



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

February 4, 2025

(Tuesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on January 30, 2025.

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 2:35 pm. Board members in attendance included President Bob Blew; Vice President Lisa Specca, Kurt Alstede, David DeFrango, John Hart, Stephen V. Lee, IV, Joel Viereck and Rick Gardner. The meeting was held at Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, Atlantic City, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary of Agriculture Edward 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, Deputy Director, SADC; Mark Dinglasan, Director, Office of the Food Security Advocate; Tameko Webster, Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe, Jeff Beach, Christopher LaRegina, Nathan Schatz (Teams), Andrea Rgizi, Alyssa Pitt, Kaitlynn Dixon, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Allen Carter, President, Ashley Kerr, Alfred Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Bruce Eklund, State Statistician; Lindsay Carragher, Deputy Director, Farm Service Agency; Evan Madlinger, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS; Jess Niederer, Organic & Regenerative Farming Board; Bob Andrzejczak; former State Board members Paul Hlubik, Steve Wagner, Erick Doyle and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of December 18, 2024, regular meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Maria Stewart, Cheese Farm to Table LLC, reported to the Board about a concern that is happening in the dairy industry with inspection reports from the Department of Health and noted that there is grave concern about the effect on the industry. She reported that this started in the summer of 2023 and that by 2024 they were feeling the burden of the challenges with the Department of Health.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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

- Wendie Cohick has left the Extension area to take a University position. He reported that Josh Kohut, professor in the Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences had been appointed the SEBS Dean of Research/NJAES Director of Research effective January 1. In his new role, Kohut will work closely and collaboratively with faculty, department chairs, staff and administration to support Rutgers' land-grant mission and research excellence as a top-tier public research institution.
- He noted that there is a search currently underway for a University President. It is hoped that a new President will be in place as of July 1.
- VGA Educational Sessions planned by Bill Bamka and Michelle Casella are ongoing and have had a very good turnout so far for their sessions and he noted that they worked closely with the VGA to offer sessions that would be beneficial to many.
- Rick VanVranken, 40-year Agent from Atlantic County retired as of January 1. Rick has a tremendous wealth of knowledge, and his historical knowledge is now gone. In addition, Mike Westendorf, Livestock Specialist also retired as of January 1 after almost 30 years. He reported several other searches that are currently underway. He reported that Dean Lawson will be making her remarks to the convention delegation on Thursday.
- Finally, he reported that the NJALDP Class 12 will be graduating this summer and that they are currently recruiting and accepting applications for the next class through April.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

There was no one present from the Farm Service Agency as they were having their own meeting at the same time. It was noted that all federal funds were frozen at the time due to the change in Administration.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

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

- Farmland Assessment – they have met with Senator Pennacchio and Assembly Minority office staff; interest from the Governor's Office to raise the threshold to \$400; Farm Bureau to lead "just the facts" campaign.
- NJREAL/DEP proposal – very serious, they are seeking a meeting with DEP upper management as per the conversation they had with Commissioner LaTourette at the League of Municipalities.
- Heat Stress – proposed amendments for ag carve out appear fine to FB.
- SADC – Senate approved CV 38-0 in December, awaiting concurrence by the Assembly, anxious for announcement on Executive Director.

- Farmland Assessment/rollback bill by Simmons and Burzichelli, passed Assembly ACE in December and Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee last week, adopted Farm Bureau amendment to require written notice to assessor for approval.
- Brooke Rollins to be confirmed as USDA Secretary, discord for agriculture by tariffs; confusion created by deportation issue.
- CATA lawsuit – scheduled for later March.
- Dairy processing; desperately needs assistance from the Secretary and NJDA.
- Looking forward to delegate discussions on Thursday.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

Bruce Eklund reported to the Board on the following:

