

RESOLUTION # 4

FEDERAL FARM BILL PRIORITIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey's diverse agriculture, typified by farms ranging from as
25 small as five or 10 acres to those over more than 3,000 acres, which produce a variety of

26 crops, benefits from a strong emphasis on grants for promoting what USDA refers to as
27 Specialty Crops, and those programs are designed to increase consumer awareness about
28 fresh produce, improve access to foreign markets, ensure food safety, strengthen research
29 efforts, enhance conservation programs, and encourage investment and efficiency; and

30 **WHEREAS**, “Specialty Crops” as a catchall phrase for most crops outside of the “Big
31 Five” commodity crops is inadequate to describe the farm products most often purchased
32 fresh by consumers at retail outlets (items like blueberries, lettuces, peaches, cucumbers,
33 etc.), often leaving consumers and even members of Congress debating agriculture
34 programs confused about what “Specialty Crops” means; and

35 **WHEREAS**, aquaculture is a sector of New Jersey agriculture that is growing in
36 importance and its products are equally beneficial for good nutrition as are crops currently
37 referred to as “Specialty Crops; and

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

42 **WHEREAS**, a recent trend in New Jersey agriculture has emerged in which larger fruit
43 and vegetable growers who traditionally sell fresh products into wholesale markets
44 increasingly find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with growers from other states
45 where labor and other input costs are significantly less than in New Jersey, as well as with
46 imported produce from foreign countries, where costs are even lower; and

47 **WHEREAS**, these larger, wholesale-oriented growers are crucial in contributing to
48 New Jersey ranking in the “Top-10” producing states in a wide array of fruits and vegetables,
49 including bell peppers, eggplant, blueberries, cranberries, spinach, among others; and

50 **WHEREAS**, maintaining those high rankings in production has a direct impact on
51 federal funding coming to the state’s Specialty Crops growers because of their importance to
52 New Jersey’s overall agriculture landscape; and;

53 **WHEREAS**, as roughly 80 percent of Farm Bill funding is directed toward nutrition
54 programs, both in school feeding and community-feeding efforts, New Jersey works closely
55 with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service to
56 support a number of feeding programs that bring nutritious products to children, the elderly
57 and those in need, while simultaneously creating deeper connections between farmers and
58 those feeding programs by directing more locally grown agricultural products into them; and

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

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

66 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey also is home to numerous grain and forage producers who
67 receive a much-needed benefit from the Farm Bill’s commodities funding; and

68 **WHEREAS**, grain and forage producers strongly support a minimum safety net for
69 grain producers throughout New Jersey; and

70 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey is also home to dairy and livestock producers whose
71 stewardship maintains a considerable amount of agricultural lands; and

72 **WHEREAS**, the support for the crop sectors that sell feed to livestock producers helps
73 to keep costs to those livestock producers from rising; and

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

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

83 **WHEREAS**, the New Jersey Legislature in early-2022 approved, and the Governor
84 signed into law, a measure that directs the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to
85 subsidize premium payments for dairy farmer for the USDA margin protection program, and
86 fully funded that new approach; and

87 **WHEREAS**, the state's Specialty Crop growers also would benefit from a similar
88 approach to help subsidize their crop-insurance premium payments; and

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

94 **WHEREAS**, the Farm Bill also provides federal funding for the Land Grant university
95 system, including New Jersey's Land Grant university, Rutgers, and this funding makes
96 possible an array of research and development for agricultural products and production
97 innovation, thereby bolstering the State-level funding that goes to Rutgers and the New
98 Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES); and

99 **WHEREAS**, public colleges of agriculture, including the Land Grant university
100 system, face unprecedented facilities challenges, attempting to conduct 21st century
101 research in buildings that were constructed 60 to 70 years ago, and the Farm Bill can be one
102 of the vehicles by which federal funding to address those challenges can be directed to the
103 facility needs of those agriculture colleges; and

104 **WHEREAS**, the Farm Bill, along with some recently passed legislation regarding
105 economic recovery and supply chain issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, will have

106 funding targeted toward enhancing smaller, independent processors of meat and other
107 livestock products to ensure a more reliable supply chain for such products; and

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

112 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 108th State
113 Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 8-9, 2023, urge
114 the Congress of the United States to include within the next Farm Bill, and urge the New
115 Jersey Congressional Delegation to advocate for and support the following:

- 116 • additional funding and other support for Specialty Crops, as well as a shift in Specialty
117 Crop support to create more direct payments to those growers, akin to the support
118 payments that go to the “Big Five” commodities and giving serious consideration to
119 changing the term “Specialty Crops” to something that more accurately conveys the
120 agricultural products currently covered under that definition;
- 121 • adding aquaculture products to the general heading of “Specialty Crops” (or any new
122 name for those products designed to help the public further understand what is included
123 under that heading);
- 124 • greater attention to conservation of farmland in states experiencing development
125 pressures, especially those where development is centering on the building of massive
126 warehousing operations on farmland, which erodes the farmland base and creates vastly
127 more impervious cover than other types of development;
- 128 • funding to develop smaller, independent processors of meat and other livestock products
129 to ensure a more reliable supply chain for such products, funding for increased USDA
130 meat inspection in states that do not have state-level meat-inspection programs, funding
131 for the expansion of large-animal veterinary services for the producers of animals
132 destined for processing;

133

- 134 • reviewing the multiple definitions of “rural” in the USDA’s Rural Development programs to
135 ensure that they focus on the importance of agriculture to a given geographical area, not
136 simply the number of people living in those areas;
- 137 • examining the role that federal subsidies for crop insurance premiums can play in
138 encouraging more farmers to secure such coverage to help them overcome weather,
139 disease, pest, and other damage, thus reducing the reliance on ad-hoc disaster
140 payments funded by the federal government; and
- 141 • reauthorizing and providing robust funding in the Farm Bill for the Research Facilities Act
142 in order to address the facilities needs of colleges of agriculture, including the Land Grant
143 university system, as advocated by the Association of Public Land Grant Universities.