**RESOLUTION # 19**

**RUTGERS NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION**

**WHEREAS**, the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) has been generating and disseminating science-based knowledge and resources to New Jersey’s residents, communities, and businesses since 1880; and

**WHEREAS**, the federal Hatch Act (1887), Smith-Lever Act (1914), and McIntire-Stennis Act (1962) established federal capacity funding for agricultural experiment stations at land-grant institutions across the nation and Cooperative Extension in New Jersey and nationally; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES has research faculty and staff in campus-based departments, centers and institutes at the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and maintains research farms, business incubator facilities, and marine and coastal research stations across the state; and

**WHEREAS**, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, an integral part of NJAES that provides access to the resources and expertise of Rutgers University and the national Cooperative Extension system, has faculty and staff in county offices across New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, the NJAES generates and extends university knowledge and science-based educational programs through research and outreach programs to the public in diverse areas encompassing agriculture; natural resources stewardship and the environment; food, nutrition and health; fisheries, aquaculture, marine and coastal resources; home, lawn and garden; and, youth and community development; and

**WHEREAS**, the NJAES strives to support the contemporary and emerging needs of a diverse range of stakeholders in the state; increase the climate and economic resiliency of our communities and businesses; catalyze economic development and innovation; and promote environmental integrity and sustainable resource management and land use; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s agricultural community is faced with a multitude of challenges that threaten its viability and sustainability, including; compliance with a growing number of regulations; new invasive pests; urbanization; land use and environmental regulation; water-quality concerns; rising labor and other production costs; wildlife damage, cost and accessibility of farmland; climate issues; globalizing market competition; Right to Farm conflicts; labor supply shortages; supply chain disruptions; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey agriculture’s viability and sustainability requires regulatory flexibility, access to information and innovations that enhance production efficiency and farm prosperity, market access, sound land and resource stewardship, farm business decision making, risk management, and planning for farm transition and business succession to the next generation of agriculturalists; and

**WHEREAS**, the NJAES is a separate line item in the State of New Jersey’s annual budget; and

**WHEREAS**, State base budget appropriations to NJAES have, in inflation-adjusted terms, declined by 45 percent (equivalent to the loss of $16.5 million per year in purchasing power) since Fiscal Year 2008; and

**WHEREAS**, this erosion of stable “base” state funding (i.e., past cuts and a flat (not inflation-adjusted) level of funding for nine consecutive years) adversely impacts the ability of the NJAES to cover rising operating costs and maintain and develop the necessary long-term physical infrastructure, technology, and staffing needed to support the existing and evolving needs of New Jersey residents, as well as their communities and businesses; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES, unlike other schools in the university system, does not receive tuition revenues and therefore cannot make up for funding shortfalls via tuition increases; and

**WHEREAS**, a series of recent State supplemental budget (“special purpose”) appropriations to NJAES facilitated the beginning of much needed re-investments in the physical infrastructure, equipment and machinery, instrumentation, and technology at NJAES research farms and field stations; and

**WHEREAS**, these capital investments are supporting the development or expansion of needed programs related to climate adaptation, renewable energy, soil health, hemp production, wildlife management, aquaculture breeding and development, invasive species detection and control, integrated pest management, and new crop commercialization, to name only a few; and

**WHEREAS**, long-term planning and appropriate staffing (i.e., strategic faculty hires) cannot be supported with year-to-year supplemental funding, but requires sustained increase to the State’s base appropriation to NJAES; and

**WHEREAS**, the past decade has demonstrated that decreased state funding significantly and negatively impacts NJAES’ delivery of crucial programs across the state, including the investment in and dissemination of new research, adoption of new technologies, and the maintenance of campus-based and off-campus research facilities; and

**WHEREAS,** the state’s agricultural community has experienced and continues to experience the negative ramifications of funding-related attrition in Extension agents and specialists who are vital for the development and delivery of agricultural programming needed to maintain industry viability; and

**WHEREAS**, the state’s agricultural community is deeply concerned about the erosion in NJAES staffing in the face of recent faculty and staff retirements and their associated impacts on critical research and extension program continuity and succession, as well as new program development; and

**WHEREAS**, these concerns are magnified by the projected retirement of 25 to 40 percent of existing extension facility over the next several years, as well as the anticipated retirements of large numbers of essential technical and programmatic staff, field station staff, and administrative staff across NJAES; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize and support the continued efforts of NJAES leadership and the NJAES Board of Managers, in cooperation with County Boards of Agriculture, the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, New Jersey Farm Bureau, and agricultural commodity groups to develop the necessary strategies to support the continued delivery of quality programming in production agriculture and diverse areas affecting the quality of like for all NJAES constituent groups; and

**WHEREAS**, we support the Rutgers NJAES “*Catalyze NJ”* Initiative which builds on the accomplishments of “*Vision 2025*” supported by special purpose funding over the last five years, that resulted in transformative infrastructure, equipment, and technology improvements needed to deliver innovative programs and achieve the NJAES mission; and

