



State of New Jersey

## **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**April 22, 2026**

**(Wednesday)**

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on April 16, 2026.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by giving written notice of the time, date, location and to the extent known the agenda of this meeting. At least 48-hours in advance this notice has been posted on the third floor, Riverview Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey; mailed to the Newark Star Ledger; the Trenton Times; the Philadelphia Inquirer and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Bob Blew called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 12:05 pm. Board members in attendance included President Bob Blew; Vice President Stephen V. Lee, IV, David DeFrango, John Hart, Joel Viereck, Rick Gardner, Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Wengryn; Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison; Dr. Sandra Strilec (TEAMS), Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC; Tameko Webster, Chris LaRegina, Robert Vivian, Jeff Beach, Anthony Tarr, Billy Connors (TEAMS), Bella Walz (TEAMS), Alyssa Pitt (TEAMS), Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Allen Carter (TEAMS), Ashley Kerr, Al Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Robert Andrzejczak, State Executive Director, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, NRCS; Tom Hionis, State Board Member-Elect; David Watts, Organic & Regenerative Farming Board; Ryck Suydam, Somerset County farmer; Manatee Smith, Producers 1 Agriculture Group and Sustainable Solutions, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

### **RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board adopts a resolution to enter executive session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(8), to evaluate the performance of an employee. The Board will evaluate the employees' performance in implementing strategic outreach to stakeholders and in reviewing and implementing hiring practices in the Department.

The Board will disclose the contents of the closed session as soon as we are able to do so. Minutes will be approved at a future Board meeting.

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to enter executive session.

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to go back into the public session of the meeting.

### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

ON the MOTION of Rick Gardner, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2026, meeting.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Manatee Smith, Producers1 Ag Group and Sustainable Solutions, reported that he was in the audience to see what the next steps for the Urban Agriculture Committee are and looks forward to working with the Department. He provided the Board with a copy of an article that he prepared with Fallon Ayaan titled: Urban Agriculture is Municipal Infrastructure: A Statewide call to action for New Jersey's urban mayors.

Board member David DeFrange commented that the work of the Urban Ag Committee will continue after he leaves the Board. It was also noted that the results from the survey would be sent to the Committee as soon as it is ready.

Ryck Suydam, Somerset County farmer, stated that he had presented to the Board at their January meeting the concern of restrictions on leased state farmland. He noted that the restrictions are generally unnecessary and burdensome on farmers. He stated that our new Governor is pro-business and agriculture is a business. He stated that he was very happy to hear that the State Board now has a Committee for DEP issues and offered his assistance to Joel Viereck, Chair of the new DEP Committee. He noted that he had spoken with Senator Smith about this issue and the Senator asked if more or less farmland is being leased because of the restrictions. At the time, they only had one year of data about the state leased lands and asked that the DEP Committee add it to the list of things that need to be addressed by the Committee. It was noted that they are hoping to have five years of data for Senator Smith to review.

Joel Viereck, Chair of the DEP Committee, noted that the Committee had one brief meeting after the formation of the Committee and that they would be working to establish a list of concerns that will be drafted by the Committee to take to DEP.

### **REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Brian Schilling represented the College and reported on the following topics:

- New Extension Specialist in Food Safety, Byron Chaves Elizondo started on March 1; Amelia Valente recently took over Monmouth County 4-H, she comes from the Ocean County office and has a background in Extension. They are currently interviewing for positions in Bergen County and the Vegetable Statewide IPM position, which is very important, and they are extending an offer for the PSEP, Pesticide Safety Education Position, which has been a very difficult process but hope that they are finally going to have someone.

- Ag Leadership Development Program Class 13 was in Washington, DC this past month where they had a good trip visiting legislators and seeing how things work in DC. They went to the Dutch Embassy because they will be travelling to the Netherlands for their international trip.
- He gave kudos to the Monmouth County Board of Ag and Planning Department. They put on a good program looking at right to farm kind of strategically through the eyes of farms are changing, farms are trying to find a way to adapt and make money with a new generation coming on board. There were people from the planning community, a lawyer who spoke very well, Chuck Roohr was there as well as the Secretary who also made some comments. He noted that they did a very good job putting the presentation together and noted that there were probably 80 or more in attendance.
- Meredith Taylor and Claudia Urdanivia are planning in May through October to have an online training program with some hands-on components for urban ag, everything you would want to know as a starter, IPM, production practices, soils and so forth.
- He reported that there would be a free webinar on the drone program, and using drones in agriculture. Anyone interested should contact Steve Komar or Michelle Casella.

### **REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)**

State Executive Director Robert Andrzejczak reported the following on behalf of the Farm Service Agency:

#### **FSA Temporary Program Analyst**

FSA is looking for temporary office assistance to help deliver "The American Relief Act of 2025," which was signed into law on December 21, 2024, and provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture with more than \$30 billion to deliver disaster recovery assistance for farmers and livestock producers. This position will help support the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program which will aid producers for necessary expenses due to losses due to weather related events in 2023 and 2024. Resumes can be submitted to the Hunterdon/Somerset County FSA Office; 687 Pittstown Road, Suite 2; Frenchtown, NJ 08825 or email Laura LaFevre at [laura.lafevre@usda.gov](mailto:laura.lafevre@usda.gov) through May 8, 2026.

#### **Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (Stage 1 and Stage 2)**

FSA is delivering more than \$16 billion in SDRP assistance. Stage 2 of SDRP covers eligible crops, tree, bush and vine losses that were not covered under Stage 1 program provisions, including non-indemnified (shallow loss), uncovered and quality losses.

Stage 1 remains available to producers who received an indemnity under crop insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for eligible crop losses due to qualifying 2023 and 2024 natural disaster events. Producers have until April 30, 2026, to apply for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 assistance.

