**RESOLUTION # 6**

**HUNGER, NUTRITION AND GLEANING IN NEW JERSEY**

**WHEREAS**, schools are an appropriate vehicle to promote the availability of healthier foods and nutrition services, as they are uniquely positioned to model and reinforce healthy eating behaviors, such as increasing knowledge of and improving access to fruits and vegetables on the school campus and at school-related activities; and

**WHEREAS**,schools can serve as an outreach tool to carry positive nutrition messages, through student exposure to nutrition information and farming practices, to parents and the community at large; and

**WHEREAS**,schools are required to develop and implement a school nutrition/wellness policy and to promote nutritious alternatives, and the Department continues to train schools and school food-service providers about marketing nutritious foods to children and incorporating more fresh fruits, vegetables and dairy into the school meal program; and

**WHEREAS,** school-feeding programs, since they were moved into the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (as well as those that were added after that move) have improved and been enhanced under the Department’s Division of Food & Nutrition; and

**WHEREAS**, those improvements to the programs have been accompanied by an emphasis on connecting New Jersey farmers to nearby schools, thus creating a synergistic approach that benefits both education and agriculture in this state; and

**WHEREAS**, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the usual ways of delivering nutritious foods to students while they are in school were disrupted by schools shifting to virtual learning from home, meaning the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, USDA, and education officials needed to collaborate on ensuring those meals continued to get to students, through various methods of delivering those meals to students at home; and

**WHEREAS**, the Department has significantly increased participation in the School Breakfast Program by working in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education to facilitate the inclusion of “breakfast after the bell” options in schools; and

**WHEREAS**, the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children are established through the United States Department of Agriculture but have been administered in New Jersey through the New Jersey Department of Health; and

**WHEREAS**, WIC coupon redemption rates in New Jersey have traditionally been low compared to other states, and resistance has been met for the idea of “over-issuing” WIC coupons in order to ensure the highest possible number of people are receiving them, with the goal that they will also use them; and

**WHEREAS**,a sound, balanced, nutritious diet is important to the well-being of society, both in terms of the future productivity of our children and the health and well-being of the population in general; and

**WHEREAS**,approximately 1.9 million people in New Jersey rely upon various feeding and nutrition programs administered by or through the Department to avoid food insecurity; and

**WHEREAS**, the division has greatly expanded the Child and Adult Care Food Program, growing from 43 sponsors operating at 71 sites throughout the state in 1997, when the programs were moved to NJDA, to 733 sponsors operating at 2,075 sites in 2022; and

**WHEREAS**, school and feeding programs that have commenced since the programs were moved to NJDA also have advanced significantly, including: an increase in the total number of students receiving school breakfast, from 160,384 in 2008 to 356,475 in 2021/22; an increase in the average number of children served in the Summer Food Service Program, from 51,906 in 2005 to 1,972,313 in 2021; and an increase in schools participating in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to expose students to healthier snacks, from 25 schools in 2008 to 202 schools in 2021/22; and

**WHEREAS**, the influence of the Farm to School Program has led to almost 500schools purchasing local products from New Jersey farmers; more than 300 of the districts buying local and implementing cafeteria programs using Harvest of the Month promotional material to highlight the nutritional value of local items; and nearly 200 of the districts using a curriculum that ties cafeteria meals to healthy eating education and/or field trips to farms; and

**WHEREAS**, local purchases of food items including fresh fruits and vegetables can benefit the local economy, growers and distributors, thus reducing the number of “food miles” those commodities must travel to reach the end consumers; and

**WHEREAS**, timely information from state officials regarding the potential for sale of locally grown and harvested foods through federal government programs such as SNAP, WIC, and the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program would help farmers more effectively plan for what types and amounts of produce they should grow in a coming season; and

**WHEREAS,** WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and similar food safety net programs often are eligible to be used for fresh farm products at an on-farm market, and we recognize the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture has focused on concerns arising from a pilot program that provides electronic benefits transfer (EBT) equipment for farmers and market managers to accept those payments, and exploring the significant connectivity and other functional issues with that equipment that those in the pilot program have been experiencing; and

**WHEREAS**,non-profit gleaning organizations that harvest, collect, and distribute surplus produce from farms to community feeding operations are a valuable source of fresh agricultural products that need additional financial resources for procuring this food, with concurrent costs related to storage and transportation of this produce, as demonstrated by the numerous forms of distribution being performed whether direct to small pantries or direct to consumers at free "pop up" markets in underserved communities; and

