**RESOLUTION #1**

**FARM VIABILITY**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey farms have some of the highest production costs of any state in the nation, ranking 1st (in cropland costs at $13,000 per acre; fertilizer costs at $93 per acre; and fuel costs at $70 per acre), 2nd (in labor costs at $426 per acre), and 4th (in total production costs at $1,386 per acre), respectively; and

**WHEREAS**, while New Jersey farms rank 4th in the nation in gross income per acre ($1,621), the percent of gross that is netted after production costs are subtracted is only 14.5%, ranking New Jersey 41st out of 50 states; and

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

**WHEREAS**, the delegates to the 2021, 2022, and 2023 State Agricultural Conventions called on agencies and groups with agriculture as their primary interest to “examine…the various factors, positive and negative, that impact New Jersey agricultural operations and report findings and recommendations regarding the long-term viability of agriculture in New Jersey”; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey farmland being purchased and designated as public land reduces the available production land for farmers and becomes overgrown areas without purpose, ultimately reducing land contributing to the state food system and its goal for food security among its population; and

**WHEREAS**, farm viability initiatives will be useless without land to continue agriculture throughout the state, as well as damages caused by increased wildlife populations due to abandoned public farmland, that will aid in housing invasive species and other animals that will affect crops and livestock production in those areas; and

**WHEREAS**, the decrease in farm viability should not be connected to decreased farmland due to it becoming public lands and an overgrown area instead of remaining in production agriculture; and

**WHEREAS,** the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES), New Jersey

Department of Agriculture, New Jersey Farm Bureau, and industry leaders are to be commended for their efforts to mobilize a statewide *Farm Viability Initiative* to identify critical issues affecting, and develop actionable strategies to strengthen, the current and longer-term viability of farming in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, more specifically, NJAES has been leading efforts on the *Farm Viability*

*Initiative*, hosting regional farmer focus groups to identify the most prominent obstacles that affect the viability of New Jersey farm operations and discuss potential solutions to ameliorate them; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES has researched and analyzed a myriad of metrics that pinpoint

the most prominent factors contributing to a consistent decline in net farm income; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES has conducted extensive outreach to various governmental and

non-government entities whose programs could potentially be deployed in tandem to

assist New Jersey farmers through a unified effort by agricultural leaders in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES has identified its research farms as integral to the *Farm Viability Initiative,* having the potential to demonstrate the latest cutting-edge technologies and in-field management practices that simultaneously reduce production costs, reduce erosion, build soil health, and build resilience to climate change.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, do commend the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, in cooperation with leadership from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Rutgers NJAES, New Jersey Farm Bureau, and other agricultural entities on the initiation of a statewide farm viability initiative to examine the array of issues impacting the current and long-term viability of farming in New Jersey.

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

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

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we urge the investigation of overgrown public farmlands’ effect on the viability of agriculture throughout the state and the affected commodity groups.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly encourage communication between appropriate agencies to further understand and mitigate this issue as it pertains to farm viability and agriculture industries and overall food production in the state of New Jersey.

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

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that the *Farm Viability Initiative* has begun to coalesce around several key issues that will require coordination between agricultural leaders, robust funding, and innovative thinking to holistically and effectively remedy.

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

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

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