



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

August 26, 2026

(Wednesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on August 19, 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 Camden Courier Post; the Philadelphia Inquirer and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Stephen V. Lee IV called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 1:01 pm. Board members in attendance included President Stephen V. Lee, IV; Vice President Joel Viereck (on TEAMS), David DeFrango, John Hart, Rick Gardner, Robert Blew, Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roehr, Executive Director, SADC; Deputy Assistant Secretary Tameko Webster; Billy Conners, Robert Vivian, Jeff Beach, Anthony Tarr, On TEAMS – Kaitlynn Dixon, Bella Walz, Tim Idland, Alyssa Pitt, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Liz Thompson, Ashley Kerr, Al Murray, Asa Cadwaller, NJ Farm Bureau; Tim Hionis, State Board Member-Elect (TEAMS); Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Robert Andrzejczak State Executive Director, Farm Service Agency, Arelys “Liz” Ortiz, Assistant State Conservationist-Field Operations, NRCS, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

It was noted that Secretary Wengryn was traveling on a NASDA trade mission to Kenya & Rwanda, in addition, Vice President Viereck was participating by phone for a short time from vacation.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Rick Gardner, seconded by Bob Blew, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 22, 2026, meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public offered comment; no online participants raised hands.

RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to go into Executive Session.

N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(8)– a matter involving the employment, appointment, termination of employment, terms and conditions of employment, evaluation of the performance of, promotion, or disciplining of any specific prospective public officer or employee or current public officer or employee employed or appointed by the public body. The contents of this discussion will be made public as soon as is appropriate at an upcoming meeting.

ON the MOTION of Hillary Barile, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted unanimously to go back into the regular session.

President Lee announced that the Board meeting agenda has been recently adjusted to place board work earlier in the meeting for better engagement and efficiency. He noted that he appreciates receiving the industry reports prior to the Board meeting and asked that they report on anything not covered in their reports. He announced that the Board Committee structure would most likely be changing to align with specific divisions, although it was noted that there are a few required standing committees under the bylaws. In addition, there was some discussion about board member term limits, continuity and institutional knowledge retention. They will continue evaluating the Committee structure before implementing changes. Additionally, he reported that there is a very strong alumni association of folks that have worked with us before and have a lot of knowledge about the Department and the issues that are happening in New Jersey.

Board member David DeFrange, who has now served two terms on the Board, stated that he too feels that it is very helpful in having the experience of working with the Board and members of the Department for an extended period. Especially with all the recent issues the agriculture community is facing with other Departments like DEP and the Department of Health. He also stated that any Board member that wants to serve another term is still expected to go through the Caucus procedure and be elected by the delegates.

Board member Rick Gardner commented that while he would be in favor of members serving more than one term, he noted that it should be at least one new Board member in each class.

Board member Holly Sytsema commented that when she decided to seek a second term, she visited the Caucus and was asked questions that were very different than she had answered during the first term and that she was able to answer some of the more difficult questions because she had already served on the Board.

Board member Bob Blew stated that it may be wise to amend the Bylaws to state that Board members may serve more than one term, even though it has been done before, it may be a good idea to include that in the Bylaws going forward.

President Lee asked Board members Hillary Barile, Holly Sytsema and Rick Gardner to serve on the Personnel Committee and that outgoing members Bob Blew and Dave DeFrange serve in adjunct role.

President Lee announced that the Board received correspondence from the NJ Apple Council to inquire about representation for the apple industry at the State Agricultural Convention. For a commodity to want to have a Convention seat, you must go through an application process and based on the Bylaws must be before July 1 for the following year's Convention.

It was noted that they would be ineligible for a voting seat for the 2027 Convention but that they may attend as a non-voting participant. A letter will be sent to the North and South Caucus presidents requesting approval of this arrangement. Their submission may be used as the application for 2028 pending legal review.

ON the MOTION of Bob Blew, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to send a letter to the North and South Caucus presidents requesting approval of this arrangement, so they recognize what we are trying to accomplish.

Board member David DeFrange stated that he feels that the membership of the Resolutions Committee should be reviewed by the Board's Nominations Committee so that we can appropriately tie all the things that we are working on to make sure that the membership is well represented.

Board member Hillary Barile stated that if we are talking about making changes to the Bylaws there should be a concerted effort to read through to make sure that there aren't other inconsistencies or other things that need to be addressed.