**WHEREAS**, gleaning surplus agricultural products as a means of reducing food insecurity has been increasing to feed our residents and more gleaning organizations are working with farmers to tackle than in the past, with New Jersey farmers contributing approximately 4.8 million pounds of food and farm products annually; and

**WHEREAS**, according to the 2023 State Food Purchase Program – Gleaning Support Grant – July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024 public notice, it indicates that there will be a $300,000 grant for nonprofit gleaning organizations; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s non-profit gleaning organizations have demonstrated a need for infrastructure support, including transportation costs, to receive, handle, and distribute farm products to the organizations that can move them to food-insecure residents; and

**WHEREAS**, costs associated with the heavy transport of gleaned produce, such as regular maintenance and emergency repairs of vehicles, often exceed the mileage reimbursement rate allowed under the current Gleaning Support Grant guidelines; and

**WHEREAS,** the State of New Jersey passed P.L. 2020 c.24 to reduce food waste and gleaning is a proven and effective way of also helping to reduce food waste at the farm level; and

**WHEREAS**, the FY2023 state budget included $100,000 for Hunters Helping the Hungry to be targeted toward moving meat from hunting, primarily venison from deer, to feeding operations to help feed the hungry, but that appropriation was not repeated in the FY2024 budget; and

**WHEREAS**, the biggest challenge in adding venison to the feeding operations is aligning hunters with butchers who can cut and prepare the meat for the feeding operations’ use; and

**WHEREAS**, the Department has for the past 27 years worked with municipalities and agriculture groups to establish and support community farmers markets, where, in addition to selling to the general public, farmers can accept federally issued Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition program vouchers from senior citizens, which the farmers then redeem for additional income; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey is home to some of the largest commercial fishing ports in the United States, and New Jersey’s commercial fishermen seek to reduce hunger by participating in a seafood gleaning program; and

**WHEREAS**, among the goals of the gleaning program is exposing consumers to the tastes of some underutilized species, in the hope they will seek them out in the future, and, under the program being proposed, fishermen will receive neither payment nor tax write-offs for the fish being gleaned.

**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 continue to support the efforts of the Department and its partners in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as community feeding organizations, to ensure that healthy food choices and fresh fruits and vegetables are available to all children and adults throughout New Jersey.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we vehemently oppose any legislation that would move school and/or community feeding programs currently housed in the NJDA’s Division of Food & Nutrition to any other agency, as the division has done an outstanding job over the past 26 years to expand, modernize, and promote those programs, aided by moving to an almost entirely paperless system through strategic use of web-based interactions with schools and community feeding organizations.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**,that we urge the Department to continue to lead in promoting healthy foods and sound dietary choices to improve the well-being of New Jersey's citizens by promoting programs such as “Jersey Fresh Farm to School,” “Farm to Preschool,” “Farm to Summer,” and school wellness policies.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**,that we urge those at all levels responsible for purchasing or otherwise acquiring food for community feeding programs to ensure that those foods are grown, harvested or produced in New Jersey to the greatest extent practicable.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we stress the critical nature of the Governor and Legislature providing adequate funding for the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) in the FY2025 budget and request that the appropriation be increased to $600,000, to more adequately address local food insecurity, the increase in demand for nonprofit gleaning organizations’ services and the real costs of providing these necessary local services.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we also urge the Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign, legislation to increase the tax benefit to help farmers who donate food to pantries and partner with nonprofit gleaning organizations, which will accelerate farm participation with a tax deduction that is representative of the actual market value of the food that is gleaned.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Department to work with New Jersey fruit and vegetable processing companies and the Rutgers Food Innovation Center to produce pre-packaged, value-added, single-serving New Jersey fruit and vegetable products, and “Made with Jersey Fresh”” products, for use in school food service menus.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we encourage the Department to engage in an education and outreach campaign to link hunters with butchers, and to further link those butchers with feeding operations, in order to fulfill the mission of Hunters Helping the Hungry by moving meat from hunts into the stream of food accepted by the feeding operations.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Department of Agriculture to continue seeking consultation with the New Jersey Department of Health and any other state and/or federal agencies to address issues with farmers and market managers accepting WIC or other safety-net payments, so that New Jersey can maximize the WIC and other benefits that can help the state’s residents remain food secure, and to hold public discussions about those issues with the farmers and market managers who have expressed these concerns.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we do hereby support and encourage the use of grants from all possible sources by New Jersey fishermen to establish and grow the United States Seafood Gleaning Program, and we support the USSGP pilot project in Monmouth and Ocean counties in New Jersey to promote these efforts.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the FY2025 State Food Purchase Program appropriation be increased to $500,000 to more adequately address local food insecurity and the increase in demand for non-profit organizations’ services.