



State of New Jersey

## **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**July 23, 2025**

**(Wednesday)**

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on July 17, 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 1:05 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 Centerton Nursery, 345 Woodruff Road, Bridgeton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Wengryn; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Ag & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC; Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, Chris LaRegina, Robert Vivian, Jeff Beach (Teams), Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Allen Carter, Liz Thompson, Ashley Kerr, Al Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Lindsay Carragher, Deputy Executive Director (Teams), Farm Service Agency, Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, NRCS, Natalie Matthias, Mayor of Woolwich Township, Ryan and Michael Wolfe, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2025 meeting.

President Blew asked outgoing Vice President Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede if they had any comments that they would like to make.

Vice President Specca commented that the Department has gone through many changes during her tenure and tackled many subjects and through it all the Board worked together with the Department

staff for the time and dedication to the agricultural industry and noted that it has been an honor to serve on the Board and considers all to be friends.

Kurt Alstede stated that it has been a pleasure to serve on the State Board and that he was pleased to be part of the change with the new Secretary of Agriculture and the new Executive Director of SADC. In addition, he reported that he was pleased that the decision has been made that the SADC is no longer going to require farmers to first be denied by the municipality to go for a site-specific AMP. He noted that it highlights what is most important for this Board to continue to do as in terms of policy goals and that it is to support farmers first. He stated that USDA Secretary Rollins has set an agenda for farmers first and hopes that will continue to be the agenda of this Board and the Department. He thanked the members of the Board and Department staff.

President Blew presented a letter from Governor Phil Murphy to Jeff Wolfe's sons, Ryan and Michael, that were on hand to receive the letter. President Blew and members of Board and audience gave them a standing ovation.

Ryan Wolfe thanked the State Board, and the Department staff present. He stated that his father truly enjoyed his work at the Department of Agriculture.

#### **SWEARING IN OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS**

At this time new members Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema were each officially sworn in by Senator John Burzichelli, from the third legislative district, then took their seats at the Board table.

Assemblywoman Heather Simmons congratulated Hillary and welcomed her to the State Board from the Third Legislative District. She noted that they are pleased to have additional representation from the district on the State Board. She also commented that the district acknowledges the loss of Jeff Wolfe, the Public Information Officer of the Department of Agriculture. Jeff was the epitome of service to the community and service to the agricultural community as a spokesman, an advocate and as a friend, he will be missed by all.

#### **REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Board member Joel Viereck reported that the Nominations Committee had met, and the following motion was made:

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by David DeFrance, Bob Blew was nominated as the President and Stephen Lee was nominated as Vice President of the State Board.

There were no nominations from the floor.

A roll call vote was unanimous in favor for Bob Blew as President and Stephen Lee as Vice President of the State Board of Agriculture.

## **REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

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

- New University President William Tate comes to Rutgers from LSU and has a Land Grant background. He's been educated at and served at a few land grants; he was at LSU for more than three years as President. He has not personally met him yet but has heard that he recognizes a land grant.

## **REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU**

Allen Carter represented the Farm Bureau and reported on the following topics:

- Returned from a Washington, DC trip with Liz Thompson, new Executive Director, where they had a sit down in the White House with many of the cabinet members including the Secretary of Agriculture, US Trade Representative and the White House Director of Domestic Policy and several others. There was a good discussion.
- It was noted that the gubernatorial candidates have been visiting the County Ag Fairs and that it was an excellent forum for them to speak with members of the ag community. It was suggested that the Farm Bureau schedule a meeting with each of the candidates to speak with their directors and then possibly the ag community. It was suggested that Farm Bureau host a "Meet the Candidates" event with a moderator and both candidates.

## **REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)**

Lindsay Carragher, reported on behalf of the Farm Service Agency:

### **County Committee (COC) Elections:**

FSA is now accepting nominations for county committee members and encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants to take part in the COC election nomination process. County committee members make important decisions about how Federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2025 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by August 1, 2025. Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction.

Visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/index](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/New-Jersey/index) to identify which LAA(s) are up for election in your County Office. Customers can identify which LAA they or their farming or ranching operation is in by using our GIS locator tool available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://fsa.usda.gov/elections).

### **Supplemental Disaster Relief Program**

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 will leverage existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments. Details regarding Stage 2 will be provided at a later date. A deadline for either program has not been announced.

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, Somerset and Warren.

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

Agricultural producers and private landowners can enroll in Grassland CRP through August 8, 2025. Grassland CRP is a voluntary program that contracts agricultural producers to help landowners and operators protect grassland, including range land, pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and eligible land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. CRP participants develop and implement conservation plans that work alongside their haying and grazing operations. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance. The contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

To be eligible for grassland CRP, land must have an established cover containing forbs or shrubs, be located in an area historically dominated by grassland, provides habitat for animal and plant populations of significant ecological value, or is expiring CRP. Offered land with more than 5% tree canopy is ineligible for grassland CRP.

#### **Acreage Reporting**

FSA annually collects data relating to crops through crop acreage reports. If you want to participate in many USDA programs, including crop insurance, safety net, conservation, and disaster assistance programs, you must file timely acreage reports to remain eligible for program benefits. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops, location, and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, may prevent the loss of benefits.

If crops have not been planted by the crop's acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported to FSA on an FSA-578, report of acreage, within 15 days after planting is complete.

#### **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) – Notice of Loss**

When a crop or planting is affected by a natural disaster, producers with NAP coverage must notify the FSA office where their farm records are maintained and complete Part B (the Notice of Loss portion) of form CCC-576, "Notice of Loss and Application for Payment." This must be completed within 15 calendar days of the earlier of: A natural disaster occurrence; the final planting date if planting is prevented by a natural disaster; the date that damage to the crop or loss of production becomes apparent; or the normal harvest date. Producers of hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent. The crops subject to this requirement will be listed in the NAP Basic Provisions.

### **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.

### **Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP)**

As of Monday July 13, New Jersey FSA has approved 512 ECAP applications and paid \$5,458,433 to New Jersey farmers. Nationally, FSA paid \$7.8 billion. There is a public facing dashboard if producers are interested in following ECAP signup.

The Farm Service Agency is issuing up to \$10 billion directly to agricultural producers through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) for the 2024 crop year, with an application period of March 19, 2025, through August 15, 2025.

Authorized by the American Relief Act 2025, these economic relief payments are based on planted and prevented planted crop acres for eligible commodities for the 2024 crop year.

Eligible producers must report 2024 crop year planted and prevented planted acres to FSA on an FSA-578. Producers may late-file for use in ECAP-only by the deadline August 15, 2025. The payment limitation is \$125,000, with an option to increase it to \$250,000 if the applicant provides a CPA certification that 75% or greater of their average gross income in 2020, 2021 and 2022 came from farming, ranching or forestry activities.

### **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.

President Blew asked if there has been any word on the permanent State Director position being filled. She reported that there has not been an appointment for New Jersey at this time.

**\*\*We experienced some technical difficulties that prevented some to comment that were online.**

## **REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)**

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, reported the following:

