

**Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture**  
**November 18, 2020**

**School Nutrition Programs** – Food and Nutrition Division staff are working collaboratively with the Summer Food Service Program to develop a plan that will involve monitoring Seamless Summer Option (SSO) participants through school year 2020-21. Additional guidance continues to be released by the USDA. The team is reviewing it carefully so that all requirements are incorporated in the plan.

**National Virtual FFA Convention** – FFA Chapters across New Jersey and the State FFA Association attended the 93rd National FFA Convention on Oct. 27-29. Through the virtual platform, members participated in an array of workshops, watch sessions hosted by the National FFA Officer Team and chats with exhibitors. Through the Blue 365 partnership with Microsoft, members participated in the Blue Room where they explored innovation and sustainability in the agricultural industry and heard from speakers representing several different agriculture-related businesses. Competition highlights for New Jersey included Bergen County Academies taking first in Agriscience, 10 New Jersey members receiving their American FFA Degrees and the Allentown and Woodstown chapters being recognized as Three Star chapters.

**Dairy Processing Progress** – On-farm dairy processing continues to advance with multiple farms at various stages of planning and construction. One plant is ready to start with testing of the unit with the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) in order to gain its Grade A processing approval. They worked with the NJDOH on the plans and label approvals were also conducted.

**New Jersey Hemp Program** – Participating in this year's New Jersey Hemp Program were 59 Growers, 13 Processors, and 6 Handlers who were licensed and proposed to grow approximately 449 acres in the field and 57 acres under glass. The actual hemp acreage planted throughout the state was 81 field acres and 2 acres under glass by 37 active growers. To date, 218 samples were taken by program staff. A total of 193 samples passed the criteria for Total THC (0.3 percent) while 22 samples failed compliance and were subsequently destroyed.

**United States Animal Health Association Meeting** – A Division of Animal Health veterinarian attended the virtual 125th Annual Meeting of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA), which included a session for the Committee on Animal Emergency Management. The session included a series of live presentations as well as recorded updates from regional alliance groups in the United States. Information presented included how the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted animal agriculture in the country. The challenges faced and met by food animal production, particularly swine, and its processing facilities were discussed. Additionally, a New York state animal health official spoke on how it managed and supervised zoological and companion animal SARS-CoV-2 testing.

**Free and Reduced Meal Applications** – Food and Nutrition Division staff are providing assistance and guidance to sponsors on Verification and Direct Certification. These processes are normally conducted in the fall and rely heavily on the school meal applications that schools collect from households to determine free or reduced meals. This year the number of applications collected is significantly low because of the pandemic and the USDA's waivers that allow meals to all students at no cost. The USDA's guidance has been to continue the process as usual and perhaps extend the deadlines to December to encourage the schools to gather more meal applications from the households.

**Organic Certifications** – Marketing and Development Division staff organic employees are completing work on certifications and in-house field inspectors are using the modified inspection protocol of reviewing documents prior to doing on-site visits. Training has taken place so more in-house staff can do organic

inspections. Other staff are being trained to complete organic certification packets for handlers and producers in order to keep the program completing certification of clients until open positions are filled.

**Animal Health Diagnostic Lab Testing** – During the month of October, the Pathology Laboratory Section completed 661 tests and/or procedures. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic), immunohistochemical and parasitological preparation and evaluation and these cases generated additional diagnostic tests for other laboratory sections (e.g. bacteriology, virology and molecular). Results from these case submissions help to support practicing veterinarians (large, mixed and small animal), private food and companion animal owners, NJ State Agencies, racetrack, wildlife, zoo and nonprofit animal facilities. Cases involved diagnostic testing for disease and/or cause of death diagnosis and routine and/or sporadic disease surveillance for large and small ruminant, companion animal and exotic/zoo species; sudden death with no clinical symptoms; assessment of backyard and small flock health issues; large scale flock disease; law enforcement forensic investigation and animals exhibiting neurologic symptoms.

**Soil Erosion Program** – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff is reporting that new housing projects are increasingly more difficult to design due to building on “marginal” land that was overlooked previously due to poor location or difficulties with environmental permitting. The impact of development on these parcels is noticed by Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) in their review of drainage systems and the potential for downstream erosion. Drainage design has become more complex with a greater reliance on infiltration practices to dispose of stormwater runoff from new impervious surfaces. The NJDEP has adopted new “Green Infrastructure” (GI) design requirements for developments that will use distributed stormwater management systems and rely even more on infiltration. The interplay between GI and erosion and sediment control standards is being evaluated by the NJDA and the SCDs to ensure no conflicts arise between the two programs.

**Boxwood Blight** – Plant Industry Division staff completed the third and final boxwood-compliance inspection during mid-October at 41 nursery locations. Inspectors detected two instances of boxwood blight (BWB) during these inspections. Once samples were taken and the laboratory determinations were made, inspectors met with the boxwood producers and arrangements were made for the removal and destruction of the infected plants. The first site was relatively small resulting in the removal and destruction of 100 plants. The second site was much larger and contained more than five acres of boxwood plants. Inspectors concluded that the BWB infection likely spread throughout this second site on the worker’s tools and equipment. This was the first significant instance of BWB for New Jersey growers this year. Only BWB quarantine complaint nurseries are permitted to ship their plants into these areas.