

RESOLUTION # 35

WATER

1 **WHEREAS**, water is the lifeblood of the agricultural industry, and agricultural access
2 to an adequate water supply is a critical concern for New Jersey's farmers; and this need is
3 especially urgent during periods of drought when restrictions on water use could
4 catastrophically affect farm income for the production year; and

5 **WHEREAS**, even absent drought conditions, ensuring an adequate water supply,
6 both now and in the future, is essential to protecting the production capability and economic
7 stability of agriculture; and

8 **WHEREAS**, many New Jersey farmers implement water-management practices as a
9 routine part of their conservationist approach to agriculture, resulting in New Jersey
10 agriculture using just four percent of the state's total water use, less than other comparable
11 areas in the United States and worldwide; and

12 **WHEREAS**, the Department has worked with the New Jersey Department of
13 Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to restore some of the agricultural water allocations in the
14 restricted water supply areas in Cumberland, Salem and Gloucester Counties in Critical Area
15 2 and in Ocean, Monmouth and Middlesex Counties in Critical Area 1; however, despite
16 these efforts (which included advocating for the Tri-County Pipeline), agricultural water
17 concerns still persist, and New Jersey's farmers face increasing water supply restrictions,
18 particularly in Critical Areas 1 and 2; and many agricultural water certifications are being
19 subjected to reductions in their allocations based upon actual water usage; and

20 **WHEREAS**, in 1987, the NJDEP completed a study that showed the Potomac-
21 Raritan-Magothy (PRM) aquifer, at the time the major source of drinking water in
22 southwestern New Jersey, was being rapidly depleted, resulting in the Tri-County Pipeline
23 project to provide potable water from sources other than the PRM aquifer; and

24 **WHEREAS**, the state Administration released a long-awaited draft New Jersey Water
25 Supply Plan in May 2017 and held four public meetings and a 60-plus day comment period;
26 and

27 **WHEREAS**, the Plan defines current water use trends and quantifies the volume of
28 water used in New Jersey from 1990 to 2015; and

29 **WHEREAS**, the Plan estimates future residential demands based on population
30 projections to determine whether existing approved resources and developed water supply
31 infrastructure can accommodate anticipated growth; and

32 **WHEREAS**, the Plan defines overarching water supply policies and identifies policy
33 and/or regulatory actions necessary to ensure an adequate and secure water supply
34 statewide, and also provides a support tool to inform local, regulatory and state planning
35 decisions; and

36 **WHEREAS**, consumptive agricultural water use has decreased from a high of
37 67,860,000 gallons per year in 1995 to 30,658,000 gallons per year in 2015, a reduction
38 most attributable to more high-efficiency irrigation systems and high-tech devices such as
39 moisture sensors; and

40 **WHEREAS**, one of the policies identified for improving the state's water supply is to
41 coordinate with the agricultural community to more accurately assess agricultural water use
42 and the industry's anticipated future water demands; and

43 **WHEREAS**, the NJDEP should continue to work with the NJDA, the SADC, Rutgers
44 Agricultural Agents and other agriculture stakeholders to obtain better data for agricultural
45 water use.

46 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 105th State
47 Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2020,
48 direct the Department of Agriculture to continue working with the New Jersey Department of
49 Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to address water supply and water quality issues even

50 beyond the NJDEP's drafted Water Supply Plan and by strategically planning and
51 promoting the implementation of federal and state conservation cost-share programs.

52 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the NJDEP to ensure that they plan for
53 adequate, realistic water resources for New Jersey's farmers, realizing that such resources
54 are critical to overall farm management.

55 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Department and NJDEP to continue
56 to allow farmers who employ water conservation practices that utilize water at a rate that is
57 *below* their permit allocations at certain times to correspondingly *increase* water use at other
58 times, under the program that allows for annual averages in water use. Such a program
59 encourages the implementation of water conservation measures within the agricultural
60 community and improves the viability of the agricultural industry by allowing water usage to
61 be tailored to fit the needs of each agricultural operation.

62 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Department to work with NJDEP to
63 ensure that all water-related plans, policies and programs of the state recognize the critical
64 role that farmland plays in providing recharge of water to underlying aquifer systems and
65 surface water supplies.

66 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge all municipalities located along the Tri-
67 County Pipeline project and those served by the Raritan Water Supply Authority to utilize
68 those sources of potable water, as opposed to utilizing groundwater, thereby reserving as
69 much available groundwater as possible for agricultural operations.

70 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we request that the previous efforts of the
71 Department and Rutgers Cooperative Extension, who were working with the New Jersey
72 Water Supply Authority (NJWSA) in developing a draft Ag Water Conservation Plan, which
73 will outline specific best management practices addressing water conservation and water
74 quality protection, be revived.

75 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the NJDEP to consider the
76 needs of agricultural operations when developing policies and programs that involve water
77 quality issues, such as stormwater management and impervious coverage limitations.

78 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we encourage producers to use water
79 conservation technologies and to utilize any available state and federal cost-share grants to
80 implement such measures and continue to look for new and efficient methods to conserve
81 water on farms, including drip irrigation, water recapture and reuse, and enhanced on-farm
82 water storage techniques.

83 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge a review by the Attorney General to
84 reaffirm the longstanding interpretation of the statutory language that agricultural operations
85 are exempt from fees and surcharges for water and water use.