

12/15/05 SADC Meeting Highlights

Secretary's Report

The N.J. Department of Agriculture is developing a Garden State Agriculture Development Initiative to help New Jersey agriculture thrive and grow. Several proposed components have been identified, including promoting green energy; training for producers, management and workers to improve productivity on farms; creation of an agricultural innovation fund to provide low-interest loans to help farmers expand or create new markets for their products, and to make capital or equity investments into larger projects that help a number of farmers; strengthening of the New Jersey brands – Jersey Fresh, Jersey Grown and Jersey Seafood; and expansion of agricultural management practices under the Right to Farm Program. The Department will be establishing working groups and working closely with Rutgers staff on this initiative. Any comments or ideas are welcome.

Executive Director's Report

The SADC will offer free conflict resolution training to county agriculture development boards, mediators it contracts with through its Agricultural Mediation Program and others involved in resolving farm-related disputes. The training will be conducted in cooperation with the N.J. Office of Dispute Settlement. Three regional seminars will be offered early next year on dates to be announced.

The first annual Farmland Preservation Summit will be held on Friday, March 3rd, at Cook College. Save the Date cards will be mailed shortly.

The deadline for the SADC photo contest has been extended through January. Details are available at <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/sadc/photocontest.pdf>.

Agritourism Agricultural Management Practice (AMP)

Following receipt of comments on the agritourism AMP, the SADC is working with Farm Bureau and Rutgers staff to prepare a revised proposal to bring back to the SADC at its January meeting. The AMP was the subject of substantial comment at the Farm Bureau convention and was widely circulated in the agricultural community. Any additional comments should be forwarded to the SADC as soon as possible. Several commenters were concerned the AMP gives municipalities new authority to regulate these activities. Right to Farm, however, requires that the SADC and county agriculture development boards take into consideration municipal standards.

RDSO Rule Amendments

The SADC discussed a draft rule that would clarify who can live in Residual Dwelling Site Opportunity (RDSO) homes, including what happens in cases where a farmer becomes disabled, retires or dies. A subcommittee of SADC members Karen Anderson, Ralph Siegel and Dr. Daniel Rossi, along with Dan Kennedy will meet to further refine the draft language to address committee members' concerns.

Direct Easement, Fee Simple Purchase Ranking Criteria

The Committee discussed proposed ranking criteria for its direct easement and fee simple programs that would focus on two factors: the farm's quality score as compared with the

county's average quality score under the county easement purchase program since 2000, and the farm's size as compared with the average farm size in the county based on U.S. Census data. Farms with quality scores at least 90 percent of the average quality score in the county and 75 percent of the county's average size would automatically receive preliminary approval. Farms not meeting this criteria still could be accepted but would need to go before the Committee for preliminary approval. Based on concerns raised about the impact on counties with predominantly small farms, staff is re-evaluating the proposal and expects to return to the Committee with a revised proposal at its January meeting. The goal of the proposed criteria is to streamline the two programs.

Process Review Recommendations

Comments on the Process Review Committee's recommendations to streamline farmland preservation programs were generally supportive. Counties have requested financial assistance to help them prepare the comprehensive plans that will be required under the new county-wide planning incentive grant program. SADC staff is exploring funding possibilities and expects to come back to the Committee with a formal rule proposal to implement the recommendations as early as its February meeting.

Condemnation of Easements or Fee Simple Interest

The SADC directed staff to develop a policy for consideration at its January meeting that would prohibit the SADC from participating in the preservation of land or easements acquired through eminent domain.