



State of New Jersey

## **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING February 25, 2026 (Wednesday)**

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on February 18, 2026.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by giving written notice of the time, date, location and to the extent known the agenda of this meeting. At least 48-hours in advance this notice has been posted on the third floor, Riverview Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey; mailed to the Newark Star Ledger; the Camden Courier Post; the Trenton Times and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Bob Blew called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 1:01 pm. Board members in attendance included President Bob Blew; Vice President Stephen V. Lee, IV, David DeFrangé (TEAMS), John Hart, Joel Viereck, Rick Gardner, Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Wengryn; Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC; Tameko Webster, Chris LaRegina, Robert Vivian, Jeff Beach, Tim Idland (TEAMS), Alyssa Pitt (TEAMS), Andrea Egizi (TEAMS), Anthony Tarr, CFO, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Ashley Kerr, Al Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Sarah Lally, State Executive Director, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins (TEAMS), State Conservationist, NRCS; Fran Hancock, Eastern Fresh Growers; Jeanine Cava, Executive Director, New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative; Manatee Smith, President and CEO, Producers 1 Agriculture Group and Sustainable Solutions; David Watts, Organic & Regenerative Farming Board, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

#### **RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board adopts a resolution to enter into executive session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(8), to evaluate the performance of an employee. The Board will evaluate the employees' performance in implementing strategic outreach to stakeholders and in reviewing and implementing hiring practices in the Department.

The Board will disclose the contents of the closed session as soon as we are able to do so. Minutes will be approved at a future Board meeting.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Stephen Lee, the Board voted unanimously to enter into executive session.

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to go back into the public session of the meeting.

### MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Rick Gardner, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 16 and January 21, 2026, meetings.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Fran Hancock, Eastern Fresh Growers, reported to the Board that in 2023, they received a USDA REAP (Rural Energy for American Program Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans Grant) for installing a solar field to power their packing house and shipping facility. He stated that Atlantic City Electric (ACE) failed to provide a Permission to Operate (PTO) for their farm's 749kW solar system. He stated that as a farm operating on the thin margins typical of our industry, they invested in this project to secure their future and manage the high energy costs of their packing and cooling operations. This project was approved for a USDA REAP grant in June 2023 and has been physically complete since December 2025. With the current state of federal grants related to green energy, they are greatly concerned that if they are unable to receive grant funds soon, it will be eliminated. He noted that they have been trapped in an interconnection limbo for years due to: **Inconsistent Technical Requirements:** ACE forced a mid-construction redesign of our RTU/SCADA systems after the original engineering was already approved. Delays and changes also caused the project to go significantly over budget, at their farm's expense. **Administrative Negligence:** ACE technicians arrived for critical shutdown without notice, causing further months of delay for their active farm operations. **Personnel Turnover:** Their project has stalled as key ACE personnel transition off the solar DER team without adequate handoffs. Finally, he stated that while their solar array sits idle in the sun, they are losing thousands of dollars every month in interest payments on the equipment while simultaneously paying full retail rates to power their coolers and facility. This delay is not just a bureaucratic inconvenience; it is a direct threat to their farm's ability to remain operational.

Jeanine Cava, Executive Director, New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative, reported that a couple of weeks ago, she and Jennifer Lamonica from the Atlantic County Board of Agriculture went to Washington, DC and participated in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's Winter Lobby Day Hill visits. They met with staff from Senator Kim's team and Senator Booker's team, as well as staff. This was their second year participating, Jen Lamonica received a scholarship to be able to attend this year. She commented that Jen was very excited, and she stated that this was a fantastic opportunity. She noted that she would follow up with a written report of the trip. She noted that the two main issues that they talked about were restoring funding for USDA staff in the FY27 budget. We were cut 21% of our USDA staff, as you know, we lost 118 USDA staff in New Jersey we talked a lot about restoration and fully funding USDA staff. In addition, they talked about the impact of staff cuts to farmers and the ability to

navigate and access different programs in the next farm bill, extension of the farm safety net securities around disaster recovery and just farm safety net in general for specialty crop and smaller producers.

And first and foremost, they talked most about anything that can be done either independent of the Farm Bill or within the next Farm Bill to strengthen local, reliable local markets for small and mid-sized producers and so. They thanked Congressman Van Drew, for supporting the bipartisan bill on the House side that would create essentially a bigger, better version of what LFPA and LFS were. On the House side, that did get included in the House markup of the Farm Bill, but with no appropriation so that is why for many other reasons, why we're not supporting the House version of the Farm bill as is, but just wanted to let you know that. She reported that they had a robust experience there as part of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's winter meeting.

Manatee Smith is the President and CEO of Producers 1 Agriculture Group and Sustainable Solutions, a certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Small Business Enterprise (SBE) based in Princeton, NJ. The company focuses on agricultural land development, food distribution, and sustainable, climate-smart solutions for urban and rural areas. He reported that they do much work in the South, with a lot of black farmers until the funding got cut for the DEI program for the USDA, so they are reinventing their company to work more in New Jersey, but the demographics are different down South because most of the farmers were African American or people of color. Here you have different demographics and you have more rural farmers that are Caucasian. For an urban ag, farmers are African American people of color. So, they're trying to come up with a plan and solution to help solve the problem to bridge the gap between both offset, you know the food deserts also help farmers be more productive at the same time. He stated that he wanted to introduce myself because he's here to try and lend his support and partnership and collaboration with New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Farm Bureau.

Board member Dave DeFrange thanked Manatee for coming to the meeting today and introducing himself. As of right now, we've had a great opportunity through the resolution process through the county boards to engage with the urban agriculture community and our Urban Agriculture Committee of the State Board. We are striving for more of a strategic approach in alignment between issues with urban agriculture, understanding what we can provide for them and what they can provide for us. I think right now is the key time to understand that we are marching forward together to try to see how this is going to work out. We had our first meeting as a committee to start to align and bring a strategic vision into approach with bringing outside resources in and the committee would be happy to have your input as time goes on. He stated that the resolution process states that in 2026, we must look at everything between urban agriculture and rural agriculture and bring them together in alignment and come up with a plan.

### **REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Brian Schilling represented the College and reported on the following topics:

- Congratulations to the Department and the Board on the Convention, I have got to tell you, being on the resolutions committee, I'm always nervous, the last couple years going into time window we have with the resolutions, but I thought it went well and public accolades to Bill Cutts, he did a wonderful job.

- As you know, the Board of Managers, over the past few years, has been doing needs assessment from the counties upward. This information is very important, as we gather the information from the counties and our partners, we would not have gotten the hiring approvals that we have. He stated that they have been very fortunate to have the support of the industry guiding us, so the information is provided to Dean Lawson who presents it to the Chancellor. He stated that the College is going into a hard budget season so that continuing guidance is going to be important as we try to figure out how to weather this more.
- The VGA part of the program went exceptionally well; we had over 25 or so programs and workshops over 80 speakers in total. I don't know if others have the final data, but my understanding is we saw about 700 people down in Atlantic City over those days at the Ag Convention, the trade show and the VGA. It was nice seeing a lot of the new county agents coming out and getting introduced to the industry. He noted that Michelle Casella and Bill Bamca did an extraordinary job in the planning. He noted that they had about 20 students from Cook Campus come down as well as some 4H members in the audience for Temple Grandin. She did an outstanding job, and the audience was captivated by her.
- Just a few program updates – last week they held the second AI tools (artificial intelligence) Tools for Agriculture Conference in South Jersey. He thanked the members of the Board and the Secretary that were in attendance. There are a lot of new ideas, new technologies, one of the most interesting things that I heard was the technological people saying we are happy to talk to the growers and the growers saying, we'd rather talk to Extension because they want Extension to test the technology to see if it works.
- Testing of lasers, not to kill birds, but to scare them and some of the drone technology for wildlife deterrence.
- He has invited the State Board and the Secretary an invitation to attend a Farmer and Fisher Wellness program on March 19 at the Eco Complex as the industry is facing some hard times and several of our peer states have farm stress and mental health and wellness programs that we would like to incorporate into future programs. He noted that Farm Bureau has really been pushing at the federal level and state level to bring some of these resources to the industry.
- Staffing update: George Hamilton, who was a 35 plus year veteran extension specialist in vegetable entomology in our pesticide safety program, retired as of January 1. This was a significant loss for the industry. In addition, I have been promising the industry that we're making progress on replacing Pat Hastings. We are now knocking on wood in the final steps of bringing on somebody as they are very eager to fill this position. Nancy Sharma joined us as our new Fruit Pathologist on January 1; she is based on campus but has statewide responsibilities. Patrick McMullen joined us as a successor for Rick Van Vranken in Atlantic County as our new AG and Natural Resource Agent. Finally, he reported that a few searches will hopefully be concluded soon.

### REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

Sarah Lally reported on behalf of the Farm Service Agency:

#### **Farmer Bridge Assistance Program (FBA)**

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced the enrollment period for the Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program, providing \$11 billion in one-time bridge payments to row crop producers in response to temporary trade market disruptions and increased production costs. The FBA enrollment

period opens February 23 and closes April 17, 2026. Bridge payments are intended in part to aid farmers until historic investments from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), including reference prices which are set to increase between 10–21% for major covered commodities and will reach eligible farmers after October 1, 2026.

Pre-filled applications will be available online to producers with a Login.gov account who timely filed their 2025 crop acreage report for eligible commodities. Producers who have a Login.gov account can access and submit their pre-filled application from [fsa.usda.gov/fba](https://fsa.usda.gov/fba). Additionally, producers can also request their pre-filled FBA application from their FSA county office. Commodity-specific payment rates are:

Barley: \$20.51	Corn: \$44.36	Peanuts: \$55.65	Soybeans: \$30.88
Canola: \$23.57	Cotton: \$117.35	Peas: \$19.60	Sunflower: \$17.32
Chickpeas (Large): \$26.46	Flax: \$8.05	Rice: \$132.89	Wheat: \$39.35
Chickpeas (Small): \$33.36	Lentils: \$23.98	Safflower: \$24.86	
	Mustard: \$23.21	Sesame: \$13.68	
	Oats: \$81.75	Sorghum: \$48.11	

### Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program – NEW!

On February 13, Secretary Rollins announced that USDA FSA is providing \$1 billion in Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program assistance for specialty crops and sugar, commodities not covered through the previously announced Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program. These one-time bridge payments will help address market disruptions, elevated input costs, persistent inflation, and market losses from foreign competitors engaging in unfair trade practices that impede exports. ASCF payments will be based on reported 2025 planted acres. Specialty crop producers have until March 13, 2026, to report 2025 acres to FSA. Commodity-specific payment rates will be released by the end of March. More information on ASCF is available online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/fba](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/fba) or producers can contact their local FSA county office.

ASCF – eligible specialty crops include: (A) *Almond, Apple, Apricot, Aronia berry, Artichoke, Asparagus, Avocado*; (B) *Banana, Bean (Snap or green; Lima; Dry edible), Beet (Table), Blackberry, Blueberry, Breadfruit, Broccoli (including Broccoli Raab), Brussels Sprouts*; (C) *Cabbage (including Chinese), Cacao, Carrot, Cashew, Cauliflower, Celery, Celery, Cherimoya, Cherry, Chestnut (for Nuts), Chive, Citrus, Coconut, Coffee, Collards (including Kale), Cranberry, Cucumber, Currant*; (D) *Date, Dry Edible Beans and Peas\**; (E) *Edamame, Eggplant, Endive*; (F) *Feijou, Fig, Filbert (Hazelnut)*; (G) *Garlic, Gooseberry, Grape (including Raisin), Guava*; (H) *Horseradish*; (K) *Kiwi, Kohlrabi*; (L) *Leek, Lettuce, Litchi*; (M) *Macadamia, Mango, Melon (All Types), Mushroom (Cultivated), Mustard and Other Greens*; (N) *Nectarine*; (O) *Okra, Olive, Onion, Opuntia*; (P) *Papaya, Parsley, Parsnip, Passion Fruit, Pea (Garden; English or Edible Pod; Dry edible), Peach, Pear, Pecan, Pepper, Persimmon, Pineapple, Pistachio, Plum (including Prune), Pomegranate, Potato, Pumpkin*; (Q) *Quince*; (R) *Radish (All Types), Raspberry, Rhubarb, Rutabaga*; (S) *Salsify, Spinach, Squash (Summer and Winter), Strawberry, Suriname Cherry, Sweet Corn, Sweet Potato, Swiss Chard*; (T) *Taro, Tomato (including Tomatillo), Turnip*; (W) *Walnut, Watermelon*.

