RESOLUTION # 19
FARM BILL PRIORITIES

WHEREAS, New Jersey agriculture is diverse, spanning nearly a dozen major sectors, and depends upon the vitality of a variety of agricultural products and enterprises to make the overall industry a success; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey farms’ proximity to population centers brings with it unique challenges not faced in those states where significantly lower population densities make it less likely that farmers will confront noise, odor and other complaints from neighboring residents; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey’s diversified economy and various industries make it more of a challenge for farm operators to find, train and retain adequate labor; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey’s continuous dedication to protecting and improving the environment has created the need for farmers to be ever-mindful of the need to be stewards of their land, water and other natural resources, both for the benefit of their own operations and for the quality of life of all residents; and

WHEREAS, for these reasons, New Jersey farmers face unique challenges in their efforts to keep their farm operations viable and thriving, creating the need to rely on certain government programs to help them meet these challenges; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey can cover the costs of operating these essential government programs only with the assistance of federal funding; and

WHEREAS, the federal Farm Bill historically contains within it the spending priorities for the nation’s agricultural industry, including nutritional programs that are interconnected with agriculture; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey farms’ needs from federal programs are significantly different from those of farms in many other regions of the country; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey’s diverse agriculture, typified by farms ranging from as small as five or 10 acres to those over more than 3,000 acres, which produce a variety of
crops, benefits from a strong emphasis on Specialty Crops Grants designed to increase consumer awareness about fresh produce, improve access to foreign markets, ensure food safety, strengthen research efforts, enhance conservation programs and encourage investment and efficiency; and

WHEREAS, nursery and greenhouse production accounted for $498,125,000 in farmgate receipts in 2017, and fruits, vegetables, berries and tree nuts accounted for $363,788,000 in farmgate receipts in 2017; and

WHEREAS, a broad array of agricultural trade associations representing United States growers and shippers are continuing to work on achieving mutual objectives for the Farm Bill and assuring a common platform across regions, commodities, and other interests, including allies in support of the production of “specialty crops”; and

WHEREAS, the agricultural sectors dominant in New Jersey would not be well served by direct payment to growers, but instead by building the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of specialty crop production in the United States; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey works closely with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service to support a number of feeding programs that bring nutritious products to children, the elderly and those in need; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey is committed to bringing more of the fruits and vegetables produced by its farmers into these programs to ensure that the offerings are of the highest practicable nutritional value; and

WHEREAS, funding targeted for these feeding programs can be stretched by ensuring, whenever possible, that products be bought locally first, regionally second and nationally and internationally as a last resort, thereby cutting the associated transportation costs, especially in times of rising fuel prices; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey also is home to numerous grain and forage producers who receive a much-needed benefit from the Farm Bill’s commodities funding; and
WHEREAS, grain and forage producers strongly support a minimum safety net for grain producers throughout New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey is also home to dairy and livestock producers whose stewardship maintains a considerable amount of agricultural lands and support for the crop sectors that sell feed to livestock producers helps to keep costs to those livestock producers from rising; and

WHEREAS, the approach of the federal government toward relying on subsidized crop insurance premiums as a farmer's sole protection from the devastation of severe weather events – including hurricanes, other persistent flooding rains, hail, extreme heat, drought or any other extreme weather, as well as market loss due to quality and low prices – appears to be increasing rather than decreasing, since it is a way of addressing a farmer's losses without the additional expense of direct ad-hoc payments; and

WHEREAS, federal crop insurance programs, in which premiums paid by farmers are subsidized with federal funds, receive their authorizations and operating parameters through the Farm Bill; and

WHEREAS, apple growers in the various counties need a program that would encompass the entire state, not limited to counties, especially as some orchards in the northern part of the state cross county lines, with one county having a defined program and established yields and the neighboring counties not having a defined program, leaving producers at a disadvantage in the under-established counties; and

WHEREAS, the Farm Bill also can include funding for projects to bring reliable broadband to the rural areas of New Jersey, which is desperately needed by farmers to enable them to keep pace with technological advances in both producing and marketing agricultural products.

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,
urge the Congress of the United States to include within the next Farm Bill, and urge the
New Jersey Congressional delegation to advocate for and support the following:

- additional funding and other support for Specialty Crops;
- additional funding and other support in helping states fight invasive species, both plant
  and animal, as well as plant and animal diseases, with an emphasis on preventing
  invasive species and exotic diseases from entering the United States through
  international ports;
- greater attention to conservation of farmland in states experiencing development
  pressures;
- and reviewing the multiple definitions of “rural” in the USDA’s Rural Development
  programs to ensure that they focus on the importance of agriculture to a given
  geographical area, not simply the number of people living in those areas.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the New Jersey Congressional
delegation to propose and/or support funding in the next Farm Bill to help bring reliable
broadband telecommunications and Internet to rural areas of this state, and to ensure that
such funding is tied to the agricultural character of a rural area, not solely its population or
inclusion in a given Census tract.