**RESOLUTION # 4**

**FARMLAND ASSESSMENT**

**WHEREAS,** to the New Jersey farmer, farmland assessment provides tax equity to land actively devoted to agricultural and horticultural uses; and

**WHEREAS,** to the New Jersey public, farmland assessment is a cornerstone public policy in keeping agriculture, and all its positive environmental, economic and aesthetic attributes, alive and well in this, the most densely populated state in the nation; and

 **WHEREAS**, certain aspects of farmland assessment have come under question concerning enforcement, education, and qualification criteria; and

**WHEREAS,** in the early 2000s, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) commissioned the Food Policy Institute at Rutgers University to research the implications of potential changes in the eligibility requirements for farmland assessment on qualified acreage and agricultural industry revenues in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, the Rutgers study found raising the minimum revenue requirement to $1,000 would result in 47,378 acres of land (10,426 acres of cropland/pasture and 36,952 acres of woodland) being rendered ineligible for farmland assessment and the estimated loss of $2 million in agricultural industry revenue, assuming no productivity adjustments are made; and

**WHEREAS**, the Rutgers study also found that raising the minimum revenue requirement to $2,500 would result in 149,631 acres of land (56,641 acres of cropland/pasture and 92,989 acres of woodland) being rendered ineligible for farmland assessment and the estimated loss of $10.75 million in agricultural industry revenue, assuming no productivity adjustments are made; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2008, three separate bills were introduced in the Legislature that proposed to change the farmland assessment qualification criteria by also qualifying woodland through “stewardship” programs that do not require harvesting or sales; defining solar and wind energy generation as agricultural uses; changing the minimum dollar-sales requirement to $1,000; permitting acreage under a bee management plan to qualify; requiring tax assessors to attend educational courses; and providing rule-making authority to the Department to set minimum cropping intensity and livestock carrying capacities; and

 **WHEREAS,** an audit report on the Farmland Assessment program was released by the Office of Legislative Services in October 2008 that recommended state oversight organizations review and advocate changes to the regulations/policy defining actively devoted farmland/woodland as well as modifying the gross sales requirements and the length of the rollback recovery period; and

**WHEREAS**, that audit report also cited an uneven enforcement and interpretation of the rules governing farmland assessment by local tax assessors throughout the state, underscoring the need for uniform training and guidance materials to ensure that tax assessors statewide are working from the same set of guidelines and interpreting them in a uniform manner; and

**WHEREAS**, the audit found inadequate local monitoring of enrolled properties and enforcement of the law’s eligibility provisions, due in part to inadequate resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the Farmland Evaluation Committee at their August 2024 regular meeting, directed Rutgers University to conduct a reassessment of minimum dollar sales adjusted for inflation since the 2013 sales adjustment to $1,000.

**WHEREAS**, commodity prices for NJ farmers have not kept pace with inflation, so extrapolating what initially was a $500 minimum income requirement on the first 5 acres cannot be accurately done using general inflation statistics.

**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, reaffirm the paramount importance that farmland assessment has in providing equitable agricultural taxes on farmland and woodland actively devoted to an agricultural or horticultural use.
 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we urge the NJDA to work with its fellow members of the State Farmland Evaluation Committee to examine all the factors that should play into any deliberations about changing the amount of documented receipts a landowner must realize on the first five acres of agricultural/horticultural production lands, especially to include the prices farmers are currently receiving for commodity crops, which may be too low to satisfy a significantly higher number than the current $1,000 in sales on the first five acres.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that any legislation aimed at changing the Farmland Assessment program must include language REQUIRING local and county tax assessors avail themselves of the training offered by the NJDA’s Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources and other agencies in order to ensure consistent application of new and existing Farmland Assessment program rules and regulations, helping assessors to better meet their obligations through on-site visual verification and with methodical and careful reviews of farm assessment qualifying documents.