## **COC Elections**

Due to the government shutdown, the 2025 COC Election timeframes have been modified:

- March 2nd: New members will take office. Current members will continue to serve on an extended term until new members take office. The 2025 COC election results are as follows:

Burlington (LAA 3): Craig Higginbotham

Monmouth (LAA 2): Robert Balz

Burlington (LAA 4): John Matro

Morris (LAA 5): Dale C. Davis IV

Cumberland (LAA5): Lori Kertz

Salem (LAA 1): James Bradway

Hunterdon (LAA 5): Debbie Norz

## **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the enrollment periods for agricultural producers and landowners to submit offers for the Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for Continuous CRP starting February 12, 2026, through March 20, 2026. Enrollment for General CRP will run from March 9, 2026, through April 17, 2026. FSA will announce dates for Grassland CRP signup in the near future.

CRP is USDA's flagship conservation program, providing financial and technical support to agricultural producers and landowners who place unproductive or marginal cropland under contract for 10–15 years and who agree to voluntarily convert the land to beneficial vegetative cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and support wildlife habitat. The *Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*, extends FSA's authority to administer CRP through September 30, 2026. "We're still very close to the 27-million-acre statutory cap with 1.9 million acres available for all CRP enrollments this fiscal year so enrollment is likely to be competitive," USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Richard Fordyce said. "This isn't about the total number of acres enrolled, it's about producers and landowners offering and USDA accepting the acres that can best deliver real, lasting benefits to soil, water and wildlife."

## **Continuous CRP (Signup 65)**

FSA will batch Continuous CRP offers submitted by interested agricultural producers and landowners. Offers to re-enroll expiring CRP continuous acreage will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis. New acreage offered in continuous CRP practices will be considered for acceptance on a first-come, first-serve basis if they support USDA conservation priorities including but not limited to practices that address water quality, such as filter strips and grass waterways, and practices that restore native ecosystems or target specific resource concerns. The first Continuous CRP batching period ends on March 20, 2026. Offers submitted after this date will be considered for acceptance in subsequent batching periods if acreage remains available.

Continuous CRP participants voluntarily offer environmentally sensitive lands, typically smaller parcels than offered through General CRP including wetlands, riparian buffers, and varying wildlife habitats. In return, they receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover. Continuous CRP enrollment options include:

- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP): Addresses high priority conservation objectives of states and Tribal governments on agricultural lands in specific geographic areas.

- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Initiative (SAFE): Restores vital habitat in order to meet high-priority state wildlife conservation goals.
- Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative: Prioritizes water quality practices on the land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms. The vegetative covers also contribute to increased wildlife populations.
- CLEAR30 (a component of the CLEAR Initiative): Offers additional incentives for water quality practice adoption and can be accessed in 30-year contracts.
- Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI): Producers and landowners can enroll in CRP to establish long-term cover on highly erodible cropland that has a weighted erodibility index greater than or equal to 20.

### **General CRP (Signup 66)**

General CRP offers are submitted through a competitive bid process. After the enrollment period closes, General CRP offers are ranked and scored by FSA, using nationally established environmental benefits criteria. USDA will announce accepted offers once ranking and scoring for all offers is completed. In addition to annual rental payments, approved General CRP participants may also be eligible for cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover. Producers and landowners interested in participating in CRP should contact their local FSA county office.

### **Loss Adjusters**

New Jersey FSA is seeking Loss Adjusters (LAs) for the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Loss Adjusters are required to have knowledge of field crops and specialty crops, as well as a thorough understanding and execution of crop adjusting guidelines and program provisions, as applicable to FSA programs. If interested, please contact Aly Dyson, NJ FSA Disaster Specialist, [Aly.Dyson@usda.gov](mailto:Aly.Dyson@usda.gov), with any questions.

### **Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMC)**

The Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program has been announced for the 2026 coverage year; it is an important safety net program that provides producers with price support to help offset milk and feed price differences. Starting January 12, 2026, dairy producers can enroll in DMC. The enrollment period ends February 26, 2026. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), reauthorized DMC for calendar years 2026 through 2031.

DMC's Tier 1 coverage level increased from five million pounds to six million pounds. All dairy operations that elect to enroll in DMC for 2026 will establish a new production history. Existing dairy operations that started marketing milk on or before January 1, 2023, will use the higher of milk marketings for the years of 2021, 2022, or 2023. New dairy operations starting after January 1, 2023, will use their first year of monthly milk marketings, even for a partial year. Milk marketing statements or production evidence are required to establish a production history.

Dairy operations also have the option to lock-in coverage levels for six years (2026-2031) with premium fees discounted by 25%.

DMC offers different levels of coverage, including an option that is free to producers, minus a \$100 administrative fee. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online dairy decision tool.

### **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm–Raised Fish (ELAP)**

ELAP offers financial aid to producers who suffer losses from specific adverse conditions not covered by other USDA disaster assistance programs. This includes losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events, and other qualifying conditions affecting livestock, honeybees, and farm–raised fish *including mollusks*. ELAP provides critical support to help producers recover and sustain their operations.