- Census of Horticulture is currently underway and that the next big thing they have is the ARMS (Agriculture Resource Management Survey) which measures the financial well-being of American agriculture, NJ agriculture and includes things like farm viability, agriculture contribution, the gross domestic product and estimates of farm net income. He is hoping that growers that are asked to participate will so that they have plenty of good data to analyze.
- In addition, he reported that on February 12 they will be releasing a vegetable report in the Garden State. He asked all to encourage farmers to complete the ARMS survey as the information is most important to New Jersey.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

Evan Madlinger, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, reported the following on behalf of Julie Hawkins:

- With the new Administration settling in, NRCS is busy working through the Executive Orders from USDA and the information is slowly working its way down to NRCS. He reported that the agency will be celebrating its 90th anniversary of leading conservation efforts across the nation. He noted that although some funds are currently frozen, the regular farm bill dollars were released, and we can use those which allow staff to continue to move forward with ranking for equip and our RMA program. In addition, they anticipate announcing their CSP Program on March 18.
- It was noted that their IRA funding has been paused, and staff are not even allowed to work on it at this time, so everything is currently on hold. Unfortunately, producers that were approved in the first phase of the program that have had the work completed cannot be paid until the pause is lifted. In addition, he noted that there is a hiring freeze, they were in the process of hiring three new engineers and all of that has been put on hold as well.

ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

Jess Neiderer, reported on behalf of the Organic & Regenerative Farming Board:

- Partnered with the recent NOFA Conference and they held their second full public meeting at that conference, and it was well attended. She noted that they are very committed to having their meetings be available digitally to whoever decides to attend that way.
- The survey that they have created to assess the needs of the regenerative and organic farmer population, so the survey is open to being taken by ag service professionals, farmers who are certified, not certified, regenerative, interested in sustainable practices, etc. She noted that the

survey has been open for about three weeks and close to 100 farmers have already completed it. She reported that it is a comprehensive survey with about 45 questions. It is hoped that they will be able to gather some good data from it. She reported that the survey will be open through the end of February. In addition, she noted that students from Rutgers will be analyzing the survey results. It was noted that some of the largest challenges have been the cost of equipment, land and extreme weather conditions. It is hoped that the report of the survey results will be available by early April when the next full public meeting of the Board will be held.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn reported that the recent NOFA Conference was well attended, and they had educational sessions for producers to attend. In addition, he attended the NJNLA annual meeting where he had the opportunity to speak with some of the vendors and they were optimistic for the future growing season. He reported that he is looking forward to the delegate discussion on Resolutions and the Convention proceedings. He reported that the final amendments on the Invasives legislation were sent to the Office of Legislative Services.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported that the first year of the Summer EBT distribution reached over 711,000 children in the state and allocated out over \$85.3 million dollars. She thanked Mark Dinglasan and the Office of the Food Security Advocate for working side by side with the Summer EBT efforts, it was a tremendous accomplishment. In addition, she reported that New Jersey is the only state that has the Department of Agriculture administer the program. She reported that the School Nutrition program is gearing up for their annual spring training. She noted that program staff are actively preparing schools for the 2025-2026 school year and finally, she noted that the Food Distribution unit was currently undergoing a management evaluation (ME) by USDA. The review looks at the compliance with USDA food distribution as well as the TEFAP program and the Child & Adult Care Food program will have their ME. She provided the Board members with a sample of the Sesame Ginger Kale salad; she reported that the sample is featured today at the Farm to School exhibit booth at the trade show.

Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, reported to the Board that at the direction of the Board and the Secretary, the Office of the Secretary continues to work on the Department's Strategic Plan. The Plan does look at our partnerships and how we can strengthen them, specifically in the area of programming and resources, policy and regulation, partnership and collaboration and identifying from the community what the priorities are and it is imperative that as we move forward with our Department during leadership that we're looking to partner together so that we can be the best Department in the nation. She reported that she worked to onboard the new Employee Relations Coordinator, and we are very excited about that and what it will bring to our Department. She worked with the Cannabis Commission to look at the possibility of shared titles and what that could look like in the future. She attended the monthly State Emergency Management meeting at the ROIC, where they discussed safety and readiness in case of emergency. In addition, she reported that she had participated in the interviews for the new CFO position and that the Department is planning to host the very first One Health Taskforce meeting, scheduled for February 21. Finally, she reported that that Department had just completed a very successful Fishbowl meeting.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, reported that the number of HPAI cases in poultry continue to rise across the nation as well as drive the cost of eggs to very high prices. He noted that he encouraged those with backyard flocks to consider vaccination. He is concerned that if the number of cases continue to rise it will affect the food supply as well. He noted that Department staff drafted outreach letters with updated information on the progressing HPAI outbreak, including the disease status in domestic poultry, dairy cattle, and wild birds. This included information about the uptick in detections within wild birds, the importance of on-farm biosecurity, separation of multi-species on-farm, and reporting mortality and morbidity to the Department. Information regarding HPAI has been posted on the Department's website and provided to Rutgers Extension for distribution.

Paul Waller, Cherry Grove Farm, commented that they had received mixed messages on what Department is handling this issue and who is actually doing the testing.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported that he had attended the Urban Ag tours and found them to be very informative. He noted that the Department needs to understand more of their concerns and the issues that they are having. He noted that technology seems to be one of the impediments and understanding what their limitations and barriers are and how we can help. He reported that Division staff is currently working with NRCS to develop a cross-training program with DEP and starting with land enforcement and there will be a session at the EcoComplex for DEP enforcement staff that are new so that we can develop a good relationship with enforcement so they understand if they see a problem, they know who to reach out to. He reported that there is a PFAS issue in Warren County and he spoke with EPA last week and they are going to expand the area of interest to include more farmland. He reported that there will be a meeting with the Warren County Board of Ag to go through some of the questions that agriculture has specifically regarding what they are trying to do and how we can start to move forward and do some additional testing. He noted that PFAS is going to continue to be an issue around the state but for now Warren County is still the big hot spot.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that a total of five municipalities in Passaic and Sussex Counties declined to participate in this year's aerial LDD treatment program, reducing the initial proposed treatment acreage by 16,179 acres, bringing the new 2025 LDD treatment program to 7,581 acres of both single and double applications in nine municipalities in Burlington, Cape May, Morris and Sussex counties. He noted that as of January, the NJ Hemp Program has registered six growers, one processor and one handler. All registered applicants were licensed with the New Jersey Hemp Program in previous years. In addition, he reported that we have been in touch with USDA, and they are in the process of setting up a tabletop exercise for box tree moth for the end of August or September because we know that the insect will be here.

Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC, reported that the Next Gen staff has a booth at the VGA trade show and encouraged members to stop by. He noted that staff presented the Statewide Formula Value draft rule to the Committee at its January meeting. Based on Committee discussions, the final version is scheduled to be presented at the SADC February 27 meeting. If approved the rule will be published in the March/April Register at which time offers can be made using the new method. In addition, staff presented amendments to the soil & water regulations at the January meeting. The final version will be presented at the Committee's February or March meeting. If approved, it will be submitted for publication in the NJ Register for public comment this spring.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that the Jersey Fresh team has a booth at the VGA trade show as well and encouraged everyone to stop by and see what they have. He reported that Division staff and he are currently interviewing for a new Ad Agency and hope to make a selection in the near future so that they can start prior to the start of the new campaign. He reported that Zach Heiken, a national finalist and the NJ Outstanding Young Farmer would be headed to the National OYF competition the next day. He reported that Division of Markets staff continues the planning for New Jersey to host the NAAMO (North American Agricultural Marketing Officials) in July. He noted that he met recently with the NAAMO officials to go over the draft agenda that has been prepared and they were pleased and looking forward to visiting NJ. Finally, he noted that the Department awaits word from USDA on the availability of funds for the Specialty Crop Block Grants but noted that Division staff are ready once the announcement is made, and it will be shared on all media sites.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Steve Lee announced that Burlington, Atlantic and Camden County Boards of Agriculture would be holding a leadership meeting the next day to come together to talk about issues that are important to their counties. He stated that it is critical to work collectively at the Board level, noting that is where we can get things accomplished at the grass roots level. In addition, he noted that the Leadership Meeting that Secretary Wengryn held earlier today was an excellent opportunity for all the groups to talk collectively and how we can move the industry forward.