- Some '26 funding was released and they announced on July 11 that the next batching cycle funding for the AMA, Equip and CSP Programs. That gives farmers and forest owners about 14 weeks to decide if they want to make an application to address resource concerns.
- She reported that the hiring freeze was extended through October 15, but the agency submitted a plan to Secretary Rollins to fulfill some critical vacancies and that was approved. There are about eight positions, and it is hoped that they can fill some of those critical positions.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn thanked both Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede for their service on the Board and announced that we had something for them to take with them, a letter from Governor Murphy thanking them for their service as well as a copy of the Jersey Fresh ad celebrating 40 years of Jersey Fresh with notes from Board members and Department staff. He personally thanked them both for the encouragement and support that he received from them since he was selected as Secretary of Agriculture. He noted that over the weekend he attended the annual gathering of the NAAMO (North American Agricultural Marketing Officials) Conference here in New Jersey that the Division of Marketing & Development is hosting through Thursday this week. He noted that the group of about 85 had earlier today toured Centerton Nursery (our host for today) and that they had already toured some of our state's best farming operations/locations. In addition, he attended the Terroir New Jersey Wine Showcase of fruit wines, which aims to attain recognition and respect for New Jersey's Wine Industry. The Showcase is not a competition, but a platform to set standards and benchmarks for wine quality in our State. He noted that judges stated that they are now advocates for New Jersey wines. He reported that the County Fair circuit was underway, and he attended the opening of the Cumberland County Fair and that he would be back in this area tomorrow for the Gloucester County Fair. He would be attending the Mercer County and the Sussex County fairs in the coming weeks. He mentioned that he would attend and be throwing out the first pitch at the Somerset Patriots game next week (with approval from his doctor) and noted that tickets for the game are still available. He reported on behalf of Assistant Secretary Atchison that the Department and the Division of Travel & Tourism have an MOU agreement that is currently under attorney review for the Agritourism grant, that is \$5M for farms and individual agritourism operations to apply for grants for marketing promotion. He noted that there will be a break down of what the money can be used for. It is expected that the MOU will be completed soon and once approved, it will be made available. Finally, he reported that on August 8 there will be an event with Food Export Northeast for buyers from 29 countries, called Summer in the Cities in Jersey City. In addition, that day, Congresswoman LaMonica McIver from the 10<sup>th</sup> District is hosting a Food & Nutrition Forum that he will also be attending.

Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC, thanked outgoing Board members Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede for their time on the Board and especially the issues that contributed to the extra work that added to your terms on the Board. He welcomed Holly and Hillary to the Board and noted that they have worked together previously and is looking forward to working with them. He reported that on June 30<sup>th</sup> the SADC's budget for fiscal year 2024 was passed by the Legislature which will allow the SADC to replenish certain program funding pots and retain its current staffing level. In addition, he noted that although they were back in business, the length of time that it took to release the monies, the SADC was not able to replace some employees that had left. It will take some time to dig out from the backlog that it caused. The most important thing is now they can move forward. In addition, he reported that at the SADC's June meeting the SADC found the policy adopted by some CADB's requiring farmers to be denied by their township before the matter will be reviewed for Right to Farm eligibility to be inconsistent with the intent of the Right to Farm Act. He noted that they are trying to come up with some alternatives on how to handle this issue as the towns that adopted the policy, did so because they do not have the expertise to deal with some of the matters that were being addressed. In addition, they have come up with some alternatives on that that could be handled, and staff have started the process of visiting the CADB's to have this conversation. Whether it is the policy of the CADB or not, they want to have the

conservation what updates are right to farm and particularly if that was a policy that they were considering, what some alternatives might be. Finally, he reported that farms in the Pinelands area of the state have had an appraisal formula for 20 years. The Pinelands formula starts with a base rate and builds from there. The Statewide Formula Valuation law allows for the SADC to adjust the Pinelands base rate for inflation. The SADC will be submitting a regulatory amendment next month to increase the Pinelands base rate. Pinelands landowners will be eligible for the traditional appraisal, the amended Pinelands formula or the new statewide formula.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, thanked both Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede for the time they served on the Board. She too welcomed Holly and Hillary to the Board. She reported that she is the Director for the Division of Food & Nutrition and oversees the Federal Nutrition Program that the Department administers. She noted that the Summer Food Service Program was well underway, and the School Nutrition program is getting ready and gearing up working with the school food authorities for the 2025–2026 school year. In addition, the direct certification program opened last week, direct certification is the process by which we directly certify students for free meals in school if they are receiving benefits under other programs such as SNAP or Medicaid, TANIF and foster children. As of July 18, Summer EBT benefit cards were activated successfully, with \$50.9 million in benefits redeemed as of that date. Finally, she reported that the Farm to School Team conducted the New Jersey Farm to School Academy Pilot Program. A three-day Summer Series is being held at different locations across the state. Three school districts – Camden School District, West New York Board of Education, and New Brunswick Board of Education – and one early Childhood Education Center, St. Joseph's-Pro Cathedral were selected to participate in the pilot. Through the summer series and yearlong coaching and training sessions, each team will plan a sustainable Farm to School Program within their school district.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, thanked outgoing Board members Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede for the support of the Division of Animal Health and welcomed the new Board members Holly Sytsema and Hillary Barile. He reported that that it seems like HPAI is flying away with the birds that have gone to Canada for the fall at least. He reported that the Department is working in conjunction with the Department of Health on the testing for HPAI and the tests for the end of June were negative for HPAI in dairy cattle. However, he reported that Secretary Rollins has ordered the closure of livestock trade through southern ports of entry effective immediately. He reported that Division of Animal Health staff are staying updated on the issues surrounding New World Screwworm (NWS) and its potential to impact U.S. livestock.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, thanked both Lisa Specca and Kurt Alstede for their time and dedication to the agricultural industry and welcomed Holly and Hillary, noting that Hillary once worked in the Division of Ag & Natural Resources years ago and noted that he is looking forward to working with both Hillary and Holly. He reported that earlier this week, DEP came out with the substantive changes to the Real, the climate rules. With that, they will need to repropose them, but only the pieces that they are changing which amounts to a lot of work in the coastal zone which means that ag specific questions were not up for discussion at this point. They feel that they have answered those questions and there won't be any more changes to that and what they are looking at are some areas related to what they call the innovation risk zone related to elevation changes. He noted that comments made now are only to the related changes that they are proposing. He reported that the Farmland Evaluation Committee meeting has been scheduled for next week. He noted that Division staff

would be meeting with taxation to review an online portal that they have developed and there will be a demonstration of the portal prior to it being presented at the Farmland Evaluation Committee meeting. He reported that the portal will be helpful for all as it will help with the information gathering and processing which is currently all done by hand. In addition, he has met with the Department of Health and the Department of Labor on ag labor housing as there have been several concerns raised with workers having to get medical treatment which they believe may or may not be tied to some of the housing conditions. Finally, he reported that an internal working group has been established and has been going out to see a lot of different farm sites or urban ag operations so that they can try to get a handle on what exactly is taking place already. He noted that in the resolution from the Ag Convention there was some discussion with the respect to the definition of urban agriculture, which is very hard to define, it can't be overly broad but also can't be too specific because it is a wider array of things that take place in these areas.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, thanked outgoing Board members Kurt and Lisa and welcomed new Board members Holly and Hillary. He reported that the 2025 Statewide Aerial Defoliation survey began on June 19 and was completed on June 23. A total of 126,075 acres were found defoliated in 14 counties and 57 municipalities in the state with most of the defoliation observed in Sussex, Passaic and Morris counties. This represents an approximate 10% reduction in defoliation when compared to that observed in 2024, the infestation has moved south-easterly affecting more municipalities and counties than in 2024. Defoliation notification letters have been sent out to all the affected municipalities asking them if they are going to request fall ground egg mass surveys. He noted that because the weather has been very wet and moist for North and South Jersey, they expect a lot of fungus activity. He reported that we were contacted by USDA, who was contacted by the Coast Guard in NY, about a vessel coming in from India with giant honeybees on board that are native to India, Southeast Asia, they don't live in colonies, they make their cones, one or two, under branches or rock ledges and are very aggressive. He told them that they needed to destroy them offshore because if they make it to the port, they could wipe out the honeybee industry.

Tameko Webster, Chief of Staff, thanked both Kurt and Lisa for their service to the Board and the agricultural industry and noted that they have been with the Board since she stated, and they have been a great asset to her as she learned about the Department and the Board. She welcomed Hillary and Holly and announced that she was providing the members of the Board today with a copy of the surveys that were completed and a report compilation of the findings for the Board to review. She noted that we are working to schedule a mini summit at the end of September at the EcoComplex with the participants being identified by the Board and Secretary Wengryn. The intention is to review the information provided in the reports and plan the path forward for the Department. We continue to partner with the Governor's Office for engagement and watching for federal impacts and how they impact our department. She reported that as we wind down from the current Governor to a new Governor, we are looking at some things that make our department great and some things that we would like to improve and some of the needs in terms of education and training. She participated in the Civil Service Commission Workforce Summit at Rutgers University which focused on staff retention. She reported that for the One Health Initiative, we will be bringing in a program support specialist to really focus on outreach and planning. She announced that the Department has moved to a new public facing website, the old site created in 2003, has been brought up to 2025 and we are excited to see where we can take that technology. She reported that planning for the 2026 State Agricultural Convention is underway, and



we have again partnered with the Vegetable Growers Association and are looking forward to an exciting Convention. Finally, she reported that staff is preparing for the upcoming Board member Orientation that will be held on August 27 and September 24 in conjunction with the regular Board meetings in the afternoon. The orientation will allow for the Board members to have a real close deep dive into what we do at the Department. She noted that she was three days away from her first year with the Department and still feels like this is the best job she has ever had.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Joel Viereck reported that it has been a pretty good growing season for those in the south, wholesale markets have been pretty good, and it seems like everything's been moving easily. He noted that especially this season they have really been relying on the Cooperatives in the area. He stated that it is important that anyone in the wholesale business supports their Cooperatives because without them bringing everything together like they do, it makes it a lot easier to be successful with their help. He reported that after some discussions, it appears that the explosion that happened at the Seabrook Brother plant last month was very destructive, but they have decided to rebuild and think that they have what is needed but will ask for help if needed. He attended two of the Farm Credit East customer service events, one was at Kurt's farm in Chester and noted that it was the first time that he had been there and was very impressed to see his operation and the attention to detail they have, it is a beautiful property. Finally, he noted that he has been working on the Woolwich Twp. TDR issue and that the Mayor of Woolwich was here today and would be speaking to the Board under new business.

David DeFrance thanked both Kurt and Lisa for the time that they have spent on the Board and noted that he had learned a lot from both of them. He thanked Holly for returning to the Board and noted that he was excited to work with Hillary going forward. He stated that it has been an incredible growing year, but at times has been challenging at moments with the weather, but overall, economically things have been going extremely well for the nursery industry, at least up north. It has allowed us to fulfill some testing that we do. He mentioned the issue of heat stress and it has been a real challenge for where heat stress comes in because they are able to grow better plant material when they know when the plants will be stressed. In addition, he reported that many of us in the urban agriculture front, where he wore several hats, one on the State Board and two as an instructor at Mercer County Community College where they put a lot of emphasis on ag and urban together. He noted that Mercer County Community College will be doing an agriculture summit that will be held in August and Board members will be invited. This will bring all communities in the urban agriculture front together and they will look at the language of the legislation as well as the details of what they need.

John Hart reported that it has been terrible weather for making/planting hay. He noted that the Mercer County Fair was scheduled for the upcoming weekend and hopes that the weather will be good. He noted that the eminent domain issue in Cranbury continues to be a concern for all and stated that the Department needs to stay on top of the issue. Secretary Wengryn stated that the DCA has met with the town to find alternative sites and the landowner of that parcel has applied to the SADC for preservation. Finally, he asked about the status of the dairy inspections and whether the inspections could be done by the Department of Agriculture instead of Health, but it was noted that the current statute and regulation says that they are done by the Department of Health and that it will take a legislative change for that to happen.

Rick Gardner thanked Lisa and Kurt, who he has known for a long time, and noted that he was always amazed at their keen insight and instinct about agriculture and their vast knowledge base that has been very helpful to him. He welcomed Holly and Hillary and noted that he looks forward to working with them going forward. He noted that the Warren County Fair starts this coming weekend and many of the members of the Board work the County Fair, in addition, they are looking to make some changes to their bylaws which has not been done in a long time, but it is on the agenda for September. He noted that he has been very busy with the Grants Committee, there has been a great deal of work for them and is excited to be part of the Committee. He noted that the livestock market has been seeing record prices for cattle, just not enough cattle in New Jersey but Pennsylvania and New York are also seeing lower numbers of cattle but much higher prices as well. He hosted approximately 25 students through a Rutgers program and noted that he was very optimistic about the future of agriculture. The young group has some great questions about agriculture, and he was very encouraged. In addition, he commented that on the issue of farmland assessment we must be directly involved in the conversations with legislators before any changes take place regarding this. Finally, he noted that the couple that spoke to the Board a few months back about a driveway issue and suggested that the Board write a letter to the SADC noting that it is a public safety issue in that if the driveway is not changed, no fire truck apparatus can make the curvature through the tunnel to save their home or barns. It was noted that the easement is funded by the county, state and federal agencies. It was noted that this issue has been going on for a very long time but that there would be a hearing on this issue in August. It was also noted that because of the litigation of this issue, more comment could not be made.

Hillary Barile introduced herself to the group and reported that she farms at Rabbit Hill Farms in Shiloh, Cumberland County. She has attended County Board meetings since she was in college and worked for a while in the Department of Agriculture under Monique Purcell and Frank Minch and did some contractor work for SADC, so she has some familiarity of the Department's programs. She noted that their farm is predominately grain production but about a decade ago they built a malt house to process those grains to get them ready to be made into beer or spirits for New Jersey and regional producers that want to use local grains in the manufacture of their beer or whiskey or whatever they want to make. In addition, they do grow some sod. She stated that she is really looking forward to her time on the Board and getting up to speed on all the issues in each Division.

Holly Sytsema thanked both Kurt and Lisa for serving the dedication is much appreciated. She noted that there has ever been two women sworn in at the same time on the State Board and that she was honored to serve with Hillary as well as a second term on the Board. She looks forward to seeing what we can get done to promote agriculture and represent all the agriculture that we have in the New Jersey. She noted that she left Sussex County at 8:30 this morning and that it's a different world up there because of the temperatures noting that some farmers did not even get corn in the ground. In addition, she noted that hay has also been a struggle, and that this week was the first nice week that they have had in about five weeks. She is excited about the opportunity to serve again and working with everyone.

Vice President Lee commented that he was sorry to be late today as he was travelling back from Washington, DC as he had spent the past few days doing visits on the hill while wearing his Ocean Spray hat. The unique part of that is that he gets to talk about ag issues that are important to us, it gave us a chance to be able to have our issues brought to our legislators where he was able to meet with many of the representatives and talk with staff members. Both Senator Booker & Senator Kim's office was not

aware of what happened at the Seabrook plant and asked him to connect them with the Seabrook family to let them know that they've got federal support in any way that they need it. He noted that Congress will be working on the Farm Bill next. He thanked both Kurt and Lisa noting that they have known each other a long time and they have dealt with some pretty significant issues since he came on the Board, there was no Secretary, no Chief of Staff and the Personnel Committee under Holly's leadership went through the process of getting interviews and recruiting in some cases but really doing a lot of heavy lifting and we don't always agree with each other but I am honored and privileged and blessed to have had the opportunity to be able to work with Kurt, Lisa and Holly specifically on the Personnel Committee during a very critical time in our Department and it is something that I will always remember. He noted that he feels that it is important to have former Board members engaged in our subcommittees, they bring a lot of knowledge and historical perspective to the table. He reported that he would be manning the Burlington County Board of Agriculture table at the Burlington County Farm Fair on Saturday evening and noted that Herb Conaway, Jack Ciatarelli and Mikie Sherril are expected to be there as they are travelling the ag fair circuit. He encouraged anyone who is contacted by any of the candidates for Governor that we show them the importance of agriculture here in NJ. He noted that he had just looked at the new Department website and was excited to see a cranberry picture with Chairman Spearman and the Secretary and others featured. He thanked President Blew for hosting the Board today.

President Blew thanked Kurt Alstede for his time and dedication to the Board and always learned something from the conversations that they had. He thanked Lisa Specca, noting that he could not have gotten through the last year without her help, her guidance, always the cool, calming voice in his ear to help ground him, but her vast knowledge of the SADC from her time there and all of the knowledge she brought in from Dave with Rutgers and it was just an invaluable resource and I could not have gone through this year without you. He noted that they hosted the NAAMO folks earlier today, there was about 80 people on two separate busses, but they asked a lot of good questions, so I think we were well received. He noted that the Cumberland County Fair was last week, and they did get rained out two nights, but his son said it was the best demolition derby he has ever been to, and his daughter is excited for the Salem County Fair next week as she is entering the sewing and embroidery contest, so she is very excited. Finally, he noted that he was honored to be elected to serve another year as President on a Board that has two past presidents on it, and he will continue to look to them for guidance and working together on the work to be done. He stated that he and Vice President Lee would be working on Committee and County Board assignments and will get them out once they are ready to go. He looks forward to working with the Board going forward to get a lot of work done in the next year.

#### Legislative Committee

Chairman Steve Lee announced that there was a Legislative Tour scheduled for Friday, July 25 in East Orange and Rob Vivian is coordinating so please let him know if you are available to attend. He noted that it is important to get to different parts of the state and we have done a lot in the south / central part of the state. He noted that regarding the urban agriculture issue we should have some kind of gathering at the EcoComplex where we can gather a team to discuss and how we can all work together to have a good dialogue on this issue.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Wine Grant**

Chairman Steve Lee reported that the Grants Committee had met and has requested further information before the Board makes a determination.

ON the MOTION of John Hart, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted to table the discussion until the Committee can meet to discuss the additional information requested.

### **Commercial Fertilizer Values**

President Blew commented that the Commercial Fertilizer Values were approved at the meeting last month, they were released for public comment. No comments were received.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Commercial Values as presented.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mayor Natalie Matthias of Woolwich Township in Gloucester County introduced herself and said one of the pleasures she has as being mayor is that every day is something different. She noted that she appreciated the work that the State Board does for New Jersey. She stated that Woolwich Township is about 22 square miles and has the distinction of being one of three municipalities in the state that participated in the TDR program for farmland preservation. As a participant in the program, started in 2008, Woolwich Township preserved over 800 acres through the program. However, the program faced challenges such as implementation hurdles, limited market activity and inadequate preservation. Because of those challenges and the changing landscape of land use in the receiving areas, the Township voted to repeal the TDR ordinance in June 2023. The decision came after a period of reevaluation and was driven by the realization that the receiving area had become developed with uses such as warehouses or were required for affordable housing, hindering the effective use of TDR credits. She has played a key role in advocating for the repeal stating that it is in the Township's best interest to undertake a Master Plan reexamination and move away from the ineffective TDR program. The Township, under her leadership, has shifted away from the TDR program due to its failure to meet its intended goals of farmland preservation and smart growth. She noted that the focus has moved towards implementing alternative strategies and addressing current land use needs. She reported that they have asked the SADC that the program be ended so that they can open a pathway for farmland preservation. She has been told numerous times that they are working on it. She receives calls from farmers all the time wanting to preserve their land and she cannot give them an answer. She noted that the matter is now with the Attorney General, and she is hoping to expedite an answer so that they can begin to move forward. She presented a letter from the Gloucester County Agricultural Development Board (CADB) that supports her request. She asked that the Board send a letter to help advocate so that they can get a resolution. She thanked the Board for their time and attention to this matter.

Allen Carter commented that the New Jersey Farm Bureau invested a great deal of time and effort on the Real Rule comments and noted that it was disturbing that they did not receive any communication about the concerns that they addressed on the rule. Secretary Wengryn stated that the responses from the DEP were addressed in the Register, they do not respond to each commenter. He noted that the Department will continue to engage with our sister agency in these rules.

Marty Flynn and Joe Stillwell, running for Assembly were on hand for the meeting to learn about agriculture and the State Board.

### **MEETINGS**

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, August 27, 2025, beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

ON the MOTION of Rick Gardner, seconded by David DeFrango, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 3:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn