

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture

March 26, 2025

Next Generation Ag Summit – The Agricultural and Natural Resources Division's Office of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Education staff worked with representatives from the State Agriculture Development Committee and Rutgers to plan and conduct the first Next Generation Ag Summit. Nearly 50 young people and industry experts who are committed to shaping the future of agriculture attended the event. The session was dedicated to empowering the next generation of agriculture through the themes of cultivate, innovate, and elevate. Students heard from esteemed speakers, participated in workshops focused on Empowered Choices and Leading Change, and engaged in round table discussions highlighting policy issues and career exploration. There are plans to offer this event again next year.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Awareness – In late February, the animal emergency preparedness coordinator and others in the NJDA Division of Animal Health presented during an NJ Department of Health-hosted webinar. The webinar was developed to provide New Jersey local health department officers updates on the national and state H5N1 status. The NJ DOH public health veterinarian presented on the disease's human health and zoonotic potential. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection wildlife veterinarian reviewed the wild bird component of disease transmission and New Jersey's recent wild bird mortality events. The NJDA provided an outline of the response plan when the disease is detected in domestic poultry and encouraged local health departments to relay any reports of sick domestic poultry to the Department. The webinar was a vital opportunity to reach key county and municipal partners that engage in community planning and response. During this heightened disease awareness, this webinar enabled critical outreach with accurate information from the NJDA and state partners to the local health officials.

Summer EBT – The Division of Food and Nutrition Summer EBT Unit has been working on several projects in preparation for the second year of program implementation. To begin, the team, alongside NJDA leadership, submitted the final signed SEBT 2025 Plan for Operations & Management (POM) and supporting documents to the USDA on Friday, February 14. The POM document is a huge undertaking that requires collaboration from multiple entities, including NJDA as the lead agency, the NJ Departments of Human Services and Education as partnering agencies, and the Governor's Office and Office of Food Security Advocate as supporting agencies. The NJDA anticipates a response from the USDA within 30 days of the February 15 POM submission deadline.

Jersey Fresh – The Marketing and Development Division Director and staff are planning to attend the Food Export conference in St. Louis and the Canadian Produce Marketing Association trade show in Montreal in the coming weeks. The Director and staff also attended the Camden County Board of Agriculture meeting, NJ Sire Stakes meeting, NJ Organic and Regenerative Farm Board meeting and conference, NJ Blueberry Council meeting, and NJ Cranberry Council meeting. The Director attended the Atlantic County Board of Agriculture Annual Dinner on behalf of the Secretary and the Monmouth County Board dinner. Division staff also continues to identify products that could qualify for the value-added "Made With Jersey Fresh" program.

Census of Horticulture Assistance – Plant Industry Division Nursery Program staff are working with the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in updating their lists of nursery firms for future census reporting. The most recent data for New Jersey nurseries was detailed in a 2022 report which established that the State's agriculture industry was expanding. The report placed nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod as the state's leading sector providing over 48 percent of total sales and ranking New Jersey 7th in the country for this category. Staff have also begun working with software developers from the Nursery Program's inspection reporting system of USAPlants to update the method of capturing and reporting commodity acreages. This data will be collected as part of seasonal nursery inspections and will establish each county's top nursery commodity types by acreage.

2025 New Jersey Envirothon – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff attended the Google Meet virtual NJ Envirothon planning meeting. A division staff member will attend the training session on April 3, 2025, being held at the Forest Resource Education Center (FREC) to assist with informing students how the team presentation portion of the competition will be conducted. The 2025 NJ Envirothon is scheduled for Saturday, May 17, 2025, at the Burlington County Soil Conservation Committee Office in Columbus, N.J. Thirteen teams are currently registered, and registration closes April 4, 2025.

Summer Food Service Program – Food and Nutrition Division Summer Food Service Program staff continue to reach out to newly eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs) that meet the 50 percent or greater threshold, as mandated by State law under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-24 through N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27, the State requires every school district where 50 percent or more of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the federal National School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program to become a sponsor or site in the SFSP. To date, the Division has approved 25 renewal applications and is currently reviewing additional submissions for approval. The SFSP renewal application allows organizations that successfully participated in the program in the previous year to update their information and reapply for continued participation, ensuring they meet program requirements and can continue providing free meals to children in low-income areas.

Division of Animal Health Pathology Laboratory Testing – During February, the Division of Animal Health's Pathology Laboratory Section completed 325 tests and/or procedures. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic), immunohistochemical, and parasitological preparation and evaluation, and these cases generated additional diagnostic tests for other laboratory sections (e.g., bacteriology, virology, and molecular). Results from these case submissions help to support practicing veterinarians (large, mixed, and small animals), private food and companion animal owners, New Jersey State Agencies, racetracks, wildlife, zoos, and nonprofit animal facilities. Cases involved diagnostic testing for disease and/or cause of death diagnosis and routine and/or sporadic disease surveillance for large and small ruminants, companion animals, and exotic/zoo species; sudden death with no clinical symptoms; assessment of backyard and small flock health issues; large scale flock disease; law enforcement forensic investigation and animals exhibiting neurologic symptoms.

Lymantria Dispar Dispar (LDD – formerly known as Gypsy Moth) Treatment Plan – A total of 5,022 acres of forested residential municipal and 3,745 acres of state lands are targeted for treatment on the 2025 Lymantria Dispar Dispar aerial suppression program. The aerial suppression contract was awarded to Downtown Airport Inc. to treat the 8,767 acres of state and municipal properties at a half gallon per acre (38 B.I.U.'s) for a cost of \$65.24 per acre. A total of eight municipalities in Burlington, Cape May, Morris and Sussex counties are participating in the program this season. A total of 16,325 acres of forested residential properties will not be treated on this year's program as five municipalities in Passaic and Sussex Counties opted out of treatments

Livestock Processing – The North Jersey Processing Center has been working on alternative funding from groups that fund nonprofits. The Department has supplied support to the group as they work to secure the land for the site. A site committee has been formed to complete the steps of securing the property and ready it for building starting in 2025. The project continues to move forward slowly, but the hope is that final approvals from the county for the land on which the plant will be built will come soon.