### **Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (Stage 1 and Stage 2)**

FSA is delivering more than \$16 billion in SDRP assistance. Stage 2 of SDRP covers eligible crops, tree, bush and vine losses that were not covered under Stage 1 program provisions, including non–indemnified (shallow loss), uncovered and quality losses.

Stage 1 remains available to producers who received an indemnity under crop insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for eligible crop losses due to qualifying 2023 and 2024 natural disaster events. Producers have until April 30, 2026, to apply for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 assistance. Thus far, New Jersey FSA has approved 379 SDRP Stage 1 applications and paid over \$5.5 million to New Jersey farmers. Nationally, FSA paid over \$5.9 billion. There is a public facing dashboard if producers are interested in following SDRP signup.

SDRP provides disaster relief payments to eligible producers who suffered revenue, quality, or production losses to crops, trees, bushes, or vines due to qualifying disaster events in calendar years 2023 and 2024. SDRP assistance to eligible producers will be delivered in two stages. Producers can receive payments in both stages, if applicable, and for one or both years, depending on losses. The signup period for Stage 1 opened on July 7, 2025. Stage 1 leverages existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments.

Stage 2 provides assistance for eligible crops, tree, bush and vine losses not covered under Stage 1, including:

#### Non–Indemnified (Including Shallow Losses)

- Insured losses through federal crop insurance that did not trigger a crop insurance indemnity.
- Losses with NAP coverage did not trigger NAP payment.

#### Uncovered (Uninsured) Losses

- Includes losses that were not insured through federal crop insurance or NAP.

#### Quality Losses

- Includes quality losses to commodities indicated by:
- A decrease in value based on discounts due to the physical condition of the crop supported by applicable grading factors.
- A decline in the nutritional value of forage crops supported by documented forage tests.

Producers will certify to an SDRP quality loss percentage – Losses due to drought must have occurred in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks, D3 (extreme drought) or greater intensity level during the applicable calendar year. Counties that have met eligibility criteria for drought in calendar year 2023 and/or 2024 are outlined in the fact sheet SDRP Drought Eligible Counties. For 2023, there are no drought eligible counties in NJ. For 2024, the following are drought eligible counties: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Salem County, Somerset County, Warren.

### **Farm Storage Facility Loan**

Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFLs) provide low-interest financing for producers to store, handle and/or transport eligible commodities they produce. This includes acquiring, constructing or upgrading new or used, portable or permanently affixed, on-farm storage and handling facilities, acquiring new or used storage and handling trucks, acquiring portable or permanently affixed storage and handling equipment.

### **Farm Storage Facility Loan Rates for February 2026:**

3-year loan term: 3.625%	10-year loan term: 4.125%
5-year loan term: 3.750%	12-year loan term: 4.375%
7-year loan term: 4.000%	

### **Farm Loan Programs**

The Farm Service Agency offers loans to help farmers and ranchers get the financing they need to start, expand or maintain a family farm. Use the Loan Assistance Tool (<https://lat.fpac.usda.gov/>) to check your eligibility for FSA Loans, discover FSA loan types, learn about FSA Loan requirements, and walk through the easy-to-understand instructions when completing the forms.

**Operating Loans:** Operating Loans can be used to purchase livestock, seed and equipment. It can also cover farm operating costs and family living expenses while a farm gets up and running.

**Farm Ownership Loans:** Farm Ownership Loans can be used to purchase or expand a farm or ranch. This loan can help with paying closing costs, constructing or improving buildings on the farm, or help conserve and protect soil and water resources.

**Microloans:** Microloans are a type of Operating or Farm Ownership Loan. They're designed to meet the needs of small and beginning farmers, or for non-traditional and specialty operations by easing some of the requirements and offering less paperwork

**Youth Loans:** Youth Loans are a type of Operating Loan for young people between 10-20 years old who need assistance with an educational agricultural project. Typically, these youth are participating in 4-H clubs, FFA, or a similar organization.

**Guaranteed Loans:** Emergency Loans help farmers and ranchers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding, other natural disasters or losses.

For more information regarding Farm Loan Programs, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs>.

**Emergency Loans:** Emergency Loans help farmers and ranchers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding, other natural disasters or losses.

The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to designate counties as disaster areas to make Emergency Loans available to producers suffering losses in those counties and in contiguous counties. To request a Secretarial Disaster Declaration, FSA must determine a 30 percent production loss of at least one crop in the county. EM loans are also available following a Presidential major disaster declaration, or an FSA Administrator's Physical Loss Notification (APLN) for livestock-related losses.

Through an Emergency Loan, a producer can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000. Farmers in the following counties may be eligible for Emergency Loans through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA): there are currently no active Disaster Designations.

### **REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU**

Ashley Kerr represented the Farm Bureau and reported on the following topics:

- Great hearing done by the newly formed Ag Committee in the Assembly focusing on ag viability and farmland preservation. We would like to work with the State Board Legislative Committee to come up with some bill ideas to help support these areas.
- Have the two new forestry seats for the FEC been filled?
- Farmer seats on the SADC, how many farmer seats are looking to be replaced?
- Ready to work with NJDA on budget asks for this coming year as we would like to be aligned to these requests.
- NJNLA's Total Pro show was a success, even with the snow date close to 2000 people attended.
- Recent informative sessions by Rutgers on climate change impacts (for technical service providers) and AI in agriculture. Also working with Rutgers on a Farmer and Fisher Wellness Alliance as part of our mental health initiative.
- Looking to work with Frank Minch and the Department on roadway safety, hopefully to be introduced to the new Motor Vehicle Commissioner.
- NJ Soybean Board is next week where Farm Bureau will have a booth; today staffer Ben Casella is speaking at the Sod Growers meeting.
- Morris County NJFB member Kurt Alstede is now a member of AFBF's Labor Issue Advisory Committee. He is working with other Farm Bureau members from across the country to help develop policy recommendations to address farm labor needs. This is good for New Jersey.
- Federal issues – House Ag Committee released their proposed farm bill; and specialty crop bridge payment info released by USDA-FSA.

