**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 challenges associated with moving products to market, regulatory compliance, adverse weather events, and flat market prices in many commodity areas; and

**WHEREAS**, data from the USDA’s Census of Agriculture allow comparisons of agriculture’s financial performance across states and reveal several trends of concern in terms of the New Jersey farm sectors’ financial position. For example: New Jersey ranks fourth nationally in the value of farm products sold per acre but has dropped to 16th in net cash income per acre, and 46th in net cash income kept as a percentage of gross farm income; and

**WHEREAS**, these federal data also show that New Jersey farms’ average production costs per acre are the third-highest in the nation and are more than four times the national average; and

**WHEREAS**, on a per-acre basis, New Jersey farms are highest nationally in the cost of hired labor (nearly 13 times the national average), first in property taxes (nearly nine times the national average), and first in fuel, utilities, and several other production expense categories; and

**WHEREAS**, these substantial cost-of-production disadvantages are further compounded by the increasing regulatory pressures across all levels of government and ever-present Right to Farm challenges, the full economic impact of which are not well quantified or reflected in net farm income impacts; and

**WHEREAS**, since 2021, the delegates to the State Agricultural Convention have 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,** a farm viability working group comprising New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES), New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), New Jersey Farm Bureau, State Board of Agriculture, and other industry leaders are to be commended for their efforts to mobilize a statewide Farm Viability Initiative to identify and bring focus to critical issues affecting, and develop actionable strategies to strengthen, the current and longer-term viability of farming in the state; and

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

*Initiative*, analyzing data on farm economic performance and factors affecting net farm income, as well as 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**, this initiative has resulted in extensive and ongoing 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**, there is encouraging progress resulting from these mobilized efforts, including development of a new Statewide farmland preservation formula that aims to increase farmland easement values; implementation of the special occasion events law that brings new economic opportunities to preserved farms; state support of agrivoltaics research through Rutgers that seeks to support state renewable energy goals while protecting farmland and providing new economic opportunities to farms; revisions of SADC and NJDA cost-share programs to offer more financial support to growers across a wider range of covered practices and farm modernization investments; programs to support wildlife fencing; continued investments in the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station research farms’ infrastructure, agricultural technologies, and equipment; state funding for local produce purchases by emergency feeding organizations; increasing coordination and investment in “next gen” farming programs; and increased focus on research, extension, and demonstration efforts centering on new agricultural technologies that will support farm efficiency; and

**WHEREAS**, NJAES research farms are 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 110th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2025, do commend the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, in cooperation with leadership from the NJDA, 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 9,998 farms of all scales, which operate and manage more than 711,000 acres of land and produce and sell $1.5 billion of agricultural products.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that this delegate body also recognizes that New Jersey’s 337 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 encourage industry participation in ongoing research being conducted at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) 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 continuing efforts of a New Jersey Farm Viability working group 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 working group, 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.