

RESOLUTION # 31

RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS

1 **WHEREAS**, today's modern farming operation is as likely to sell its agricultural
2 products direct-to-the-public at an on-farm location as it is to sell them to a wholesale broker
3 or directly to a retailer; and

4 **WHEREAS**, an increasing number of New Jersey farm operators are incorporating
5 agri-tourism components on their farms; and

6 **WHEREAS**, attracting consumers to the farm property to either purchase products or
7 partake in agri-tourism events requires these farm operators to employ advertising over
8 various forms of media; and

9 **WHEREAS**, social media and other forms of advertising over the Internet have
10 become increasingly popular ways to reach the exact type of consumer the farmer is looking
11 for; and

12 **WHEREAS**, the ability to maximize Internet-based advertising depends, especially in
13 rural areas where farms are concentrated, upon connecting to adequate high-speed Internet
14 and broadband services; and

15 **WHEREAS**, today's agricultural operations also rely on high-speed Internet and
16 broadband services for many vital functions beyond advertising, such as remote sensing of
17 field and greenhouse conditions, remote control of equipment, shipping and receiving control
18 and coordination, obtaining current weather information critical to application of crop inputs,
19 and for innumerable other purposes; and

20 **WHEREAS**, the lack of reliable broadband telecommunications in the state's rural
21 areas also impacts the ability of Rutgers University's Extension Service to provide all the
22 help to farmers that they could if that deficiency were addressed; and

23 **WHEREAS**, the lack of adequate broadband communications inhibits or precludes
24 the use of these tools that can enhance farm's efficiency and viability, thereby creating
25 inequity for farmers living in areas underserved by adequate telecommunications; and

26 **WHEREAS**, as technology continues to grow in importance to agriculture, the need
27 for adequate high-speed Internet and broadband services will grow in importance to
28 successful farming; and

29 **WHEREAS**, rural areas of New Jersey have been underserved by broadband service
30 from Internet service providers; and

31 **WHEREAS**, the State Board of Agriculture has heard numerous complaints of
32 diminished Internet, wireless and landline service quality in rural areas of New Jersey,
33 especially in areas served by Verizon Communications; and

34 **WHEREAS**, the State of New Jersey, in particular the Board of Public Utilities (BPU),
35 has allowed Verizon to abandon its earlier commitment to ensuring that all New Jersey
36 communities it serves will have adequate infrastructure for a copper network or, more
37 preferably, be transitioned to a wireless network that will better match the future of
38 communications and Internet access; and

39 **WHEREAS**, the State Board of Agriculture has unanimously passed a resolution
40 calling upon the BPU to investigate the status of high-speed Internet and landline telephone
41 service in New Jersey's rural communities, particularly those served by Verizon
42 Communications; and

43 **WHEREAS**, as a first step toward addressing inadequate broadband service in rural
44 areas, the Department, with significant support from the Governor's Office and the Office of
45 Homeland Security and Preparedness, began working in 2019 with Cumberland County
46 officials and the State Director of the USDA's Rural Development office to pursue funding
47 under the USDA's Rural e-Connectivity program to bring broadband to several municipalities
48 in the county that fit the program's criteria, and is continuing to pursue those funding
49 opportunities in 2020; and

50 **WHEREAS**, legislation has been introduced to create an office within the State
51 government to address the need for reliable broadband communications in the state's rural
52 areas.

53 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 106th State
54 Agricultural Convention, assembled through a virtual platform hosted in Trenton, New
55 Jersey, in accordance with COVID-19 pandemic recommendations, on February 17, 2021,
56 do hereby wholeheartedly support the proposed creation of an office within state government
57 to concentrate on bringing reliable broadband communications to New Jersey's rural areas,
58 where it will have significant positive impact upon farm operators' ability to use Internet-
59 based applications in both the production and marketing of agricultural products and will
60 enhance research and outreach efforts at the rural experiment stations of Rutgers
61 University's Extension Service.

62 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the State Board and Department of
63 Agriculture to continue exploring ways in which adequate and reliable high-speed Internet,
64 landline and broadband service can be brought to New Jersey's rural communities, so that
65 the state's farmers will be better positioned to maximize the opportunities for direct-to-the-
66 public marketing of their agricultural products, on-line promotion of their agri-tourism events,
67 and the use of technology overall to improve the efficiency and viability of their farms.