### **REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)**

Bruce Eklund reported the following:

- Census of Horticulture will be released tomorrow as well as the floriculture report.
- Farms and Land in Farms also released, several states reporting that they have lost farms, but New Jersey held steady at 9,900 farms.

- Currently working on ARMS 3 which is a very important survey regarding the farm economy and asked that Board members encourage producers that received it participate.

### **REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, reported the following:

The announcement of our Headquarters Office building closing by the end of the year and employees being moved out by the end of this calendar year was announced today. She noted that they will be helping with the suitability and feasibility worksheets for the current CRP sign up and they continue to process applications and rankings for our current sign up for our other conservation programs.

Board member Joel Viereck commented that there is a local work group meeting at the Woodstown Service Center and some producers have requested that someone from the State Office be in attendance so that they could hear some of the thoughts and concerns regarding programming from the producers.

Ms. Hawkins explained what the current Chief has done this year is provide talking points, preparatory meetings and slide decks for our DC's to be able to adequately participate in the local working groups. In addition, there was a meeting to prepare the two district conservationists that cover those counties but noted that if there are questions, they will be happy to respond to them.

### **ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD**

David Watts made the following report:

- First, he thanked all the Board members that came to their last meeting at the NOFA conference and at the end of January. It's always great seeing you guys, especially so many of you guys that attended, not only the meeting, but that whole conference.
- Next meeting is April 21 in Newark. Once the exact location is determined, the information will be posted on the website.
- There has been some headway in getting their last board member, they were told that they needed more applicants so they are actively taking more resumes so that they have a good database as at some point, some members may be replaced as these positions are appointed by the Governor.

Board member Steve Lee thanked him for welcoming the Board members to the NOFA Conference and commented that it was nice to see Glenn Beebe being recognized as he has certainly dedicated a big part of his life to agriculture. It was a very nice gesture.

Mr. Watts commented that it was great to be able to recognize him as he played such a key role on the Organic and Regenerative Board being founded.

Board member Joel Viereck noted that he had joined the meeting virtually and noted that with some of the discussions about suppliers, etc. as there are some are options that you'd be able to take advantage of some of the cooperatives like Vineland Produce auction has a warehouse there where you can pretty much get anything in what you would get like large quantity discounts. Even if you're buying small

quantities and there's some other opportunities too and stated that he would be happy to talk with Board members and of steer them in the direction on those things.

### SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn reported that there was a successful NASDA Winter Policy Conference in Washington, where some of the priority areas like labor, animal disease and traceability, the Federal Farm Bill, pesticide regulations and regional food procurement and distribution. He noted that there are six working committees, with each Commissioner serving three, so staff were covering the meetings he could not. It was a good meeting that gave our Chief of Staff a better feel for how the departments nationally all work together, building those relationships between the states, not only in the region but all states. He noted that Texas, Nevada, Florida and New Jersey all handle school nutrition programs and other state departments don't. In addition, Texas is sort of the mother of all states because they have all the USDA food benefit programs within their Department of Agriculture. We all learned a lot from having conversations with each other about ways to advance our industries. He attended the AI meeting which lines up with what the Governor is asking us to do as state agencies. The previous administration had established in AI education platform and this meeting looked at how we can bring Agriculture's need to that infrastructure and get what we need out of that program area. We need to talk to the industry about how to take what the state's investing in and make Ag a priority within those areas. Looking forward to some exciting things that are going to happen on the AI front because money is already being invested and it is Ag coming forward as an industry and saying this is what we need to move our industry forward. He reported this weekend would be the first Cabinet retreat and he is looking forward to meeting with new staff. He noted that the new Motor Vehicle Commissioner is awaiting approval from the Senate at this time but that they have already been having discussions about updating motor vehicle regulations that impact ag lands and farmers, all of the items in the Farm Bureau Motor vehicle book that we tell producers to carry with them as well as adding the traffic safety component. He had a great meeting with the DEP Commissioner, HPAI has become our current area of focus due to a bunch of wildlife goose deaths.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, noted that she had previously explained that we had a Ramadan waiver with the USDA which allows schools to send meals home with children so that they can consume the meals when the observation of Ramadan allows them to. That period will run from February 17 through March 19 and there were over 20 districts that signed up for the waiver throughout the state. The next thing for Summer EBT is our POM, which is the Plan of Operations & Management, which was submitted on February 13 to the Regional Office for review. The Regional Office gave us tremendous compliments, and she stated that she was very proud of her staff for the work that was done and it went straight to USDA for approval without changes, which is very rare. Finally, you've heard me reference our Food Distribution Management System, (FDMS) and reported that they were working with school districts to get them signed onto the platform which needed to be done in order to get it up and running for the next school year. She thanked the food distribution staff for all their hard work getting everyone on board as well as the Department IT staff and the IT staff at Food & Nutrition for bringing this in-house system into reality.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that as a follow up to a report at the last meeting about an investigation going with a raw pet food company, they had tests pop back for listeria, salmonella and E

coli, so we were working with legal and FDA on what our next steps are. We have issued a stop order for any sale of those lots, and he will keep the Board posted on that as it develops. Tomorrow I'll be representing the Secretary at the FFA Advocacy Day and making remarks. He just returned from Burlington, VT where he attended the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Conference where he serves on the administrative council and was interested to see that New Jersey had 33 accepted grant applications, but because of conflict of interest, he doesn't see the New Jersey ones until after, but they had 33 accepted applications and only one project was funded. He commented that he would be reaching out to see why we only got one, but Maine had like seven and so, you know, we're digging into that. He commended Steve Komar and Michelle Casella, who are the state representatives, for SARE for getting the word out and working with the with the growers on that. In addition, he reported that they are working with Dana Communications, our ad agency, to get this year's campaign prepared and launched for a couple weeks again in April for greens and asparagus and then off until mid-June when we pick back up and then run through into September. Finally, he reported that on March 10 and 11, he and Dan Wunderlich would be attending a Dairy Innovation Conference in Albany, NY with the Northeast region states as part of the Dairy Innovation Center Grant.