Rick Gardner announced that Warren County held their annual Distinguished Service Dinner and Secretary Wengryn and Frank Minch were in attendance from the Department. He noted that on January 31 there was a County meeting regarding the Livestock Processing Facility, and it is expected that approvals could soon take place and time is of the essence, this is something that will benefit all of NJ.

Dave DeFrance reported that the Livestock Processing Facility is something that will benefit all in the area. It was noted that the County Board needs to work and collaborate better. He noted that the dairy issue is something that needs to be addressed, noting that he appreciated the thorough presentation to the Board today and when they made the presentation to Hunterdon County. He noted that Hunterdon County is in support of the dairy producers. We need to be more proactive instead of reactive.

Kurt Alstede reported that the cold temperatures for fruit crops have been good. He attended the American Farm Bureau Convention in San Antonio last week where producers from all over have many of the same issues facing New Jersey. He noted that many are concerned about farm labor and farm profitability. There is a concern that there will be a labor shortage and concerns about H2A and H2B. In addition, he noted there is concern about the cost of everything and the interest rates not dropping as everyone had hoped and noted how critical it is for funding sources to be available through NRCS to producers.

John Hart noted that he had attended the NOFA Conference last week and it was good to see all the energy that was there and many new faces. He noted that the last few weeks have been very difficult for farmers. At his local municipal meeting it was noted that to find room for affordable housing, they would need to find non-preserved farms, so that is what they are looking for. We need to do something

to stop that or there will be no farmland left. In addition, he reported that the new farmland assessment tax would be very crippling to New Jersey farmers, we need more solutions and less roundtables. He noted his concern for the dairy industry and noted that they were losing two farms in his area.

Joel Viereck commented that the farmland assessment issue is extremely frustrating for everybody. He reported that Gloucester County Board held their annual reorganization meeting and many of the topics covered here today were also discussed at the County level. Salem County Board of Ag did not meet but would be meeting on February 17. He met with the SADC Next Gen staff and noted that he was very optimistic and excited to see how that program unfolds and what they are doing and thinks it will be very beneficial. He attended the Food Democracy Lunch & Learn which was very informative and is also looking forward to what they have coming up in the future as well. He was excited to attend the Garden State Winegrowers Association Governor's Cup Event at Drumthwacket which was very well attended and was able to taste several different New Jersey wines. On the farm, he noted that vegetable growers are starting to plant some tomatoes, eggplants and peppers.

Vice President Specca reported that she was unable to attend the Monmouth County Board of Ag but was able to communicate with some of their members and the concern is that they believe we should be responding to the heat stress rules proactively instead of reactively. She reported to them that the Department is on it, and they were very happy to hear that. There are concerns that there will be a shortage of workers this season because of the new Administration and that guest workers may not want to come here. She reported that she had an excellent Teams meeting with the SADC Next Gen staff and encouraged producers to take the survey on the SADC website as it only takes a few minutes, and it is generating a lot of good data for them. In a meeting with legislative leaders from Burlington there were discussions about how they can help the agricultural industry and Lisa mentioned the Farm Vehicle Safety issue and there is proposed legislation to get that information into the drivers' education curriculum in New Jersey. She also was part of the Food Democracy Lunch and Learn and noted that it was aimed at educating people on how the State Board of Agriculture works, how the Convention works, what it means to be a delegate and what the resolution process was all about. She reported that there is an opening for a Farm Viability Extension Specialist and there is an opportunity to listen to the presentations made by the candidates to hear what they are thinking about viability in New Jersey.

President Blew reported that he had missed the Cape May County Board of Ag meeting as he was attending the MANTS Show, noting that last year was a very tough year for retailers but surprisingly everyone at the trade show had a very positive attitude. He noted that as a nursery producer he also likes real winter. He reported that Cumberland County Board of Ag was barely able to make a quorum and had to wait to have enough members to start their meeting, because of this they are doing their best to push for membership in this very rural county. He noted that Cumberland County College would like to get their ag education program back up and running and will be partnering with Rowan University to see what programs they are interested in and what they can do to engage more students in an agriculture program. He also mentioned that farmland assessment is a big concern.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Steve Lee, Chair, Legislative Committee, reported that tomorrow at 3:30 pm as part of the Convention, there will be a Legislative Listening Session with Assemblyman Bill Spearman (Chair, Assembly

Agriculture Committee) and Assemblywoman Andrea Katz. They will be here to listen to the concerns of the agricultural community and Steve strongly encouraged anyone who has concerns about anything to use this opportunity to speak directly with Chairman Spearman. In addition, he reported that the Legislative Committee is also finalizing plans for the upcoming 2025 Legislative Tour schedule. He also commented on the challenge that it will be to get burn permits this season, controlled burning will probably not be able to happen, and we will be in big trouble if we don't get enough rain. Finally, he reported that the Grants Committee has been very busy since they made a change to how we manage the LFPA grants. He noted that the Committee has worked with the Office of the Food Security Advocate and the Grants Team, noting that Billy Connors was excellent and that he has helped to put together a Listening Session for tomorrow on the LFPA Grants and they are hoping to have growers there to talk about what is working and what is not.

Kurt Alstede, Chair, Right to Farm Committee, reported that the Committee had identified three priority pieces of legislation: the CADB alternates, payments for frivolous lawsuits and ag tourism liability. They were transferred to the Legislative Committee and he just wanted to be sure that those pieces of legislation were still on their radar. In addition, as Chair of the Operations and Budget Committee, he reported that the Department's Fishbowl Meeting went very well and now we need to wait and see what comes from the Governor's Office.

David DeFrange, Chair, Personnel Committee, thanked the Committee members and Department staff for setting up the interviews for the CFO position. HR and Legal were very involved and he hoped that we can get a candidate on board soon as the budget is going to be very tight this year. The second round of interviews will be held next week.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Kurt Alstede, the Board voted unanimously to allow the Personnel Committee to choose the candidate for the CFO position prior to the March 26 meeting so that the new hire can hit the ground running as soon as possible.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted to have Secretary Wengryn speak with the new USDA Secretary regarding the frozen funding for USDA/NRCS.

Steve Lee voted against the motion.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval – 2025 Agricultural Fairs

ON the MOTION of Steve Lee, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2025 Agricultural Fairs as presented by the Division of Marketing and Development.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Lawler, Cherry Grove Farm, cheesemaker, reported on the serious issue that has come to light and reported his extreme distress that the Department of Health is overreaching and that he urged the Board and the delegates to please support the dairy resolution that will be heard that will get oversight of this problem back to the Department of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board adopts the following resolution:

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(7), the Board will also discuss a matter involving pending or anticipated litigation or contract negotiation other than in subsection b.(4) herein in which the public body is, or may become, a party, or matters falling within the attorney-client privilege. The Board will not disclose the contents of this part of the discussion because it falls under attorney-client privilege.

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

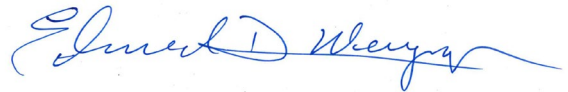
MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, March 26, 2025, beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Lisa Specca, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 5:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn