RESOLUTION # 37

WATER AND IRRIGATION WELL PERMITS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, farmers increasingly are making Rutgers Extension Agents aware of a problem with timely securing of water allocations for new wells, in which farmers must first receive a permit to install a well from one arm of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and then must install said wells prior to applying to another arm of the DEP for determination of what, if any, their water allocation will be; and

WHEREAS, this has put farmers in a position of potentially digging more of a well than what their water allocation will ultimately cover, including spending more money up-front to dig more of a well than their allocations will call for.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the delegates to the 106th State Agricultural Convention, assembled through a virtual platform hosted in Trenton, New Jersey, in accordance with COVID-19 pandemic recommendations, on February 17, 2021, direct the Department of Agriculture to continue working with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to address water supply and water quality issues even beyond the NJDEP's drafted Water Supply Plan and by strategically planning and promoting the implementation of federal and state conservation cost-share programs.

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

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

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage producers to use water conservation technologies and to utilize any available state and federal cost-share grants to implement such measures and continue to look for new and efficient methods to conserve

water on farms, including drip irrigation, water recapture and reuse, and enhanced on-farm water storage techniques.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Department to work in concert with the DEP and Rutgers Extension to devise a more coordinated and streamlined process for permitting the wells and issuing water-allocation permits for those wells that helps farmers avoid unnecessary expenses that can be incurred under the current system and allows farmers to use those wells upon completion rather than having to wait for the issuance of an allocation.