Board member Holly Sytsema asked that Dan Wunderlich reach out to all dairy producers that have not yet signed up for DMC, he noted that he has been pleased that there has been almost 100% participation in the program to date.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that program staff continue to work with the nursery in Monmouth County that remains under a federal quarantine for *Phytophthora ramorum*. As field staff work to identify the extent of the newest *Phytophthora ramorum* infection, onsite, arrangements are being made and policy discussions continued between several members of NJDA, USDA-APHIS-PPQ, and the business owner impacted. The goal of these discussions is to identify the challenges set forth by the current federal protocol and establish a reasonable path forward. The 2026 LDD aerial suppression and defoliation sketch mapping RFP was sent to nine aerial vendors for bid submissions. The bids are due back from the vendors by February 18, 2026. The New Jersey Hemp Program has approved two licenses for 2026, along with six pending applications. The bill, S4509 was passed on January 12, 2026, which created an entire regulatory scheme for THC concentrations to be in line with the pending federal restrictions, beginning on April 13, 2026. This month 16,896 SLF egg masses were crushed on 27 properties. In warmer weather, insect traps are used to reduce populations of spotted lanternfly. This month 24 new circle traps were constructed.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported that staff is busy looking through the REAL rules, the climate rules, which is an expensive volume of regulations from DEP that was in the NJ Register at the end of January and adopted, there is a lot to get through. It would be good to have a meeting with a committee of the Board to go through some of the specifics of what we find and to include some SADC and NRCS staff for a further review. So will need to look at all the impacts of the new rules and translate what it means for the ag community. He noted that every soil conservation district is supposed to have a local working group, some do, some don't and some join together. He noted that the recent weather has been a problem so many meetings have been moved. The soil meetings always provide a good opportunity for the industry to come to talk about resource concerns and to give feedback. He reported that there is still a drought concern even though there is still snow on the ground and we will continue to monitor the situation. In addition, we will also be monitoring the

possibility of frost as the spring season approaches. Finally, he reported that even though its cold outside now, the heat stress issue is one that we will continue to stay on top of and have been meeting with the Department of Health and the Department of Labor to look at opportunities to provide more education and assistance to farm equipment needs, fans, air conditioners for labor, housing, coming up with a stress plan for field labor. There's no regulation on it at this time, so it would be a voluntary, but it would be good to have some education on that. The Department continues to work on this with Farm Bureau. He reported that the PFAS matter in Warren County has gotten back the verified sampling results from EPA. They will be reviewing all the testing results to see what they really show. He noted that livestock testing has also been talked about. He noted that there has already been pressure from EPA to come up with a risk assessment and there have been some talks with the Department of Health to get a better understanding of the impact. Finally, he noted that he would be meeting some new staff at DEP, and it was suggested that possibly a Committee of the Board could also sit in at some of the meetings that are being held with DEP.

Anthony Tarr, Chief Financial Officer, reported to the Board that the Department has just completed a fiscal assessment that will be submitted to OMB this afternoon. He thanked the Division Directors for their assistance in getting the information needed for OMB. The next step is a budget hearing session with Assembly and Senate that will happen between March 30 and May 22. He reported that the Grant Team received a total of 444 applications prior to the January 30 deadline that were reviewed by the Grant Team who are working with the Grants Committee of the Board who will be scoring the applications that have been deemed eligible.

Vice President Lee noted for the audience that Tony Tarr, the Chief Financial Officer, has done a tremendous job since he came on Board to help the Department become more fiscally solvent.

Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC, reported that the SADC would be holding a public auction for the preserved Schmied Farm in Holland Township, Hunterdon County, on March 5, 2026. The property consists of 118-acres with two older homes. A second property, the Patricelli Farm, consisting of 27-acres in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, with a large ranch home will be auctioned on April 17, 2026. The SADC hosted a virtual statewide CADB Administrators meeting on February 4 and on February 17 staff attended the Cumberland CADB meeting to provide a presentation on the new amendments to the Soil & Water Cost Share program. He noted that the SADC has added a link to an agricultural resources page on its website. The easy-to-use spreadsheet includes the names and contact information for hundreds of agricultural service businesses used by NJ farmers. Finally, SADC will hold its next public meeting the next day at 9:00 am at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton.

Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, reported that the opportunity to attend the NASDA Winter Policy Conference along with Secretary Wengryn, Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison and Division Director Frank Minch was very beneficial to meet with other state departments and have the opportunity to talk about some of the issues that all of us are facing. As a result of her attendance, she is reaching out to all the Northeast Chief of Staffs to coordinate, communicate, look at commonalities and make sure that we, the State of New Jersey, stay out front and she was excited to have the opportunity to attend. She introduced Kelline Muo, our current Eagleton Fellow. He is focused on urban act studies. He is an economics major and has been doing some research on urban agriculture in our state. He is originally from Kenya but currently working on a master's degree in public policy at Rutgers and is grateful for the

opportunity to come and work with the Department. This Friday, February 28, we will be hosting the One Health Task Force meeting, and this will mark the one-year anniversary of the Task Force and will be sharing the report that has been prepared and that the Secretary is currently reviewing and will then be sharing with the Governor and her office. Finally, she reported that March is Women's History Month and this is the International Year of the Women Farmer and the Department is working on our Women's History Month programming and we are partnering with New Jersey Farm Bureau, the New Jersey Agricultural Society and Vegetable Growers Association to create a wonderful opportunity. This program will honor and celebrate the remarkable strides women have made in leadership and the field of agriculture. The event will be held on Monday, March 30, 2026 from 10:00 to 12:30 at the EcoComplex. We will be creating two panels, one panel will focus on leadership, and the other panel will focus on women in farming and Board members Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema will moderate the two panels. She reported that last week the Department held our very first Black History month event and while we didn't know what to expect in terms of turn out because it was the first time, and there was standing room only in person and more than 40 attending virtually, so it was a great success and thanked Secretary Wengryn for the opportunity to host the event and thanked Vice President Lee for participating virtually. After the event, several staff members said what a great event it was.

Secretary Wengryn stated to the Board that Dr. Patil had a family emergency and could not be with us but reported that there had been two HPAI incidents, one in Burlington County that has cleared the quarantine period that was taken care of and there was a backyard flock in Ocean County that is entering a quarantine period and that staff would be visiting to make sure that all of the restrictions are being followed and that everybody understands all of the responsibilities.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Vice President Lee stated to the audience that he needed to leave a bit early today as he is traveling to attend a conference for Ocean Spray Growers. He asked Budget Committee Chairman Joel Viereck for his report. Joel Viereck stated that the Budget Committee had met the previous week and again thanked CFO Tony Tarr for the presentation that was made to the Committee and echoed the comments that Vice President Lee made about the work that Tony Tarr has been doing but noted that with everything that is going on, the Committee think it would be appropriate that we should get a resolution on the record directing the Secretary to put a policy in regarding the fiscal unit.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the following resolution regarding Financial Oversight and Discipline:

**WHEREAS**, the Board has reviewed departmental financial information, including legal and operational expenditures, and recognizes the need for strengthened financial controls, oversight, and accountability; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board affirms its responsibility to ensure sound stewardship of public resources and the effective management of departmental operations;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board directs the Secretary to take immediate steps to strengthen financial discipline across the Department, including the establishment of clear internal controls, approval thresholds, and accountability measures related to expenditures, with particular attention to legal and professional service costs; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Secretary shall present to the Board within 60 days a proposed policy and implementation plan outlining the actions taken, the controls to be instituted, and the process for ongoing monitoring and reporting to the Board.

Board member Holly Sytsema commented that there has been renewed interest in raw milk and she provided the Board members with draft copies of surveys regarding raw milk, one for dairy producers and one for consumers so that we can get a sense of support.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the surveys as presented.

The surveys will be shared online, through the County Boards, NJ Farm Bureau newsletter and other social media outlets.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Vice President Lee reported that he had the opportunity to be able to attend the NOFA Conference as well as the Camden County Board of Ag meeting in-person and the Gloucester County Virtual meeting and AI Symposium last week. He had the opportunity to testify at the Assembly Ag Committee last week where Secretary Wengryn did an outstanding job speaking for more than an hour about the Department and did an outstanding job. The hearing gives the legislators an opportunity to be able to ask questions so they can learn about what our Department does because there are several new members on there that have no idea what the Department of Agriculture does so you need to be commended for that, and certainly an hour was well worth the worth of time. But I know that there was a lot of good dialogue and one of the components that came out of the hearing was the raw milk component. He noted that there was a discussion about the Legislative tours that the Department hosts so that legislators can see first hand the work that is being done. He noted that Caucus meetings, as mentioned before, will be held on March 17, and noted the importance of the caucus meetings and the Board has been very proactive in terms of communicating what the responsibilities of the caucus members and it is critical component to the work being done by the Department.

He recognized the members of the Grants Committee, Rick Gardner, Dave DeFrance and President Blew, because they are independently reviewing each application for the Agritourism Grants and it is a huge job with several hundred applications to be reviewed. Collectively, we want to make sure that \$5,000,000 is well spent. If the Grants Committee had not agreed to do the review, it would have to go to a third party for review and then they would have to take a percentage of dollars off the top to be able to pay for the third-party review. He stated that the goal is to have them all reviewed by the end of March. In addition, he reported that the Board is accepting resumes for the two seats that are up on the SADC which this board is responsible for filling. Individuals that are interested in submitting resumes are due April 1. Finally, he reported that they had roughly 20 inches of snow day earlier this week and because of the amount of snow we had, we lost quite a bit of power as well. He noted that one of the things that we are concerned about in terms of the industry, from the fruit standpoint, is anticipating a wet spring and the biggest concern is because the snow was as heavy as it was, it broke a lot of blanks and branches of blueberries which is a very big deal, so it's kind of wait and see right now. Speaking of blueberries, we have a new, third in a row, Brandon Rasso, blueberry grower from Atlantic County, was a

national winner at the Outstanding Young Farmer competition, noting that for three years in a row, New Jersey has had a national winner.

President Blew thanked Vice President Lee for his report and noted to the audience that Vice President Lee was heading to a National Ocean Spray meeting.

Rick Gardner reported that he attended the Morris County Board of Ag meeting where there was discussion about the Ag Convention and what some of them liked and disliked. The Warren County Board of Ag met and had their election of officers, with Frank Van Horn being elected President and Vice President is Abby Postma. She is very engaged and she and her family own and operate Little Ridge Vineyards and she works for the school district, so she is a very busy lady. The new Secretary of the Board is Jen Bischoff and the Treasurer is Kelly Smith. Finally, he reported that the new Warren County Ag Agent, Dr. Hassan Warriach, has had numerous focus group meetings with various commodity stakeholders from the region and is working hard to become thoroughly and completely informed about the state of agriculture in our county and the greater area. He reported that because of the focus group meetings, he is going to have a farmer symposium on March 21. Even though Dr. Brian Schilling left the meeting, he thanked him, because Dr. Warriach is doing a great job and folks in the county are starting to get to know him and understand his serious commitment to agriculture and he looks forward to working with him going forward. Finally, he reported that as a member of the Grants Committee, he is looking forward to reading, assessing and scoring the agritourism grant applications, it is fantastic to see that we still have a robust Ag community in the state of New Jersey and that it's exciting to be able to do this.

