

RESOLUTION # 1

FARM VIABILITY

1 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey's agricultural industry has a long history of proactive
2 engagement in the identification of critical issues affecting farming in the state and in the
3 formulation of policy and other strategies to support the retention and viability of a robust
4 agricultural sector; and

5 **WHEREAS**, the mobilization of forward-looking agricultural leaders has, since the
6 1950s, resulted in seminal agricultural support programs in New Jersey, including
7 cornerstone agricultural statutes such as the Farmland Assessment Act of 1964, and the
8 concurrent passage of the Agriculture Retention and Development Act and Right to Farm Act
9 in 1983; and

10 **WHEREAS**, the industry embarked upon an ambitious FARMS Commission strategic
11 planning initiative in the early 1990s, which culminated with the report *Into the 21st Century:
12 Ensuring a Fertile Future for New Jersey Agriculture*, outlining a vision for a viable and
13 prosperous farm sector in New Jersey and charting a course for meeting the challenges and
14 opportunities facing the state's agriculturalists through policy and regulatory supports,
15 marketing strategies, production support, agricultural leadership development, and other
16 measures; and

17 **WHEREAS**, the comprehensive FARMS Commission effort was preceded by similar
18 industry-led initiatives, including those that resulted in the 1980 report titled *Grassroots: An
19 Agriculture Retention and Development Program for New Jersey* and its antecedent *Report
20 of the Blueprint Commission on the Future of New Jersey Agriculture* (1973); and

21 **WHEREAS**, the need periodically arises to systematically evaluate the status and
22 condition of the state's agricultural industry and set strategic priorities to bolster its viability
23 within the context of current and future challenges and opportunities; and

24 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey's agricultural and food complex accounts for \$138.5 billion
25 annually in economic activity to the state (the state's third-largest economic sector), directly

26 employs nearly 500,000 people, keeps open space productive and privately managed, and
27 enjoys highly favorable support among the state's residents, with a combined 94 percent
28 saying it is "Very Important" (70 percent) or "Somewhat Important" (24 percent) to the state's
29 wellbeing, according to a recent New Jersey Farm Bureau/Fairleigh Dickinson University poll
30 on the issue; and

31 **WHEREAS**, recent years have seen New Jersey farmers facing increasing costs that
32 competing farmers in surrounding states have not encountered, primarily from the state
33 increasing the minimum wage, an increase in fuel taxes, and other expenses, leaving New
34 Jersey farmers at even more of a competitive disadvantage to farmers in other states;

35 **WHEREAS**, these cost challenges have been exacerbated by pandemic-related and
36 other supply chain issues, spikes in fuel and input prices (such as packaging, fertilizer,
37 chemistry, labor, equipment parts/ repairs, inspection, and regulation compliance),
38 challenges moving products to market, adverse weather events, general cost inflation, and
39 flat market prices in many commodity areas; and

40 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey farmers are facing ever-increasing regulatory pressures
41 from all levels of government in addition to ever-present Right to Farm challenges; all of
42 which threaten farm economic viability; and

43 **WHEREAS**, the delegates to the 2021 and 2022 State Agricultural Conventions
44 called on agencies and groups with agriculture as their primary interest to "examine...the
45 various factors, positive and negative, that impact New Jersey agricultural operations and
46 report findings and recommendations regarding the long-term viability of agriculture in New
47 Jersey".

48 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 108th State
49 Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 8-9, 2023, do
50 commend the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, in cooperation with leadership from the
51 New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Rutgers NJAES, and other agricultural entities on the

52 initiation of a statewide farm viability initiative to examine the array of issues impacting the
53 current and long-term viability of farming in New Jersey.

54 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we recognize the essential importance that the
55 statewide farm viability initiative contemplate the challenges and needs facing all aspects of
56 New Jersey's diverse agricultural industry, which currently comprises 9,883 farms of all
57 scales, which operate and manage more than 730,000 acres of land and produce and sell
58 more than \$1.1 billion of agricultural products.

59 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that this delegate body also recognizes that New
60 Jersey's 383 largest farms account for 75 percent of agricultural products sold in the state,
61 and that threats to the economic viability of many of these farms' continued operation are
62 very real, meaning attrition within this cohort of New Jersey farms—a proverbial heart of the
63 commercial farming industry—would have irreparable impacts on the economic viability and
64 the physical and cultural landscape of agriculture in New Jersey.

65 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we encourage industry participation in ongoing
66 research being conducted at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station to (1) document
67 the status and condition of the state's farming industry and (2) engage farmers in
68 forthcoming survey and regional focus group work designed to identify farm challenges and
69 potential strategies for bolstering the economic viability of the state's farms.

70 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we endorse the convening of a New Jersey Farm
71 Viability Commission to further develop recommendations and strategies emerging from this
72 initiative into an actionable plan for (1) guiding statutory, regulatory, and policy support for
73 farm viability, (2) informing NJAES research and extension program development, and (3)
74 resourcing for the adoption of new agricultural technologies, innovative and cost-effective
75 production practices, new farm management and marketing strategies, soil and water
76 resource conservation and climate resilience practices, and other strategies that will
77 strengthen and sustain the viability of New Jersey agriculture.

78 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Legislature to pass, and the
79 Governor to sign, all measures requiring legislative approval that stem from the
80 recommendations emerging from a New Jersey Farm Viability Commission, with adequate
81 funding to ensure effective implementation.

82 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we also urge appropriate agency policy and
83 rulemaking be implemented to modernize and/or better align programs to support the viability
84 of farming in the state.