Thus far, New Jersey FSA has approved 379 SDRP Stage 1 applications and paid over \$5.5 million to New Jersey farmers. Nationally, FSA paid over \$5.9 billion. There is a public facing dashboard if producers are interested in following SDRP signup.

SDRP provides disaster relief payments to eligible producers who suffered revenue, quality, or production losses to crops, trees, bushes, or vines due to qualifying disaster events in calendar years

2023 and 2024. SDRP assistance to eligible producers will be delivered in two stages. Producers can receive payments in both stages, if applicable, and for one or both years, depending on losses. The signup period for Stage 1 opened on July 7, 2025. Stage 1 leverages existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments.

Stage 2 provides assistance for eligible crops, tree, bush and vine losses not covered under Stage 1, including:

- Non-Indemnified (Including Shallow Losses)
  - Insured losses through federal crop insurance that did not trigger a crop insurance indemnity.
  - Losses with NAP coverage that did not trigger a NAP payment.
- Uncovered (Uninsured) Losses
  - Includes losses that were not insured through federal crop insurance or NAP.
- Quality Losses
  - Includes quality losses to commodities indicated by:
- A decrease in value based on discounts due to the physical condition of the crop supported by applicable grading factors.
- A decline in the nutritional value of forage crops supported by documented forage tests.
  - Producers will certify to an SDRP quality loss percentage.

Losses due to drought must have occurred in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks, D3 (extreme drought) or greater intensity level during the applicable calendar year. Counties that have met eligibility criteria for drought in calendar year 2023 and/or 2024 are outlined in the fact sheet SDRP Drought Eligible Counties. For 2023, there are no drought eligible counties in NJ. For 2024, the following are drought eligible counties: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Salem, Somerset, Warren.

### **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the enrollment periods for agricultural producers and landowners to submit offers for the Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for Continuous CRP, through May 1, 2026. FSA will announce dates for Grassland CRP signup soon.

CRP is USDA's flagship conservation program, providing financial and technical support to agricultural producers and landowners who place unproductive or marginal cropland under contract for 10–15 years and who agree to voluntarily convert the land to beneficial vegetative cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and support wildlife habitat. The *Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*, extends FSA's authority to administer CRP through September 30, 2026.

"We're still very close to the 27-million-acre statutory cap with 1.9 million acres available for all CRP enrollments this fiscal year so enrollment is likely to be competitive," USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Richard Fordyce said. "This isn't about the total number of acres enrolled,

it's about producers and landowners offering and USDA accepting the acres that can best deliver real, lasting benefits to soil, water and wildlife.”

### **Continuous CRP (Signup 65)**

FSA will batch Continuous CRP offers submitted by interested agricultural producers and landowners. Offers to re-enroll expiring CRP continuous acreage will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis. New acreage offered in continuous CRP practices will be considered for acceptance on a first-come, first-serve basis if they support USDA conservation priorities including but not limited to practices that address water quality, such as filter strips and grass waterways, and practices that restore native ecosystems or target specific resource concerns. Offers submitted after May 1 will be considered for acceptance in subsequent batching periods if acreage remains available.

Continuous CRP participants voluntarily offer environmentally sensitive lands, typically smaller parcels than offered through General CRP including wetlands, riparian buffers, and varying wildlife habitats. In return, they receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover.

Continuous CRP enrollment options include:

- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP): Addresses high priority conservation objectives of states and Tribal governments on agricultural lands in specific geographic areas.
- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Initiative (SAFE): Restores vital habitat in order to meet high-priority state wildlife conservation goals.
- Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative: Prioritizes water quality practices on the land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms. The vegetative covers also contribute to increased wildlife populations.
- CLEAR30 (a component of the CLEAR Initiative): Offers additional incentives for water quality practice adoption and can be accessed in 30-year contracts.
- Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI): Producers and landowners can enroll in CRP to establish long-term cover on highly erodible cropland that has a weighted erodibility index greater than or equal to 20.

### **Loss Adjusters**

New Jersey FSA is seeking Loss Adjusters (LAs) for the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Loss Adjusters are required to have knowledge of field crops and specialty crops, as well as a thorough understanding and execution of crop adjusting guidelines and program provisions, as applicable to FSA programs. If interested, please contact Aly Dyson, NJ FSA Disaster Specialist, [Aly.Dyson@usda.gov](mailto:Aly.Dyson@usda.gov), with any questions.

### **Farmer Bridge Assistance Program (FBA)**

FBA enrollment period closed on Friday, April 17. FSA issued over \$9.3 billion nationwide and New Jersey has paid \$6.5 million. Producers can access the public facing FBA dashboard to remain updated on the FBA payments. Dashboard: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/farmers.gov/viz/FSA-FarmerBridgeAssistanceFBA/ProgramPaymentsbyCategoryandCommodity>

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced the enrollment period for the Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program, providing \$11 billion in one-time bridge payments to row crop producers in response to temporary trade market disruptions and increased production costs. The bridge payments are intended in part to aid farmers until historic investments from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), including reference prices which are set to increase between 10–21% for major covered commodities and will reach eligible farmers after Oct. 1, 2026.

Commodity-specific payment rates are:

- Barley: \$20.51
- Canola: \$23.57
- Chickpeas (Large): \$26.46
- Chickpeas (Small): \$33.36
- Corn: \$44.36
- Cotton: \$117.35
- Flax: \$8.05
- Lentils: \$23.98
- Mustard: \$23.21
- Oats: \$81.75
- Peanuts: \$55.65
- Peas: \$19.60
- Rice: \$132.89
- Safflower: \$24.86
- Sesame: \$13.68
- Sorghum: \$48.11
- Soybeans: \$30.88
- Sunflower: \$17.32
- Wheat: \$39.35

### Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program

Late filing acreage reporting for ASCF has been extended to April 24. On February 13, Secretary Rollins announced that USDA FSA is providing \$1 billion in Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program assistance for specialty crops and sugar, commodities not covered through the previously announced Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program. These one-time bridge payments will help address market disruptions, elevated input costs, persistent inflation, and market losses from foreign competitors engaging in unfair trade practices that impede exports. ASCF payments will be based on reported 2025 planted acres. Commodity-specific payment rates will be released by the end of March. More information on ASCF is available online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/fba](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/fba) or producers can contact their local FSA county office.