President Lee noted that when the Board was searching for a new Secretary of Agriculture, we would have welcomed a guide of what steps to take. It was then noted that the Bylaws are not changed by the delegates of the State Agricultural Convention, they are done by Board action.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Vice President Joel Viereck provided the following written report in his absence:

- Freeze Relief and Agricultural Financing: I have continued participating in discussions concerning state assistance and financing options for freeze-affected farmers. It is extremely important that meaningful assistance be put in place before the end of the year, and I intend to keep pushing for action.
- Federal Farmer Assistance: I have remained engaged with the White House and Farm Credit Council regarding economic assistance for farmers. We are also working to schedule a September 16 meeting in Washington following the Farm Credit Council meeting.
- Agricultural Fair Food Safety: Five reported Salmonella cases involved individuals who visited the Gloucester County Fair petting zoo. The matter also highlighted differing requirements between the state and county. State guidance treated hand sanitizer as adequate, while the Gloucester County Health Department is requiring running water, soap and disposable towels in animal-contact areas. These requirements should be clarified and made consistent before the next fair season.
- Wakefern Follow-up: A September 8 meeting is scheduled with Wakefern leadership and NJDA to review the Local Produce Summit and continue developing a path forward for strengthening Jersey Fresh promotion and purchasing within Wakefern stores.

- Healthy Corner Store Program: On September 22, I will participate in a stakeholder discussion convened by Assemblywoman Heather Simmons focused on increasing access to New Jersey-grown foods through the state's Healthy Corner Store Program.
- Urban Agriculture: I attended the Urban Agriculture Legislative Tour and the roundtable discussion that followed. It was a valuable opportunity to hear directly from participants and discuss the continued development of urban agriculture in New Jersey.
- Equine Advisory Board: I was asked to bring forward a request for the State Board to consider designating a liaison to the Equine Advisory Board.
- NAAMO: Congratulations to Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison on his election as president of NAAMO.
- County Board Reporting: I am looking forward to county board meetings resuming. As a State Board, we are working toward more consistent county board reporting and will continue developing that process in the coming weeks.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Budget Committee – The Food and Nutrition budget review is being scheduled for early September. We will continue working toward complete information, consistent reporting and a more structured budget-review process.
- DEP Liaison Committee – Meetings are being arranged regarding agricultural water-allocation concerns, and we are scheduled to meet with the DEP Commissioner on September 15. I am very optimistic about the direction of these discussions and expect to have more to report in September.
- Convention Committee – Initial coordination with VGANJ is underway for the upcoming Agricultural Convention. Our goal is to begin planning early, maintain open communication and work cooperatively toward a strong convention that serves New Jersey farmers well.

David DeFrange reported that he attended the Urban Ag & Sustainability Community meeting that was held on August 11 organized by Manatee Smith and Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora. The meeting was geared to community leaders, educators, and non-profit organizations to design an action plan focused on strengthening sustainable food systems in New Jersey. This meeting was a good opportunity to expand on the tour that the Department of Agriculture had the previous week while looking at all the facets of sustainability from solar rooftop gardens to food processing and aggregation. He noted that it was great to see the community leadership starting to get involved with including the Mayor and the sponsor of the Urban Agriculture legislation, Senator Shirley Turner. He reported that the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture would be holding their annual Resolutions Dinner where they discuss upcoming Farm Bureau and Ag Convention Resolutions for the coming year. All are invited to attend the meeting which will be held on September 11, 2026, at the Amwell Firehouse. He stated that they will observe a moment of silence in remembrance on the 25th anniversary of that fateful day. He announced that the Fair had a very strong turnout despite some weather-related disruptions. Finally, he noted that this may be one of the last Board meetings he is present for, he publicly thanked the members of the Board for the debates, the content, the challenges, because “this year’s explicitly been for me, on my operation, has been a challenge with the freeze and everything else, it’s allowed me to be more positive, when things could be so negative at times, so I just want to thank you all.”

