RESOLUTION # 2

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN AGRICULTURE

WHEREAS, today's modern farming operation is as likely to sell its agricultural products direct-to-the-public at an on-farm location as it is to sell them to a wholesale broker or directly to a retailer, as well as being more likely to add agri-tourism elements to their farm, such as pick-your-own, hayrides, or other entertainment components to draw consumers to their farms, all of which can be effectively advertised on social media; and

WHEREAS, today's agricultural operations also rely on high-speed Internet and broadband services for many vital functions beyond advertising, such as remote sensing of field and greenhouse conditions, remote control of equipment, shipping and receiving control and coordination, obtaining current weather information critical to application of crop inputs, receiving Cooperative Extension and other valuable information from Rutgers NJAES without needing to leave the farm, and for innumerable other purposes; and

WHEREAS, farmers also are increasingly using drones to cover monitoring tasks over vast expanses of fields and other areas of the farm in a fraction of the time they could cover the same amount of area on foot or even in a tractor or pickup truck, and these drones often require reliable, high-quality broadband service to operate or to execute functions central to the growing of crops and the raising of animals, the reduction of wildlife damage to crops through the use of drones to scare off animals that can cause significant crop damage; applying agricultural inputs to crops via drones; and the mapping and documentation of fields that could aid greatly in traceback efforts in the event of a foodborne illness incident; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities has established the Broadband Access Study Commission (BASC), of which the Department of Agriculture is a part, to determine how best to ensure that all residents and businesses in New Jersey, no matter which part of the state they are in, can access reliable, high-quality broadband services, with the Department particularly interested in bringing reliable broadband to rural areas of New Jersey not currently served; and

WHEREAS, especially in an age of increasing costs for fossil fuels, farmers continue to explore alternative/renewable energy sources as part of how they power equipment and source electricity for their operations; and

WHEREAS, the efforts of agricultural operators to both use and produce alternative energy are consistent with the goals of the Administration to "build a clean energy economy" in New Jersey that has 100 percent of the state's energy coming from renewable sources by 2050; and

WHEREAS, under recently passed legislation, farmers are encouraged to pursue "dual use" solar arrays, whereby they can install solar panels in fields to help in producing alternative energy while continuing to farm under or around those installations in order to maintain the overall agricultural character of their properties; and

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

WHEREAS, this increasing incorporation of technological advance in communications, drones, and renewable energy will help farmers stay on top of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and environmental improvements.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the delegates to the 108th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 8-9, 2023, on February 8-9, 2023, do hereby wholeheartedly support the work of the NJBPU-led Broadband Access Study Commission to concentrate on bringing reliable broadband communications to all New Jersey residents and businesses, especially unserved rural areas, where it will have significant positive impact upon farm operators' ability to use Internet-based applications in both the production and marketing of agricultural products and will enhance research and outreach efforts at the rural experiment stations of Rutgers University's Extension Service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Legislature and Governor to strongly consider, in any discussions about drones and agriculture, that various courts have held that ownership of the airspace over private properties extends for up to 500 feet above those properties, and that we urge the Legislature to craft any legislation addressing farm use of drones or the use of drones by any private individual or government agency in a way that enables the Department of Agriculture to use its expertise and knowledge of the agricultural industry to create, in consultation with other agencies or private-sector entities with knowledge and expertise in unmanned aerial aircraft, guidance for farmers that fosters legitimate drone use in agricultural operations in New Jersey.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge New Jersey farmers to become even more involved in both using and creating forms of alternative or renewable energy, as a way of helping to achieve the State Energy Master Plan, to cut their own energy costs, to reduce carbon emissions from fossil fuels, and, in some circumstances, to create an additional revenue stream for their farms.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that when a farm project is net metering energy for use in a solar project, that the farm operation can use the combined readings of all meters on the farm to establish the farm energy use for the project and not require a different system for each meter on the farm.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we strongly urge those farmers pursuing “dual use” solar installations to be mindful that the farming aspects of those energy-producing projects are most important to maintaining the agricultural character of their operations, and we urge that preserved farms also be able to employ such “dual use” applications, including farms in the Highlands and Pinelands preservation areas.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge farmers and others in New Jersey’s agricultural and food industries to become involved in projects geared toward turning food and agricultural wastes into energy, through anaerobic digestion or other methods, as would be consistent with the current approaches nationwide for using food wastes to create energy.