



NEWS

New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee

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Eligible Farmers Can Apply for Special Permit to Operate Rural Microenterprise on Preserved Farmland

Many farmers who own preserved farms now have the new opportunity to apply for a special permit to operate a rural microenterprise on their land under new rules that also promote the conservation of barns and other historically and culturally significant farm structures, Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher announced today.

“There is a long tradition of farmers operating businesses that are compatible with agriculture to supplement farm income without diminishing their farms’ focus on agricultural production,” said Secretary Fisher. “These rules will enable eligible farmers to establish such businesses to strengthen the viability of their preserved farms, while providing economic incentive to protect important heritage structures and preserve New Jersey’s agrarian history for future generations.”

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) developed and adopted the rules, which are effective June 4, 2018, pursuant to the New Jersey Rural Microenterprise Act (P.L. 2015, c. 275). The law permits two categories of microenterprises – customary rural activities and agricultural support services. Customary rural activities include businesses such as snow plowing, bed and breakfasts, bakeries, and woodworking and craft-based businesses. Agricultural support services include businesses such as veterinary practices, seed suppliers and tractor equipment repair shops.

A farmer who obtains a special permit from the SADC may finish up to 2,500 square feet of the interior of an existing building to support a rural microenterprise, including the addition of walls, insulation, flooring, lighting, heating/ventilation and plumbing. However, if the building qualifies as a heritage farm building – a structure approved by the SADC as significant to New Jersey’s agrarian culture – the entirety of the structure’s interior may be finished. This provides an incentive for farmers to repurpose obsolete or underutilized farm structures that are important elements of the state’s agricultural history and rural landscape.

The entire floor area of an existing structure may be used for a rural microenterprise if the building has not been substantially altered or finished. Up to 5,000 square feet of a preserved

farm may be used for outside storage of equipment, vehicles, supplies or products associated with the business. No new structures may be constructed to support a rural microenterprise. Certain other requirements apply.

Only farms that were preserved prior to January 12, 2006 without an exception area – an area excluded from the farmland preservation deed restrictions at the time of preservation – are eligible for a special permit for a rural microenterprise. This is consistent with the law’s intent to provide opportunity to farms whose owners may have been unaware of or were denied the option to take an exception area in the early years of the Farmland Preservation Program.

For a copy of the rules, visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/ruleprop/recentlyadoptedrules.html. For more information, contact the SADC at (609) 984-2504 or sadc@ag.nj.gov.

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