John Hart reported that he attended the Middlesex County Board where they had positive feedback on the recent Ag Convention, there were a few negative comments, but asked about a survey to each county board asking for the pros and cons of the Convention. He reported that Mercer County would be having a farmer's resource conference on March 6 and invited all to attend.

Hillary Barile announced that she too attended the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee meeting and thought it went well. She noted that Assemblywoman Katz is obviously engaged and excited to move forward with this committee appointment and really set the tone of a high level of engagement and listening to farmers. It was clear that that whole committee is really interested in removing impediments to success for the industry and hearing what those impediments are. I thought it was a great listening session and there were a lot of questions from committee members and there were a lot of committee members that brought up support for Jersey Fresh before any of us said anything about that. So, it's clearly something that's on their mind and a priority for them going forward into budgeting, so it was nice because it was something that I think most of us touched on the Jersey Fresh marketing program and how we would like to see some more support there.

She also attended the NOFA New Jersey conference, again, that was well attended with some great sessions. They are a really engaged community, and I would encourage every member of this board to think about attending that conference next year because it really is a good conference. In addition, she attended the South Jersey Farmers Summit, this was an event that was put together by an independent group that started out of the Salem County area. It was really a wide-ranging topics kind of day, but you could put them into two buckets around marketing, support and promotion of local producers and then

relief from overly restrictive legislation. So, all a lot of the same things that we talked about, but all around the idea of how they can support the agricultural community and making sure that the Ag community stays vibrant in Salem, Cumberland and Gloucester counties. They had participation from local county commissioners and mayors. There were a lot of farmers there, some who we are used to seeing at some of our regular events, but a lot who don't typically participate in the county board and Farm Bureau. Vice President Lee attended and we both made comments trying to encourage people to engage with our Board and also with their county boards and making them aware of the system that already exists because there were several comments from people in the group about getting representation within the state government, so I'm looking forward to trying to work with some of that group moving forward.

She reported that Salem County would be holding their annual Friends of Agriculture dinner on March 21 and Atlantic County has their legislator's appreciation dinner coming up March 11 at a Tomasello winery. She reported that the resolution that came out of at the Convention was about the urban ag community and evaluating the needs and crops and like what's going on in the state. And so, we had a pretty good committee discussion around those ideas and got some department staff to put together some potential meeting dates for a practitioner's meeting to come soon.

President Blew reported that I will just reiterate that the Friends of Agriculture dinner at the Elmer Grange in Salem County is a nice event, the food is always very good and it's a great way to spend a Saturday evening.

Holly Sytsema wanted to welcome Board member elect Tim Hionis who was here but had to leave. She and her husband William had the pleasure of attending the National Outstanding Young Farmers of America Conference which was held in Hershey, PA the beginning of February and Brandon Rasso, Atlantic County Blueberry Grower was recognized as a national winner. He did a phenomenal job representing New Jersey. He is a good kid and has a very cool operation, she noted that on a busy day they will do 250,000 pints of berries in a day, so that is just crazy. So that program has produced 12 national winners from New Jersey, the program started in 1955 and some of the early winners include Vice President Lee's Uncle, Abbott Lee in 1955 and Jim Giamarese in the Class of 1989. So, in the past three years, as was said before, we have had three national winners because New Jersey has such a strong vetting process. She reported that nominations for this year are due by March 27. She reported that the Donaldson Farm event is going to be held Friday, March 13, 9:30 to 10:30, and it is a conservation coffee hour and it's just going to showcase some of the conservation that is being done in the county. She reported that another idea that she had was Hunterdon County has a Route 579 trail, a 25-mile trail that goes from Bloomsbury to Lambertville and that just showcases some of the farmers markets, hiking trails, river towns, specific sites to see, things like that. She would like to link what Hunterdon has throughout the rest of the State, so kind of think your county and what you would like to showcase and then we can come up with a map and possibly submit the information nationally, there's actually funding and marketing materials that we might be able to get use that would come from national recognition.

Joel Viereck reported that he had been to a couple of county ag meetings two in Gloucester, and one in Burlington County, that he covered for Steve, and he noted that Bill Cutts had really nice things to say about Secretary Wengryn. He listened to the testimony in front of the Ag & Natural Resources

Committee, and that seemed to be very good. He noted that there was considerable interest in requesting SADC positions so he thinks that we will get quite a few resumes. He attended a meeting with the Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Board members Steve and Holly with Wakefern and the focus of the meeting was strengthening the collaboration and working together to promote New Jersey products and noted that the next meeting is scheduled for March 19.

Secretary Wengryn commented that it was an excellent opportunity for them to include floral, seafood, and fruits. It was a very good meeting.

Joel Viereck said he was recently in Orlando for the Farm Credit Council annual meeting, little background on that, the Council represents national farm credit system and works to ensure federal policy and support remains strong for agriculture and rural lending. He noted that it's interesting to hear a lot of the concerns are the same all over. Finally, he noted that the annual Spring Business meeting is scheduled for March 12.

President Blew reported that he attended Cape May County and Cumberland County Board of Ag meetings, everyone is very interested to know what's going on with the agritourism applications. He noted that they had been received and that the reviews are underway. He noted that the goal is April 1 to have the reviews completed so that the monies get out to the farmers to use for this coming season, that's the goal! On a personal front, they had about 16 inches of snow from Sunday into Monday and they have about 160 greenhouse structures on our farm. We partially lost one of them due to snow load and it was one of the oldest structures on the farm. In addition, they lost about a 10-foot section of a 600-foot structure. So that's not bad. He announced that on March 24 at the TD Bank Ballpark, where the Somerset Patriots play, there will be A Walk in the Park to support horticulture therapy, where he and a few other nursery producers, in conjunction with Jersey Grown and the NJNLA are setting up concourse for a horticultural therapy walk, the entire event is free. Finally, he reported that he was presented with the first internal newsletter for the Department of Agriculture staff.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

#### **MEETINGS**

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, beginning at 1:00 pm.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

ON the MOTION of John Hart, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 3:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn