

RESOLUTION # 6

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND SOLAR ARRAYS ON FARMS

1 **WHEREAS**, energy costs place financial burdens on all New Jersey agricultural
2 sectors, and using traditional fossil fuels adds to the overall carbon footprint, making
3 traditional fossil fuels less attractive for on-farm use; and

4 **WHEREAS**, the efforts of agricultural operators to both use and produce alternative
5 energy are consistent with the goals of the Administration to “build a clean energy economy”
6 that has 100 percent of the state’s energy coming from renewable sources by 2050; and

7 **WHEREAS**, after seeing decades of development pressure from residential
8 developers, and a continuing push by developers to buy up farmland for warehousing space
9 as retailing continues its march away from brick-and-mortar and toward more purchases
10 online, the state’s farmers are also experiencing significant interest among developers in
11 placing large solar arrays on open farmland, driven in large part by the state’s Energy Master
12 Plan; and

13 **WHEREAS**, the State Board of Agriculture has adopted a Policy Statement that state
14 and local officials overseeing the development of solar arrays on farms must strike a balance
15 between preserving prime soils that are absolutely necessary for the types of high-value
16 agricultural products grown and raised in New Jersey while simultaneously allowing an
17 opportunity for farmers to maximize farm equity by selling large parcels, which can also help
18 farmers expand their agricultural operations, maximize the value and equity of their land, and
19 thereby increase their collateral to boost borrowing power for working capital for the farm;
20 and

21 **WHEREAS**, agricultural groups, including Rutgers University, the Department of
22 Agriculture, State Board of Agriculture, New Jersey Farm Bureau and others, can provide
23 vital information to officials and others involved in guiding solar development to help meet
24 Energy Master Plan goals in regards to alternative siting (both on the farm and off, and
25 including the vast inventory of state-owned land) of solar arrays; and

26 **WHEREAS**, we strongly support all farmers having the ability to utilize solar, wind
27 and other renewable energy to meet the energy needs of their agricultural operations as
28 cost-effectively as possible, whether their farms are preserved or not; and

29 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey's fiscal position requires innovative ways of creating an
30 inviting business climate for potential alternative-energy producers that do not rely entirely on
31 financial incentives; and

32 **WHEREAS**, bio-gas facilities have the potential to remove large amounts of food
33 waste, other refuse, and in some cases manure from the state's overall waste inventory, for
34 the production of bio-gas, lessening the stress on the state's landfills and thereby enhancing
35 the environment and reducing municipal waste-disposal costs; and

36 **WHEREAS**, bills have been introduced in the Legislature that would mandate
37 producers of large amounts of food waste to have that waste hauled to facilities employing
38 various methods for its re-use instead of dumping it into a landfill (except as a last-resort
39 option), including, but not limited to, using it for "agricultural purposes" or by taking it to an
40 anaerobic digester to be turned into methane gas for use in creating electrical power.

41 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 106th State
42 Agricultural Convention, assembled through a virtual platform hosted in Trenton, New
43 Jersey, in accordance with COVID-19 pandemic recommendations, on February 17, 2021,
44 support the continued development of renewable energy sources in New Jersey and support
45 the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's efforts to maximize farmers' potential roles as
46 both producers and consumers of alternative energy.

47 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Legislature and Governor to address
48 the interest among developers in placing large solar arrays or other structures such as
49 warehousing on prime farmland by encouraging and enabling farmland preservation groups,
50 either the SADC or private, non-profit organizations pursuing farmland preservation, to be
51 competitive, both in their offers and in turnaround time for signing contracts, with market-
52 driven offers from developers, going beyond the current appraisal process, which also should

53 be re-examined, and legislative measures considered, in light of these rapidly changing
54 market pressures for large tracts of farmland.

55 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Legislature to pass, and the
56 Governor to sign, provisions similar to those in other states where, if a dual use of both a
57 solar array AND continued agricultural activity are proposed for the same land, that the
58 burden of proof is on the developer to provide substantial evidence of and ensure the
59 economically viable compatibility of both uses, so that the agricultural use is not abandoned,
60 and if solar arrays are constructed on farmland, provisions are considered to protect the soil
61 in accordance with New Jersey soil restoration and soil compaction mitigation standards, so
62 that agricultural production, grassland, or grazing capabilities are not lost.

63 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge Rutgers NJAES to continue studying the
64 intersection of solar arrays and agricultural activity, with a focus on real-time alternative siting
65 of solar arrays that does not remove prime soils from agricultural production, and on the
66 potential removal of the “plus 10-percent” provisions of the 2009 law that encouraged
67 farmers on preserved farms to incorporate solar, wind, and biomass energy generation on
68 their farms, but only to the level of the past year’s energy use plus 10 percent, as removing
69 that 10-percent limit, especially when coupled with the integration of more recent technology
70 to create more energy on smaller sites, will increase the power that can be generated on
71 those sites and thus reduce the overall amount of other land needed for solar arrays.

72 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Legislature and all others involved in
73 promoting the goals of the Energy Master Plan, to examine to what extent excess/unused
74 state-owned open-space lands could be alternatives to placing large solar arrays on prime
75 farmland, as well as investigating alternative development arrangements, such as lease-
76 purchase agreements, that would provide for solar development on farms but not involve the
77 outright sale of prime farmlands, so that the land could be returned to farming if the use for
78 the solar array is abandoned at a later date.

79 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge farmers and others in New Jersey's
80 agricultural and food industries to become involved in projects geared toward turning food
81 and agricultural wastes into energy, through anaerobic digestion or other methods.

82 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support the re-use of food and agricultural
83 waste from large generators of such waste for creating energy, as well as for any other
84 agricultural purposes, which includes feeding it to livestock, as this helps farmers keep feed
85 costs down.