has been expressed by a variety of individuals and businesses.

Pepper Export Program – A New Jersey pepper grower continues to export fresh peppers into Texas under a quarantine-compliance program implemented by the NJDA and its Plant Industry Division. This compliance agreement safeguards against the introduction of European corn borer. In total, 9,700 cases of fresh pepper were certified to ship to Texas under this program so far this year.

Commodity and Inspection Grading – The Marketing and Development Division's Commodity Inspection and Grading staff is conducting all requested USDA Terminal Market and Shipping Point inspections (average of 350 per month), scheduling and conducting USDA on-farm Third Party Audits, and all FDA Produce Safety inspections. Also, staff has completed all required FDA contract inspections, is reviewing 2021 FDA contract assignments, and conducting requested on-farm fertilizer inspections.

Emergency Preparedness Planning – New Jersey's Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP) proposal was one of 10 funded nationally by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The proposal seeks to strengthen identified gaps and challenges in the Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) Community in pandemic preparedness and mass care efforts and strengthen the animal sheltering capability throughout the state. As further details from New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness colleagues are provided, the NJDA and its partners will move forward on the proposed plan. Regarding animal sheltering, the plan includes conducting exercises and training volunteers involved in County Animal Response Teams (CARTs) and State Animal Response Teams (SARTs). Additionally, there is a plan to build upon the state's efforts to support animal sheltering during mass care operations, particularly during a pandemic. Recruitment efforts of potential SART volunteers continue, including reaching out to New Jersey based animal rescue organizations and the New Jersey Veterinary Technicians and Assistants Association.

Child and Adult Care Food Program – The Food and Nutrition Division’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) website was updated to include the FY2021 Annual Certification Renewal Documents. Staff has received and is reviewing 71 annual renewal certification forms. The NJ Office of Information Technology (OIT) is installing the MOVEit® Transfer: Managed File Transfer (MFT) software to enable the consolidation of large file transfer activities in a secure environment, which will better serve our institutions.

Ag Education – Each year the National Teach Ag Campaign selects an elite group of agricultural education majors to represent the profession and encourage others to teach agriculture. New Jersey’s Renee Stillwell, a graduate of Allentown High School, is one of 14 individuals selected to serve as a National Teach Ag Ambassador this year. Renee is currently a senior at Delaware Valley University and will student teach in the spring semester. Renee was an intern in the Office of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education where she has done work with New Jersey’s Teach Ag initiative.

Marketing – The Marketing and Development Division marketing staff, along with the ad agency, launched the MoreMealsLessWaste.com food waste reduction campaign on September 1. The campaign includes the website, billboards, radio spots and social media placement. Also, the #ThankYouNJFarmers photo contest has concluded and the grand prize winner was notified with the official announcement expected this week.

Canadian Blueberry Fruit Certification Program – Plant Industry Division Nursery Inspection Program staff continued to audit participants’ recordkeeping and oversee the grower compliance with the necessary phytosanitary requirements for this year’s Canadian Blueberry Fruit Certification Program (BCP). For the season, over 461,620 crates and 94 pallets were shipped into Canadian markets this season.