**WHEREAS**, “*Catalyze NJ*” is a critical and demonstrably impactful investment initiative to develop and expand research and extension programs and demonstrations that respond to the needs of the agricultural industry and the broader range of critical needs facing New Jersey residents, communities and businesses, these state funds will also be leveraged as a match for federally funded research grants, and to continue the capital improvements, IT upgrades, and equipment purchases to support innovative program delivery; and

**WHEREAS**, we support the continuation of an annual funding mechanism to fund the NJAES and its “*CatalyzeNJ*” Initiative at an amount of at least $5.5 million ($2.5 million to NJAES base funding and $3 million in special purpose funding) needed to sustain the NJAES investments in the development and delivery of innovative programming, to leverage state funds as a match for federal research grants, and to continue investments in NJAES facilities where NJAES-mission-driven research, education and outreach occurs; and

 **WHEREAS**, we commend and support the NJAES, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, New Jersey Farm Bureau, and industry leaders 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 hereby declare that financial support for NJAES must be improved and maintained at higher levels, and as continuing additional funding, as relying upon potential special appropriations each year inhibits the ability for long-term planning, if solutions to critical issues are to be achieved, ensuring the viability of the state’s agricultural and food system.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that while recent “special purpose” state appropriations used for NJAES infrastructure have been invaluable, we assert that the lack of stable state investment precludes long-term planning for routine maintenance and, importantly, the modernization of facilities, equipment, instrumentation, and technology needed to (1) support impactful research and extension programs, (2) compete for competitive federal and other program funding, and (3) attract and retain top-tier faculty and staff. These investments are deemed essential to the ability of NJAES to effectively address the growing range of critical issues impacting New Jersey’s agricultural industry and other communities across the state.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the County Boards of Agriculture and the commodity organizations and New Jersey Farm Bureau to support the Rutgers NJAES “*Catalyze NJ”* Initiative which builds on the accomplishments of “*Vision 2025*” that resulted in transformative infrastructure, equipment, and technology improvements needed to deliver innovative programs and achieve the NJAES mission; and that “*Catalyze NJ”* is a critical and demonstrably impactful investment initiative to develop and expand research and extension programs and demonstrations that respond to the needs of the agricultural industry and the broader range of critical needs facing New Jersey residents, communities and businesses, these state funds will also be leveraged as a match for federally funded research grants, and to continue the capital improvements, IT upgrades, and equipment purchases to support innovative program delivery.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, the NJAES Board of Managers, County Boards of Agriculture, and the New Jersey Farm Bureau to work with the Governor and the Legislature to continue a stable annual mechanism to NJAES in the amount of at least $5.5 million ($2.5 million to NJAES base budget and $3 million in special purpose funding) to support the NJAES and its “*Catalyze NJ”* Initiative that will provide essential salary support for faculty and staff needed to advance and develop key stakeholder based programs and priorities, leverage these funds as a match for federal grant-funded research, as well as to support the investments needed for the maintenance and modernization of physical infrastructure across the statewide NJAES system of research farms, field stations, and business incubators where innovative programs are delivered.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support and endorse the overarching areas of investment priority articulated in “*Catalyze NJ*” that support (1) the future of food and agriculture in New Jersey, (2) climate resilience and adaptation, and (3) personal and community health and wellness programming.

 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we encourage continued participation of the NJAES Board of Managers and broader agricultural industry in the “CatalyzeNJ” Initiative to provide advisory input and guidance on the identification of immediate and longer-term programmatic priorities within the agricultural industry.

 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support NJAES leadership’s commitment to engaging the Board of Managers, agricultural industry leaders, and other stakeholder groups to identify and prioritize programs and associated staffing needs required to address critical issues affecting the current and other future viability of the farming industry (i.e., under the auspices of the ongoing statewide *Farm Viability Initiative*) and its commitment to empanel program steering committees to assist with guiding the implementation of such programs.

**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 strongly urge the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, the NJAES Board of Managers, County Boards of Agriculture and the New Jersey Farm Bureau to work with the County Boards of Commissioners to provide increased financial support toward the salaries for the county agricultural agent and educator positions.

 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we applaud and support the NJAES Board of Managers’ efforts to identify and prioritize critical extension specialist, county agent, and other staffing needs of within NJAES that will ensure critical program continuity and build new capacity in critical areas of agricultural research and extension and recognize the importance of these efforts in garnering the university’s FY2023 hiring approvals for 15 extension specialists and agents.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the timely replacement of retiring extension specialists and county agents to avoid gaps in service or disruption of essential agricultural programs.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we also urge agricultural and other stakeholders to communicate with federal Congressional representatives, through NJAES representatives to the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching (CARET) and all other appropriate agencies and officials, the continued need for stable USDA funding for the research and extension missions of NJAES that have proven their many-fold return on investment for more than a century.