Rick Gardner reported that he had attended the Morris County Board of Agriculture meeting where Assemblywoman Marissa Sweeney and a representative from Warren Community College to discuss the proposal of the future harvesting facility to be constructed in Warren County. It was reported that members of the Morris County Board were having trouble communicating with their County Commissioners, the Assemblywoman assured them that she would have someone be in touch with them as the County Commissioners absolutely need to be engaged with the farm community. In addition, he reported that he had attended the Department's Urban Ag tour on August 5, where he had the opportunity to understand some of the wholesale logistics of Urban Ag and visiting the different locations and situations that are different for each, not one size fits all. He stated that the tour was a real eye opener for him. Finally, he reported that Warren County would be holding a special meeting tonight to review policy and formulate questions that will be part of their annual Legislative Dinner meeting in September. He announced that the livestock cooperative is doing well, prices are still high and livestock people are happy.

Bob Blew reported that there is not a lot going on in Cumberland County right now with most of our summer vegetable harvest in full swing, plum tomatoes came up a couple of weeks ago, that harvest went well. Sweet potatoes are coming up now and the sweet corn market was pretty good. We had good rain; we had been running dry. He noted that one part of Cumberland got eight and one half inches in three hours last week. A lot of vegetable guys are still concerned about the price falling out of the bottom of the market like it did last year, so we can hope and pray that prices do sustain. The prices at the gas pump, you know, in New Jersey, the average is floating just below \$4.00 a gallon for the first time in a few months, but they don't notice as diesel keeps going up, with the state average running over \$5.90 now. For those that are transporting by truck, those costs are really eating into the farmer's bottom line this year. He noted that traveling out of state, the regular is about the same in PA but diesel is more expensive, so that is another challenge that has been thrust upon the American farmer. It's a big concern as the diesel fuel and transportation costs continue to strain farm profitability. Finally, he announced that Cumberland County Board of Agriculture is hosting a Friends of Agriculture meeting on September 17 at Cedar Rose Vineyards in Millville to kick off the 2026-27 meeting season. He noted that they are trying to attract some new members to the County Board.

Hillary Barile also of Cumberland County noted that she only got three of the eight inches of rain in her part of the County. She noted that some of the issues that we've been seeing have to do with small-scale livestock production, over the last few months and even over the last year with the Department of Health interplay with dairy and now with some of the meat retailers or retailers and wholesalers. She asked if the Department of Agriculture has some educational resources for people who are marketing in that way, with maybe small-scale livestock production, they're selling pre-butchered frozen or a cow share frozen and butchered those types of operations. She reported that when the Food Modernization Act came around, she was still involved with the vegetable industry and there was a great deal of education about that from the Department and from Rutgers, but she did not see any available information on that.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that the discussion right now is that part of it is Chapter 24 review and part of it is inspections regarding meat and the Department's interpretation is seemingly different than the local county health department and even the state Department of Health. He reported that Department staff Frank Minch and Dan Wunderlich have been working on trying to resolve these

differences and find some common ground and the Department will be sharing that information when we all agree.

Board member Hillary Barile asked about the statute/law and asked if it was up to the local county health officers to be interpreting and enforcing that? She asked if the Department could be educating the ag community about what the law says and then let people ask their own health department if they want to be proactive about it. It was noted that the livestock/dairy/meat processing regulations are inconsistent across health departments; there is a need for statewide clarity and education.

Holly Sytsema reported that the Legislative Tour in Bergen County on July 28 was well received by the Legislator's in attendance where we visited a Summer Feeding program at the local high school as well as visiting Demarest Farms where they could see firsthand some of the freeze that they experienced and was very interested to see trees right next to each other and some had damage and some did not, it was just the way the sun was shining. There was great attendance at the Sussex County fair, there was strong ag presence. A lot of animals came through which was great to see. As far as crop outlook is concerned, everything looks good, row crops look great, disease pressure starts to set in on some pumpkins and vegetables. They have had a good deal of rain, so they are good on the drought monitor. She reported that the Strategic Plan that they have been working on is beginning its implementation phase with the Directors and Senior staff. She reported that the exciting news is that there is an emergency relief bill for the freeze, Sussex County wrote a letter to the 24th legislative district and the County Board was able to hold a meeting and they are sponsoring language that is going to ensure viability on some of the affected farms. Once this is approved, the Department will need to be sure that the grant process is up and running, ready to roll out, that we have all information that is needed for Board members and the entire ag community is eligible. Finally, she shared a sad story of a 17-year-old Wisconsin livestock farmer who was very involved with 4-H and sports who suffered a helmet-to-helmet contact on a Thursday and died that weekend. She noted that the ag community is no stranger to these very sad stories and that she had a card for the family if anyone wanted to sign in support of the family.

John Hart reported that he attended the Urban Ag tour on August 5 as he wanted to see firsthand how the farms in the cities operate and how much they can produce and noted that there is a lot of potential there. He noted that he had some ideas for possible funding options that he shared with them. He was amazed to see that Mercer County was a participant as well. He noted that he had attended both the Mercer and Middlesex County fairs and was part of the opening ceremonies with Tameko Webster. He took time to travel to the Sussex County fair, he stated how beautiful it was there and it was great to see the amount of participation. He too noted that fuel prices continue to strain farm profitability. In addition, he noted concern regarding discontinued state funding for venison donations, impacting deer management and food bank support. He announced that the annual Mercer County Legislative Breakfast was scheduled for Monday, September 14 beginning at 7:30 am and would be held at Needle Creek Brewery in Pennington where there are many local farmers and representatives from the agricultural industry. He noted that state and federal legislators, mayors, county and Rutgers administrators will be on hand to hear the concerns. He asked if there was confirmation regarding farmers buying state land and preserving it as farmland instead of state-owned land?

OLD BUSINESS

Grant Administration

President Lee asked staff member William Conners to provide the Board with an update of the status of the Agritourism Grant Program.

- All FY26 grant agreements executed; \$2.5M was disbursed as 50% advances.
- FY27 budget currently shows *zero* appropriation; OMB may later restore funding.
- Board agreed to:
 - Prepare an agritourism legislative tour highlighting completed projects for the fall working with the Legislative Committee.
 - Hold ~30-day feedback sessions with applicants.
 - Explore SOP improvements and possibly restructure the grant review process.
 - Continuing dialogue with Travel & Tourism about future application cycles and eligibility.

NEW BUSINESS

SADC Appointment Recommendations

Due to some questions from Board members, the SADC Appointment Recommendations were tabled until the September Board meeting.

2026 Wine Advisory Council Awards

Bob Blew reported that the Board had received the recommendations from the New Jersey Wine Advisory Council with approval of these grants, however, after talking with some industry stakeholders, the Grants Committee of the Board would like to meet with the Wine Advisory Council to review some specifics regarding the applications.

ON the MOTION of Bob Blew, seconded by Rick Garnder, the Board voted unanimously to approve the specific grants to:

- Garden State Wine Growers (promotional) – \$313,637.88
For marketing and public relations campaign with focus on “modern & contemporary” marketing for younger consumers. Continued support for Wine Trail Weekends, and website adjustments to encourage tasting room visitations.
- Outer Coastal Plain Vineyard Assoc. (research) – \$16,774.00
Will work with Rutgers Ag Research in identifying the most pressing problems in NJ viticulture, and conduct research.

Box Tree Moth Quarantine

Plant Industry Division Director Joe Zoltowski reported to the Board that the box tree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) is an invasive pest that mainly targets boxwood plants (*Buxus* species). It can completely defoliate these plants and severely damage landscapes.

- The moth spreads both naturally and through human activity.
- It poses a serious threat to ornamental landscaping, especially boxwood.
- Early detection and control are important to limit its spread.

The Department is asking that the Box Tree Moth quarantine that was granted by the Board at its July meeting for Cape May County, is the same, this would just expand the quarantine to include Atlantic & Cumberland Counties.

ON the MOTION of Rick Gardner, seconded by Dave DeFrangé, the Board voted unanimously to expand the Box Tree Moth quarantine to include Atlantic and Cumberland counties.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that Secretary Wengryn was on a trade mission with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture in Kenya and Rwanda. The Secretary wanted the Board to know that he attended his first Ethics Commission meeting. He is meeting with the Frelinghuysen Mayor on Ag land preservation and master plan updates to help agriculture. He attended the Hambletonian and presented awards to winners of the New Jersey Sire Stakes races and attended the Thoroughbred Day at Monmouth Park, which is a full day of New Jersey bred horse races. Joe reported that the Secretary, Tameko and he visited many of the county fairs and State Fair and were well received in all of them. Joe reported that he finally had the Cape May chicken BBQ dinner, which was as good as advertised. He reported that Bergen County is the last to hold their fair which is scheduled for September. The drought disaster was declared to include Monmouth and Mercer counties with adjoining counties of Burlington, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Ocean and Somerset, and due to PA designations, Warren and Gloucester County are also included in relief approved counties. The Secretary attended the Urban Ag tour and the Trenton Urban Ag Summit, both highlighting the impact of urban agriculture and community food systems and had a meeting with the Food Democracy Collaborative on local food funding, school purchases and local food grants looking at steps to take for future funding. He attended the local food for school program hosted by Fairview Farms. Farmers Market Week celebration at West Windsor's farmers market and attended an Oyster and Aquaculture tour by the Assembly Ag Chair. We will be discussing next steps for industry as we launch the Jersey fresh for Aquaculture.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Tameko Webster announced that she was seeking the Board support to change the title for the Confidential Assistant position. She stated that the Civil Service Commission asked that we consider the Government Rep One title instead, so that they would be able to process the vacancy.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to change the title from Confidential Assistant to Government Rep 1.

In addition, she reported that there are opportunities for Strategic Planning training, that she would like to present the Board with some information for Board members and the Executive Team to take part in some of those trainings so that we'll have a professional platform for moving our Department forward.

Finally, Assistant Secretary Atchison reported that he had attended the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials Conference in the beginning of August in Hawaii, he noted that next year's conference will be in glamorous Minnesota. He also announced that he had been elected as President of that organization for the coming year.

There was a brief discussion about the idea of moving the Board meetings to other locations. This idea will be discussed moving forward.

President Lee commented that he appreciates the dedication of Board members Holly Sytsema and Rick Gardner for the distances they travel every month to attend our Board meetings.

Board member Rick Gardner announced that he also sits on the county's Bicentennial Board and they had a discussion about the Route 519 trail, one of the County Commissioner's stated that she would like to connect with Sussex County, he suggested that it could be a great mix of opportunities with ag farm markets as well as specific historic sites and in each county. He is hopeful that there will be further dialogue at this opportunity between the two counties.

Board member David DeFrango reported that Hunterdon County did approve the Ag viability study in Hunterdon County to address all of what they plan to do between Route 579 and 519. There will be a study this year and they will report back. Board member Holly Sytsema encouraged Board members to get after your county to try to establish this because she hopes to have it operating across the state.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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

- It was a good fair season; there were a couple of weather events but not as bad as in prior years. Attendance was good, with some challenges here and there.
- We had the Farmland Evaluation Committee meeting that sets the standards for farmland assessment values. It went well. As you may remember, the statutory changes expanded the composition of the committee to add three new members; two representing forestry, one is a representative of the public. In addition, they provided a kind of refresher on farmland assessment.
- He acknowledged Meredith Melendez for working on the situation with the local health department interpretations and has been an excellent resource.
- To my nursery friends, I'm sorry about the newest challenge facing your industry. He commended Tim Waller who has been active trying to help navigate, while working with the Department of Ag, as we deal with the latest invasive threat.
- In addition, he recognized that some of our county agents are pointing out continuing challenges with pesticide applicator license issues, the 0-balance invoicing. There have been a few instances brought to my attention lately by some of our southern county agents of examples of private pesticide applicator licenses being lost or having administrative issues. Board member Hillary Barile commented that the pesticide licensing issue was discussed at the first meeting of the DEP Committee with Katrina Angarone who stated that she wanted to go back and have discussion with staff to understand why that change was made, but that there was, there should be a very easy path forward. A process of change or clear communication so that people are not falling through the cracks in that meeting. She stated that she also asked if they could, if there was a way they could query their database because we don't have a good understanding of how many people have fallen into this hole of losing their license unknowingly by not doing the paper version.
- There is currently a hiring freeze at the University which is impacting county staffing.

- The freeze damages the fruit industry but not was not dismissing impacts in the other industry. We've been trying to work to support the Department in decision making there. The numbers are significant in the fruit sector, the new state climatologist, John Crasting and I were talking about is the question is starting to turn toward mitigation. How can we start helping grow growers start mitigating better against these things? I think it comes down to economics, if you have a once-in 100-year event or a once in a 10-year event that starts changing your outlook on what you're going to invest in in terms of equipment or mitigation measures. He is starting to look at patterns. So, I just saw the Board might be interested in knowing that in addition to the work we're trying to support the Ag leadership in the industry by enumerating the damage.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

Robert Andrzejczak reported on behalf of the Farm Service Agency:

- Freeze damage estimates reported nearly \$300M.
- Discussion on appropriate relief package size (10%-20% state support).
- EDA expressed interest in agriculture financing; board will explore outreach to farmers not served by Farm Credit.

Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program

FSA delivered ASCF assistance to eligible producers based on reported 2025 planted Specialty Crop acres. Deadline for enrollment was August 7, 2026. You can get ASCF numbers from the public ASCF dashboard: Over \$683 Million has been paid nationwide. NJ has paid over \$9.3 million.

ARCPLC

Payment limitation changes include an increased payment limit for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program. Starting with crop year 2025, the ARC and PLC payment limit will increase from \$125,000 to \$155,000. This payment limit will be adjusted going forward annually based on inflation.

Base Allocation Summary

Landowners were sent a postcard or email with instructions for accessing their Base Allocation Summary either through Login.gov or through their local Farm Service Agency office. Landowners who have a Login.gov account can access their Base Allocation Summary online or by contacting their local Farm Service Agency office for information on how to receive their summary.

After reviewing the Base Allocation Summary, landowners should contact their local FSA office if:

- Acreage history data is incorrect or missing
- There are "subsequent acres" listed and they would like to choose the subsequent acreage for base allocation
- To opt out of receiving any additional base acres

Landowners have until Aug. 31, 2026, to take any of the actions listed above or to appeal the accuracy of information contained in the Base Allocation Summary to the FSA County Committee by filing a written request.

After reviewing your base allocation summary, no further action is required if the information is correct. If FSA is not notified, the Base Allocation Summary will be considered accurate and complete. All acreage reported as eligible in the summary will be used to determine the new base allocation percentage, and new base acres will automatically be allocated to the farm(s) with the designated percentage for each farm(s).

Farms will maintain current base acres; however, eligible farms may increase base acres through the base allocation process. After the base allocation process is completed, election and enrollment for ARC and PLC will be announced for program year 2026.

Payment Eligibility and Payment Limitations

FSA is expanding payment limitation and payment eligibility provisions that affect program payments. Producers will benefit from an increased payment limitation for certain programs, and a broader definition of farming income that will result in more exceptions to income limitations. Starting with the 2026 crop year, for payment eligibility purposes, FSA will treat applicable limited liability companies (LLCs) and S-Corporations (S-Corps), and other similar entities, as “pass through entities.” Each member of the qualified pass-through entity who meets actively engaged in farming criteria will help qualify the entity for expanded payments.

For program year 2026 only, farm operations that are structured as LLCs or S-Corps or one of the new qualified pass-through entities must file updated farm operating plans with FSA for program year 2026 by Sept. 15, 2026. After program year 2026, FSA will continue to use June 1 as the date for determining ownership interest in an entity.

An additional change allows members of all entity types to receive compensation for labor and management contributions and use the same contribution to qualify as “actively engaged in farming.” This update provides consistent treatment of member contributions across all entity types.

Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (Stage 1 and Stage 2)

SDRP is still open. Deadline has been extended through September 30, 2026, for both Stage 1 and Stage 2. As of Monday August 24th, NJ has paid over \$15.8 million. Initial SDRP payments were factored at 35%, but USDA has increased the payment factor to 70%, therefore producers with approved applications have received an additional 35% of their calculated SDRP payment. Future SDRP payments will be made using a 70% payment factor.

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, with any questions.

- Disaster Designations
 - The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to designate counties as disaster areas to make Emergency Loans available to producers suffering losses in those counties and in

contiguous counties. To request a Secretarial Disaster Declaration, FSA must determine a 30 percent production loss of at least one crop in the county. EM loans are also available following a Presidential major disaster declaration, or an FSA Administrator's Physical Loss Notification (APLN) for livestock-related losses. Through an Emergency Loan, a producer can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000. Farmers in the following counties may be eligible for Emergency Loans through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA):

- 1. Secretarial Designation S6288 – New Jersey
 - a. For Freeze from 04/09/2026 – 04/22/2026
 - b. New Jersey Primary counties: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Salem, Somerset, Sussex, Warren
 - c. New Jersey Contiguous counties: Essex, Hudson, Passaic, Union
 - d. Loan application deadline: 02/08/2027
- 2. Secretarial Designation S6372 – Delaware
 - a. For Frost and Freeze from 04/20/2026 – 04/22/2026
 - b. New Jersey Contiguous counties: Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem
 - c. Loan application deadline: 03/10/2027
- 3. Secretarial Designation S6362 – New York
 - a. For Frost and Freeze from 04/19/2026 – 04/21/2026
 - b. New Jersey Contiguous counties: Bergen, Passaic, Sussex
 - c. Loan application deadline: 03/23/2027
- 4. Secretarial Designation S6362 – New York
 - a. For Frost and Freeze from 04/19/2026 – 04/21/2026
 - b. New Jersey Contiguous counties: Bergen, Passaic, Sussex
 - c. Loan application deadline: 03/23/2027
- 5. Secretarial Designation S6353 – Pennsylvania
 - a. For Drought (Fast-Track) on 05/12/2026
 - b. New Jersey Contiguous counties: Burlington, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Warren
 - c. Loan application deadline: 04/13/2027

Guaranteed Loans: FSA's Guaranteed Farm Loan Programs help family farmers and ranchers to obtain loans from USDA-approved commercial lenders at reasonable terms to buy farmland or finance agricultural production. FSA will guarantee farm loans through a commercial lender up to \$2,343,000. Financial institutions receive additional loan business as well as benefit from the safety net the FSA provides by guaranteeing farm loans up to 95 percent against possible financial loss of principal and interest.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

Ashley Kerr represented the Farm Bureau and reported on the following topics:

- State support is still needed for the spring freeze losses. They have met with Rutgers to come up with a reasonable amount to ask for initially, would like to work with the State Board and the Department to get introduced to move this fall.
- NJEDA has met with Farm Credit East to figure out how to provide support to farmers affected by the freeze.
- They are working on getting the State Board appointments to be heard by the Senate Judiciary Committee in September.
- NJFB Board of Directors approved their list of prime legislation at their meeting the previous evening, legislation that they will be monitoring this fall. The list will be shared with the Board's legislative committee at the next meeting. SADC Appropriation package was passed by the Senate in June; there is a need for the Assembly to pass it this fall but at this time there are still no sponsors.
- September 12 starts bow season for deer. Venison donation programs did not receive any state funding this year and will need it in next year's budget to continue their programming.
- The USDA Farm Service Agency designated seven New Jersey counties as natural disaster areas on August 13, 2026, due to ongoing drought conditions starting May 12, 2026. Primary counties are Mercer and Monmouth with contiguous counties of Burlington, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Ocean, and Somerset (along with out-of-state neighboring Bucks County, PA and Richmond County, NY. Eligible farmers can now apply to FSA for emergency loans to replace equipment, fix losses, or refinance debt.
- Working with Rutgers on creating a point-person and resource guide for on-farm accidents to better assist farm families through tragic situations that occur on farms. Additionally, September is Mental Health Awareness month, and we will continue to share AFBF resources. Also looking towards fall harvest and roadway safety.
- Senate Ag Committee was unable to pass the Farm Bill; they will try again in September. More negotiating will likely be needed, or this will continue to come down to a party line vote. We encourage outreach to support this bill and get it passed.
- Both AFBF and NJFB presidents put out statements expressing serious concerns over the massive potential increase in foreign beef imports totaling approximately 7,500 tractor trailer loads of meat.
- Trade talks under the USMCA with Canada have broken down, and as a result, the Trump Administration has levied a 50% tariff on Canadian alcohol, dairy, cars and other products. In retaliation for Canada threatening tariffs on U.S. goods, additional 50% tariffs were announced on Canadian goods, slated to take effect on January 1, 2027. AFBF has expressed significant concerns that additional tariff escalations and subsequent retaliation will hurt U.S. agriculture at a time when farmers and ranchers are already struggling.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

No representative.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Arelys "Liz" Ortiz, Assistant State Conservationist–Field Operations, reported the following:

- Program signup opens through September 18.
- Approval to hire district conservationists and engineers in Frenchtown.
- September 2, a State Technical Committee meeting.

ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

No representative.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, September 23, 2026, at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, beginning at 1:00 pm.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Hillary Barile, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 3:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Joe Atchison III", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joseph Atchison III