ASCF – eligible specialty crops include: (A) *Almond, Apple, Apricot, Aronia berry, Artichoke, Asparagus, Avocado*; (B) *Banana, Bean (Snap or green; Lima; Dry edible), Beet (Table), Blackberry, Blueberry, Breadfruit, Broccoli (including Broccoli Raab), Brussels Sprouts*; (C) *Cabbage (including Chinese), Cacao, Carrot, Cashew, Cauliflower, Celery, Celery, Cherimoya, Cherry, Chestnut (for Nuts), Chive, Citrus, Coconut, Coffee, Collards (including Kale), Cranberry, Cucumber, Currant*; (D) *Date, Dry Edible Beans and Peas\**; (E) *Eggplant, Endive*; (F) *Feijou, Fig, Filbert (Hazelnut)*; (G) *Garlic, Gooseberry, Grape (including Raisin), Guava*; (H) *Horseradish*; (K) *Kiwi, Kohlrabi*; (L) *Leek, Lettuce, Litchi*; (M) *Macadamia, Mango, Melon (All Types), Mushroom (Cultivated), Mustard and Other Greens*; (N) *Nectarine*; (O) *Okra, Olive, Onion, Opuntia*; (P) *Papaya, Parsley, Parsnip, Passion Fruit, Pea (Garden; English or Edible Pod; Dry edible), Peach, Pear, Pecan, Pepper, Persimmon, Pineapple, Pistachio, Plum (including Prune), Pomegranate, Potato, Pumpkin*; (Q) *Quince*; (R) *Radish (All Types), Raspberry, Rhubarb, Rutabaga*; (S) *Salsify, Spinach, Squash (Summer and Winter), Strawberry, Suriname Cherry, Sweet Corn, Sweet Potato, Swiss Chard*; (T) *Taro, Tomato (including Tomatillo), Turnip*; (W) *Walnut, Watermelon*.

Finally, he reported that the FSA State Committee has just been appointed with Paul Hlubik serving as Chair of the Committee, James Abma Jr., Alfred Murray, Raj Sinha and James Wenger, those members will help there to be representation throughout the entire state. They are currently being onboarded and will be out representing FSA very soon.

## REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

Al Murray represented the Farm Bureau and reported on the following topics:

- Continuing to work with the SBOA Legislative Committee and staff, anticipating heat stress legislation and will coordinate with Frank Minch.
- Successful tour at Holland Ridge Farms to highlight agritourism, well attended with five state legislators, two federal reps and lots of aides, members of the Senate and Assembly partisan offices and OLS. Also in attendance was the NJ Chief Innovation Officer, the Ag Secretary and SBOA member John Hart.
- NJFB hosted our first meeting of the urban ag producer's subcommittee on Monday, April 20, looking to coordinate with other groups like NJDA and Rutgers BOM moving forward.
- Following proposed changes to the Game Code and will submit formal comments.
- Continue to work on getting legislators to sponsor budget resolutions for agriculture, and most importantly Rutgers NJAES who lost both their line item and supplemental funding.
- Rooted in Resilience Women in Ag event was a success, much to the hard work of COS Tameko Webster.
- Congratulations to SBOA member Joel Viereck for speaking at the White House event and then being interviewed on Fox News.
- Federal issues – still very concerned about war in Iran and costs of diesel and fertilizer this year. AFBF did a survey across the country, 70% of the 5,700 respondents say fertilizer is now so expensive that they will not be able to buy all the fertilizer they wish to have. Some 69% of respondents from the Northeast region say they cannot afford all needed supplies this year, and only 30% of farmers in that region prebooked. In New Jersey, approximately 75% say they can't afford fertilizer without cutting back and only 21% prebooked their supply. Nitrogen fertilizer has risen more than 30%, while combined fuel and fertilizer costs have increased roughly 20–50%, and urea prices have increased by 47% since the end of February. Many of the farmers surveyed said they will forego applying normal rates of fertilizer in hopes that prices will return to an affordable level later in the growing season. Overall, 94% of respondents reported their financial situation had worsened (58%) or remained the same (36%) since last year.

## REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

Bruce Eklund reported the following:

- Soybeans in NJ are up 10,000 acres to 110,000 acres, expected corn being planted is down to 73,000 acres; expected hay harvest down 3,000 acres to 98,000 acres. Nationally, corn is expected to be 3% less acreage and soybeans up 4%. Next exciting report is May 1 for non-citrus, cranberries, blueberries and peaches. Still collecting data for local foods and organic.
- New Jersey 2024 sales for principal vegetables totaled almost \$225 million from close to 28 thousand harvested acres. Tomatoes led in value of production, followed by bell peppers and sweet corn. Sweet corn led in harvested acres followed by cucumbers and squash. NASS did not publish New Jersey asparagus in 2024. These vegetable estimates represent crops grown in the open, not those grown under glass or other protection. For information on vegetables grown under protection, please see the Census of Horticulture and the Census of Agriculture.

**REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, provided the Board with handouts on the following:

**2018 FARM BILL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IN NEW JERSEY**

- 66 M in financial assistance funding from FY19–FY25 for AMA, CSP and EQIP (FY19–FY25)
- 5,405 applications (FY19–FY25)
- 1,993 contracts (37% funded, FY19–FY25)
- Average annual percent funded (FY19–FY25)
  - EQIP – 29%    CSP – 42%    AMA – 22%

Data not yet available for FY26 until after 9/30/26

**ADMINISTRATION’S GOAL TO REDUCE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

- President Donald Trump signed several executive orders in early 2025 aimed at reducing the size of the federal government, including EO 14217 "Commencing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy" (Feb 19, 2025) and EO 14210 "Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative" (Feb 11, 2025).
  - Soil conservation in the United States is structured as a three-tiered partnership combining local, state, and federal entities. This framework was developed in the 1930s following the Dust Bowl to address erosion issues through voluntary, locally led initiatives supported by federal technical expertise.
  - Expectation that local and state government will take on more
  - Conservation delivery is not just with NRCS
- NRCS–NJ STAFFING LEVELS
  - 75 FTEs in January of 2025
  - 53 FTEs in April of 2026

**NRCS FUNDING RESOURCES FOR SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

**National NRCS Opportunity**

Fiscal Year	NRCS NHQ Funds to NACD for SCDs TA	Example Outcomes/awards
2020	6.5 M	
2021	13 M	425 SCD positions, 25K clients served
2022	15 M	490 SCD positions
2023	15 M	
2024	18 M	169 awards across 47 states
2025	27 M	Awards expected April 2026
TOTAL	95 M	More than 107K producers assisted with conservation on more than 6.75M acres

**In State**

Fiscal Year	NRCS–New Jersey Funds for SCDs TA	Example Outcomes/awards
2023	2.3 M	Notice of Funding Announcement – awarded to Cape Atlantic SCD* & Ocean SCD

2026	1.8 M	All NOFOs on hold
2027	TBD	TBD

\* These funds supported conservation TA positions in multiple service centers

Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) across the country utilize a diverse mix of funding resources to support their operations, technical assistance, and conservation projects. These funding sources primarily include a combination of state appropriations, local government contributions, federal grants, and fee-for-service programs. Many districts pursue other avenues of funding to support their farmers and private forest owners in their counties. Some examples include:

- EPA 319 Grants or EPA Clean Waters and Healthy Watersheds
- NACD TA Grants or NACD Urban and Community Conservation (UAC) grant initiative – since 2016 8M awarded to 140 conservation districts and tribes in 39 states & PR; since 2022 added 10K for UAC planning grants...
- Revenue Generating programs
  - Fee for service like equipment rental, sales of materials, easement administration
- NRCS national and/or state NOFOs (Notice of Funding Opportunities) or other agreement tools
- State legislatures – through association of conservation districts (legislative day)
  - State operating funds, BMP programs or special grants
- Local government funding
  - Local government contributions, local levies, contractual services for municipalities
- RCPP, National or State CIG
- Private sources
  - Donations, sponsorships, private foundations, etc.

### **ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD**

David Watts reported that the Board had met the previous evening in Newark, it was well attended, the next meeting is September 15 at the Mercer County Extension Office from 4:00–6:00 pm. They provided the Board with a copy of a report compiled from the initial survey that was completed when this Board was established. Some of the priority issues that were addressed included:

#### **Cooperative Systems & Bulk Purchasing**

- Discussion centered on bulk purchasing as one cooperative practice that is working and very helpful for farmers, especially cover crop seed, compost, and organic inputs (feed). The most common arrangement seems to be ‘farmer-to-farmer’. These are informal and unevenly distributed around the state.
- Bulk purchasing programs exist (via NOFA and in other states) but participants identified these programs are very labor-intensive (often need significant staffing and coordination) AND dependent on storage capacity and other hard infrastructure.
- Participants expressed strong interest and support for expanding cooperative models for statewide or regional bulk purchasing. Success will require:
  - Dedicated program direction and coordination
  - Infrastructure (storage, and distribution)
  - Institutional leadership (at State level) or multiple host organizations

Point of Interest: One participant noted that NJDA has useful historical data on commonly used organic inputs. If the Department removes farm identities from this data set, this list of inputs could inform priority bulk purchases

### Equipment Sharing & “Equipment Link”

Discussion was mixed about whether a formal equipment-sharing system is feasible or necessary. One participant noted that some equipment rental is already happening. North Jersey RC&D has one program that rents a no-till drill. Other for-profit companies rent roller crimpers and manure spreaders. New, next-gen, and small-scale growers have highest interest in these kinds of equipment share/link opportunities. But there are significant challenges.

- Individual farmers are reluctant to lend personally owned equipment
  - o Liability issues, damage, timing conflicts
- Organizational programs (managed by non-profits) are also labor/resource intensive requiring:
  - o Staffing
  - o Storage
  - o Maintenance
  - o User agreements

One participant offered a promising idea, suggesting a used-equipment exchange. Noting that the trade-in value he receives on older equipment is virtually nothing, but dealer flips the same equipment around to sell as used for high mark-up. He would rather donate his older equipment to an exchange/rental program for a tax-credit and see other growers’ benefit. Others expressed interest in this idea. Overall major concerns expressed about exchange/rental schemes are that they have:

- Neutral management (nonprofit/agency)
- Clear rules and protections
- Starting small to assess demand

### Purchasing Agreements & LFPA (Local Food Purchase Assistance)

The LFPA program received the most robust discussion on this call. Participants expressed support for this and other ‘buy local’ initiatives, BUT there were a lot of concerns about structural disadvantages for farmers (particularly small growers). Everyone wants to support this work but acknowledges we need to do it better!

What’s not working well:

- Delayed payments (60-120 days) strain farmers’ cash flow
- Price negotiations often undervalue farmers’ costs
- Requirements such as GAP certification exclude many small farms
- Confusion around:
  - o Food service company requirements vs. regulatory mandates

What is working:

- Aggregator models (e.g., co-ops, auctions)
- Direct farm-to-pantry relationships in some communities
- Successful regional examples where farmers:
  - o Were paid promptly
  - o Received fair or retail-level prices
  - o Built direct relationships with food access organizations

#### Key concerns:

- Long-term sustainability of relying on emergency food providers as primary markets
- Mismatch between:
  - Food bank “charity” economics
  - Farmers’ need for consistent, fair pricing

Discussion revealed several shared priorities. Participants expressed the need to make LFPA permanent with state funding (NJDA may be exploring this), identifying ways to support smaller-scale, underserved and minority farmers, exploring tax incentives to move surplus food off farms at fair prices, expanding aggregation, and reducing administrative barriers. LFPA has proven value but needs structural fixes, especially around payment, pricing, and access for small farms.

#### Shared Infrastructure

ORFB survey results highlight infrastructure assistance as an important issue; participants on this call did not express strong demand, but there was discussion about the types of infrastructure investment that would be most advantageous to small and beginning farmers.

Most viable for sharing: especially if tailored to small and beginning farmers

- Cold storage
- Aggregation and packing facilities
- Processing equipment
- Transportation and logistics
- Commercial kitchens
- Potentially shared greenhouse space (especially for incubator farms)

#### Key observations:

- Existing hubs (e.g., Tri-County/Hightstown) are valuable but geographically limited
- Farmers are sometimes traveling long distances to access shared facilities
- Some facilities are underutilized due to:
  - Distance
  - Cost
  - Limited awareness

Key Takeaway: There is some interest in more regionally distributed aggregation and infrastructure hubs. Urban and small farmers seem to express the most interest.

#### Livestock Processing & Slaughter Capacity

Though relevant to fewer NJ regenerative farmers, this remains a significant challenge for organic livestock producers.

#### Key points:

- Lack of slaughter facilities severely limits:
  - Pastured livestock growth
  - Integrated regenerative systems
- Demand is growing for:
  - beef, pork, goat, specialty and halal processing

- Mobile slaughter units exist but are:
  - o Limited
  - o Dependent on USDA inspector availability

Needs identified:

- Restoration of federal funding
  - Continued state and federal advocacy
  - Regional facilities to reduce travel burdens on farmers
- Takeaway: Access to an abattoir remains a system-level barrier requiring sustained policy advocacy. There are interesting models domestic/international of farmer co-ops with processing and packing capacity. Also, mobile processing pilot projects have been tried in various areas of the country. More information on successes/failures would be of interest.

**Next Steps:**

- Report at the next Organic and Regenerative Farming Board meeting
- Share findings with the State Board of Agriculture
- Conduct another call regarding the following issues:
  - Regulatory guidance
  - Compliance support

### SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn noted that NASDA sent all the Departments of Agriculture an invitation to extend to farmers the opportunity to visit the White House for Farmers Week and Farmers Day, there was a link to apply; his application was reviewed and accepted. It was a real honor to have Joel not only attend, the opportunity to meet with the President and the Secretary of Agriculture and to come out and address the crowd from the South Balcony of the White House, which Joel did have the honor to do and he did his Jersey due diligence by mentioning Jersey Fresh and why it's so important and we really appreciate that he took advantage of that opportunity. In addition, he reported that there was a very successful "Women in Agriculture" event that both Hillary and Holly worked with the Department staff, led by Tameko Webster, as well as representatives of the Vegetable Growers and Ag Society. He noted that it is important that this Department is the support structure for all groups. In addition, he reported that he had been back on the County Board of Agriculture meeting road tour with Hunterdon, Somerset as well as meeting with the Soil Conservation Districts with Frank Minch. He noted that the annual Envirothon would be held on May 9, where 18 schools will be participating. Yesterday was the Department's Senate Budget hearing in conjunction with DEP, it was long but noted that some good information was shared. He noted that the Assembly Budget hearing is scheduled for next week. He noted that with the budget process, we have some good opportunities, and there have been interesting questions regarding PFAS, Land Use preservation, our Food and Nutrition programs and in my comments, we talked about the role that the Department will play in the Invasive Species Council, so each of our Divisions were highlighted, so we're in pretty good shape. We'll see how it goes on Monday. In the interest of time, Secretary Wengryn asked that the Division Directors come forward and report on any significant updates since their reports were prepared.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison announced that he was at a Food Export Conference in Pittsburgh last week and we were excited to hear that they are doubling our money available to us, which we use about

\$2,000,000 annually, and for now we're looking at \$4 million, which led me to another point that I've discussed with the Secretary, but we'll be talking about that more at a later date. In addition, just released today the Local Ag Marketing program just became available from the USDA. He noted that we've already posted it, sent it out, posting it on our all our social media sites. That Grant Program is sent directly to the USDA, not the Grants Committee of this Board. That also includes the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Local Foods Promotion Program, deadline for that is June 5th.

The Board asked about the status of the upcoming schedule for Legislative tours, he provided the following information on the schedule:

### **LEGISLATORS' TOUR, Morris/Somerset Counties – May 29, 2026**

#### **PEONY'S ENVY**

Peony's Envy is a Nursery and Display Garden in Bernardsville, New Jersey, within easy access of New York City and Philadelphia. Founded in 2006, the farm has grown into one of the most extensive peony collections in the United States — a living library of woodland, tree, herbaceous, and intersectional cultivars, with trails that invite visitors to wander and discover at their own pace.

#### **SOMERSET HILL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The Somerset Hills School District has been very active in the Farm to School program with the Area Food Service Director who has been an advocate of the program for years including cold calling local farms to develop relationships. These calls led to a partnership with Ort Farms who work to provide healthy options to the school throughout their season.

#### **DESIDERIO TRANQUILLITY FARM**

Overwhelmingly known as the superior training center for show hunters and jumpers in North America. Situated on 60 acres of prime preserved horse country, Desiderio Tranquility Farm has been designed to exceed the diverse needs of horses and equestrians with unparalleled amenities. Numerous grooming stalls and a fully heated/cooled tack room make it a pleasure to prepare to ride. There are two large outdoor arenas with jumps and seating.

#### **BURNT MILLS CIDER**

At Burnt Mills Cider Company, we've focused on creating a premium local hard cider for the underserved state of New Jersey. Our core belief is that high quality ingredients and processes yield a better product.

### **LEGISLATORS' TOUR, Gloucester County – June 26, 2026**

#### **KING CAVIAR FARMS**

Farm Raised Caviar in New Jersey – A True Farm-to-Table Fresh Caviar

King Caviar Farms is a recently launched, fully sustainable, pedigreed Sturgeon fish farm located in southern New Jersey a few miles from the area once known as the "Caviar Capital of the World." We ship our caviar nationally, and we hand deliver depending on location. We are a true farm-to-table fresh experience!

## **VIERECK FARMS**

Viereck Farms, nestled in the heart of Swedesboro, NJ, is a picturesque haven where visitors can immerse themselves in the authentic beauty of a working farm. The rolling green pastures and charming red barns create a scene straight out of a postcard, inviting guests to experience the tranquility of rural life. Here, rows of vibrant crops sway gently in the breeze, while contented livestock graze peacefully under the vast blue sky. From pumpkin patches to sunflower fields, Viereck Farms offers a delightful array of seasonal activities for all ages to enjoy. Families can embark on a leisurely hayride through the sprawling grounds or wander through the fragrant orchards, handpicking ripe fruit straight from the trees. With a commitment to sustainable farming practices, this idyllic retreat not only provides a glimpse into agricultural life but also serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving our connection to the land.

Viereck Farms is a family-owned agricultural business in Swedesboro, NJ, specializing in the cultivation of a variety of crops. With a focus on sustainable farming practices, Viereck Farms provides fresh produce to local markets and supports the community through its commitment to quality and environmental stewardship, Viereck Farms LLC is a fourth-generation farm.

## **ROWAN UNIVERSITY VETERINARY SCHOOL and AQUAPONICS PROGRAM**

Rowan University operates a sustainable aquaponics facility at its West Campus greenhouse, blending aquaculture (fish farming) and hydroponics to grow plants without soil. The system uses fish waste, converted into nutrients, to grow leafy greens and herbs, which are donated to the Rowan Food Pantry. Led by Professor Steve Ordog, this project provides hands-on, sustainable agriculture education.

Key aspects of the Rowan aquaponics program include:

- **System Details:** The facility tests different setups, including a high-end tank and a self-built, cost-effective "scrap" system to compare efficiency.
- **Production:** The system includes tilapia or koi fish, with produce currently focusing on leafy greens such as lettuce, kale, and spinach, alongside herbs like parsley.
- **Sustainability:** This method reduces water usage and eliminates the need for artificial fertilizers.
- **Educational Impact:** Students engage in hands-on learning, monitoring water quality, and learning about the chemistry, and biology of food production.
- **Campus Support:** Harvests are donated to The Shop, Rowan's on-campus food pantry, enhancing local food security.
- **Research Focus:** The project is part of a larger, \$690 million, initiative to expand West Campus research and promote regenerative agriculture, according to Rowan Today.

He reported that work continues to plan the Legislators' Tour in Bergen County, that is scheduled for July. Finally, he reported that the Specialty Crop Block Grant applications are due on May 14.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, stated that we are hopefully through the cold weather for the year, we were able to get the burn permit, thanks to DEP for the quick turnaround, these always come very quick and very late and they have been very helpful in getting those executed so that we can get the information out to everybody. He reported that this last round there were 11 farms participating. He noted that everyone that does it should be reporting it. In addition, he reported that we are anticipating heat stress legislation and we're working with Farm Bureau on

developing a template guidance document for everybody in the event that they like to fill this out and have it on hand as we get into the weather, which we know is coming and to try to head off any legislative issues that may arise.

Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC, reported that the public auction of the preserved Patricelli Farm, consisting of 27-acres in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, with a large ranch home was a success, he noted that someone new to farming purchased it, the buyer stated that he had retired from his job on March 31, always wanted to farm, saw this one for sale in the paper, came to the auction last week and bought it. He and his wife plan to grow organic vegetables.

Vice President Lee reported to Chuck that the Nominating Committee of the Board had met earlier that day to review the applications received for the SADC vacancies and that he wanted to have a conversation with Chuck regarding the positions.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported that applications for the Summer Food Service Program are coming in and we're working with the sponsors, our uploads for Summer EBT are also progressing smoothly and we are working with schools on the New Jersey Farm to School procurement initiative.

Anthony Tarr, CFO, reported that the Assembly Budget Hearing would be held the following week for 2027. He reported that the Fiscal Office submitted its fourth quarter spending plan to OMB that was approved. In addition, he reported that there will be a Department wide risk assessment including the Office of the Secretary. The questionnaire is ready to go and we hope to start it, early May, it may take about two to four weeks to get it done across the Department. He reported that the Department submitted a budget request for the FY27 of \$80 million and to our surprise we got to \$157,000, in addition, we submitted a request for 17 positions, only one was approved by OMB.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that with the monies for Spotted Lanternfly, \$1,523,000 will have to be returned if not expended by December 31, 2026. We have asked all the participants to turn in all the receipts and invoices to us in November so that we can get all the information to fiscal to get them processed quickly. He reported that monies can also be used for large Tree of Heaven takedowns, which was not allowed in prior years.

Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, reported that the Department is heavily engaged in preparations for FIFA, our Emergency Management team was able to participate in a functional exercise in preparation. She thanked Board members Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema for supporting the Women's History Event, by being part of the event planning and serving as moderators, she thanked the Ag Society, Vegetable Growers and Farm Bureau for taking part in the very successful day for the more than 150 participants.

Dr. Sandra Strilec, Division of Animal Health, reported that the Animal Emergency Working Group Symposium will take place at the EcoComplex on May 18 and noted that registration has been very strong. She noted that the role as an advisory committee for NJDA in its animal emergency planning so that it's up and running and we've got a good group of subject matter experts to help advise us as we try to continue to bolster our capability and resilience to emergency response with animals. She reported

that on the HPAI, Avian Influenza, front, things are quieter nationally and regionally this month. Our live bird markets can continue to do a monthly closure, and Dr. Patil will reevaluate within the next week or so to decide if that needs to continue into May, but so far so good with the state's live bird markets. Finally, she reported that their first newsletter was being sent out today to New Jersey's practicing veterinarians. This is our first pilot project to get a newsletter for direct communication to our practicing veterinarians, giving them some updates on the lab and regulatory side. This edition includes some do's and don'ts for writing health certificates that we still seem to need to remind our veterinarians about. There are a couple of resources about our new world screwworm concerns coming down from South, including some new information from the USDA's playbook for response that we could see and some additional treatment options that have been recently approved in case the pest is found in our state or country and need to be addressed. She reported that there have been some changes to the Coggins or Equine Infectious Anemia testing strategies and submissions through our lab. It's timely because this is the time of year in spring when folks are getting ready to do competitions and trail riding with their horses. From February to March, our lab saw an increase of over 1000 of these tests to run. So, it's typical for this time of year, everyone wants to get out and start riding their horses, but the lab is taking the brunt of that, certainly with those tests.

#### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Hillary Barile reported that the president of the Salem County Board of Ag had reached out to her about connections between local farms and local restaurants and she reached out to Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison to see if the Division of Markets could develop some resources for local county boards to try and help build relationships between some of those entities.

Holly Sytsema reported that fuel and fertilizer are big issues right now for the farmers, while some farmers did pre-purchase by the end of the year, most of them did not. So, there are issues with that as the costs have risen well over 30%, so that is a big economic impact on all the farms across the state. Some growers are looking at what they're going to plant now and changing some of the plans that they had due to the rise in costs. Obviously, the recent freeze affected everybody across the state, but she received several calls about that. Apple and peach guys are waiting to see what happens. Encourage everybody, all the State Board members, to continue working with your county so we can get an agricultural byway. Any county that needs information can reach out to her and she will send you the template that they are working with. She encouraged the Legislative Committee to look at Section 179 as far as taxing goes, it's \$25,000 in New Jersey. Talking about neighboring states, Pennsylvania and New York are all over 1 billion, we need to get New Jersey up and we need to get it aligned federally.

Joel Viereck reported to the Board that we had the first meeting of the DEP Committee, a lot of progress there, we are looking forward to continuing to have a grassroots movement start a good dialogue there with them. He reported that the Budget Committee had met with Joe Atchison and Frank Minch to review their divisions as the Committee would be doing with all Divisions. He noted that the DEP Committee is scheduled to meet again on May 14, they have several topics that will be addressed, one being the land lease issue. He reported that the most significant thing he has done, in the past month, was to be invited to the White House, he was grateful for the opportunity.

Rick Gardner announced that during Easter Week, the Livestock Cooperative had 370 head of cattle, sheep and goats but the price had dropped because of the number of animals. He reported that at the

Warren County Board of Ag meeting Mitchell Jones, a member of the Fish & Wildlife Committee, reported that there was a bear attack the previous day on a small farm, where a goat was killed, another was maimed, the vet did come out to stitch the maimed one. The Division of Fish & Wildlife was called, and they said that the owner could shoot the bear, however, after they visited the farm, they told the farmer that he could not shoot the bear and they would not put in a trap as it was not \$1,000 worth of damage. The bear returned and smashed a 5-foot fence and ripped the barn door off. He stated that something needs to be done, there used to be a state indemnification program for the loss of commercial livestock. This cannot continue, if you have a wayward predator like that, you must be able to neutralize it. He reported that the DEP, in the county, has purchased a sizable piece of property, next to county property, it's 90 or 100 acres, so we drafted a letter last week to hopefully they keep it in farmland because it's all farmland right now goes to the Delaware River and but you know a lot of times they will keep portion of it, and let the rest grow. He commended Holly on the draft resolution she prepared regarding Route 519 and noted that Warren County is going to get involved. He noted that he would be visiting several dairy farms in his county in the next few weeks, they should be able to market their milk right in New Jersey for whatever, ice cream, yogurt, you name it. He wants to see if we can't save some of these good quality dairy farms, there are a couple where the next generation wants to take over.

Secretary Wengryn noted that Dan Wunderlich and the dairy marketing team are working with the Commissioner of Health to see what mechanics we need to put in place to make it happen. We've been working since the Ag Convention two years ago when the dairy farmers came to tell us about their problems and now Health has done a great job in advancing the inspections, improving their process and we want to keep doing that so they can take advantage of direct marketing opportunities also. One final thing, last week Warren County Warren County Commissioners transferred to the Warren County Community College under 501C3 program, for the processing and harvesting facility. Now that doesn't mean that the DEP gave them full green light. So hopefully that can happen in the next few months. Finally, he reported that there would be a "Resurrecting the Beef Industry in New Jersey" event at Sussex County Community College on April 29 and hopes to attend.

John Hart noted that he would set up a meeting of the Wildlife/Livestock Committee to discuss the black bear situation. He reported that he had attended the Farm Bureau tour of Holland Ridge Legislative Tour in Cream Ridge and commented that the equipment there was beautiful but the equipment and the bulbs comes from Holland but the tariff tax is so high, you can't pass that on to customers, you would never make any money. It was noted that when the President announced the applications for tariff relief the information was passed on to the grower at Holland Ridge and the grower has already completed the application. He reported that he had attended Monmouth County Board of Ag the previous night and there were questions about some of the commodity councils and what the check-off monies are used for. He reported that there was obvious concern about the price of fuel and fertilizer at every meeting he has attended recently. He noted that the equine industry is very upset about the reduction in purses. In addition, he is concerned about the way that some towns are using the CBT monies for things other than farmland.

Secretary Wengryn stated that the Department has posted the tariff relief information on the website so that any grower who has paid tariffs for their businesses can complete an application.

Dave DeFrance reported the recent hot/cold weather has really been a problem, he noted that they lost all the foliage off the trees that pushed in the 90-degree temperatures, we never saw fully leafed out ginkgo completely. He reported that the lower half of their property went down to 22 degrees, so we will have to wait and see what the outcome is going to be in the next couple of weeks. He reported that on the County Board front, the same topic of the costs of fuel and fertilizer is very concerning for everyone. In addition, the weather has been a constant challenge and said he would be interested in an update from Rutgers climatology because we are seeing though trend in the western part of the state with very little rain. He reported that many are concerned about the lack of rain and are keeping very close watch. He noted that the black bear situation is becoming very concerning also in that they lost three hives the other night from a bear attack, it was caught on camera. They went right through the electric fence. He reported that the Urban Ag Committee survey noted that the top priorities include, land access, land permanency and preservation, retaining funding for beginning and small farmers and noted that a meeting of the Urban Ag Committee will be scheduled.

Vice President Lee provided the Board members with correspondence from Tri-County Cooperative regarding Community Food Bank of NJ. Mike Schrob – Food Sourcing Director at the Community Food Bank of NJ, contacted the Market Manager (Jillian) at Tri-County, at the request of CFBNJ's CEO. It was noted that the Community Food Bank of NJ is the only large food bank that has stipulated a cap price when paying for fresh produce from the coops they do business with; the CFBNJ has solicited for donations of fresh produce from many NJ farmers, who have obliged in many instances, but when the food bank recently received grant appropriations recently in the Fall of '25, they skirted these NJ farmers from buying any of their produce and went directly to the consignment houses offering produce from out of state. It was noted that maybe the Community Food Bank of NJ needs to be reminded that the monies for the Food Bank Grant Funding administered by NJDA are to not only help with accessing as much food for those in need but also support NJ farmers through direct purchases from those participating farms. It seems that the food bank has taken some heat since sending their letter to Tri-County stating they are only paying .45 cents/lb. of produce. I believe they are negotiating a much fairer price (+ or – \$1.00/lb.?) that can work for both entities. He reported that at the Burlington County Board of Ag meeting there was discussion about farmers losing their pesticide licenses because they are not checking off the \$0.00 invoice. He noted that DEP Committee should put this on their list for their next meeting and if there were any questions, he referred them to Bill Bamka, in the Burlington County Extension office. He reported that Camden County held their legislator event the previous evening and there was great attendance and the best part was the federal representation by several aides. One thing they asked him about specifically is they want to understand how many grants and what kind of grants the farmers are taking advantage of in New Jersey. He will be having some dialogue with Senator Booker's office regarding that. But the one thing that he thinks was positive from it was that they feel as though the USDA should be a good vehicle for grants, which they have been historically, and he thinks having them there at Camden County's meeting last night was a big deal. They started at five or six people and think we're probably about 35 or 40 people from last night. He stated that he was happy to hear that the legislative tours are being organized as they are a great way to engage with the legislators and/or their aides. He noted that during the budget hearing it was noted that they would like to have a cranberry harvest tour as well. Finally, he congratulated Secretary Wengryn on his patience at the budget hearing, to sit there and go through that process and must wait until you're called on and go through that whole process. He thinks it's an awful lot of work and thanked and commended the Secretary for his testimony yesterday.

President Blew announced that there would be a twilight meeting in Woodstown on May 1 at 5:00 pm and that Bill Bamka will be talking about how the Endangered Species Act is affecting MSDS labeling. He thinks that's something that's very pressing to, especially people in the southwestern part of the state where we deal with a fair number of invasive species issues. He announced that the Ag Leadership Class would be holding a Bootin' Scootin' BBQ at the Burlington County Fairgrounds, May 17 at Noon to 4:00 pm, as they are raising money for their international trip to the Netherlands, which will be very expensive trip. They're trying to do what they can to offset that cost. Besides that, he is 50 hours into 100 hour week and exhausted. So, he's going to leave his comments on that. Except for the fact that this Board has done a lot of work behind the scenes over the past eight weeks and he's very proud to be among peers. He thanked the members for all the hard work that we've put in today and every day recently, we've really been burning the candle at both ends of the middle.

Board member Holly Sytsema provided the Board members with a current draft of the Strategic Plan. This information includes feedback from all the Division Directors, we did our edits, and the document that you see in front of you is what we have as of now. She asked the four members that are not on Strategic Planning Committee to look at it, get any feedback that you have for us and then we hope to have a final document.

Secretary Wengryn announced that he was getting reports in (during the meeting) on crop damage, wine grapes got hit hard. We are getting reports that some blueberries were affected. We will be keeping everybody up to date on the potential damage, it could just be pockets that we're just hearing about. Finally, he said it was one year ago today that he got his new heart valve.

Vice President Lee commented that he had received a draft of A-4029, sponsored by Assemblywoman Andrea Katz and Assemblyman Alex Sauickie, which authorizes county agricultural development boards to contractually purchase supplies for sale to NJ farmers.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

#### **MEETINGS**

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, May 27, 2026, at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, beginning at 1:00 pm.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn