



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

April 23, 2025

(Wednesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on April 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; Kurt Alstede, David DeFrango, John Hart, Stephen V. Lee, IV, Joel Viereck and Rick Gardner. The meeting was held at Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison, Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Matt Distaulo, SADC; Tameko Webster, Tony Warr, Christopher LaRegina, Nathan Schulze, Kaitlynn Dixon, Alyssa Pitt, Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe and Jeff Beach, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Peter Furey, Ashley Kerr, Al Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Lindsay Carragher, Deputy Director, Sarah Lally, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, NRCS; Bruce Eklund, NASS; Laura Tessieri, Organic and Regenerative Farming Board; Diane Tribble; Henry Rewerts and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 19 and March 26, 2025 meetings.

President Blew introduced Tony Tarr, the new CFO of the Department, this was his first week at the Department of Agriculture.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Diane Tribble and Henry Rewerts reported to the Board on the ongoing litigation between them and SADC and provided some documentation to the members of the Board. Ms. Tribble is seeking help with the blatant violations of their constitutional, civil and property rights by the SADC which began in 2011 and have continued to this day. She noted that this was a story of corruption, abuse of power and official misconduct. Ms. Tribble stated that she has plenty of proof and documents to support the claims, noting that she has documents relevant to the issue of moving their driveway and that they had a superior easement. She stated that this is the embodiment of the abuse of power, corruption and misappropriation of funds and resources. There was a short question and answer discussion on the matter and Board members thanked them for appearing before them today.

Former Board President Holly Sytsema (Teams) reported to the Board that the continuing situation with tree mitigation issues continues due to the holding of the IRA funding that was already set aside for these issues. She asked that the State Board write a letter of support on behalf of New Jersey farmers for reinstatement of the IRA funding that was slotted for tree removal, tree debris and planting. She reported that the problems that New Jersey farmers have had with the fallen dead ash trees along with the ash trees that are still standing are only becoming a bigger problem. She stated as farmers move into the fields in preparation for planting and is taking place, farmers are once again at risk, at any moment another dead tree could fall and not only injure the farmer but also cause extensive damage to the equipment.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

The College did not have a representative at the meeting. A written report was received.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

Deputy Director Lindsay Carragher reported that the Hackettstown USDA Service Center is relocating to Mt. Olive and that they have alerted their producers, making them aware of the change and noted that service may be interrupted briefly during the move. In addition, she reported that they will be wrapping up acreage reporting in the next month, so please make sure that if you report acreage to FSA and you are a participant in the non-insured crop disaster (NAP) please remember that the acreage reporting deadline for you is not necessarily the acreage reporting deadline, it is 15 days prior to the onset of harvest, so please keep that in mind as we move into planting and harvesting.

Sarah Lally reported on behalf of the Farm Service Agency:

Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage (ARCPLC)

The 2025 enrollment and election period for ARCPLC concluded on 4/15/2025. New Jersey has 3,197 enrolled contracts as of 4/17/2025, which is 106.6% of last year.

Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP)

Thus far, New Jersey FSA has approved 430 ECAP applications and paid \$4,981,860 to New Jersey farmers as of 4/17/2025.

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. To streamline and simplify the delivery of ECAP, FSA will begin sending pre-filled applications to producers who submitted acreage reports to FSA for 2024 eligible ECAP commodities soon after the signup period opens on March 19, 2025. Producers do not have to wait for their pre-filled ECAP application to apply and can contact their local office to request an application starting March 19, 2025.

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 August 15, 2025 deadline. 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.

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, with any questions.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

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

- A letter regarding state budget support is being sent to committees in both houses asking for Jersey Fresh, Ag and Natural Resources, Rutgers NJAES funding restoration of horse racing purses.
- NJREAL/DEP proposal: still seeking meeting with DEP Commissioner and staff, or the equivalent along with the State Board; running out of time (majority of Assembly Budget hearing focused on this).
- Heat Stress: continued meetings with Frank Minch and NJDA staff, working toward template for a workable standard.
- SADC: still awaiting Assembly final approval on FY2024 appropriation, much concern for overlap as next year's appropriation has already been approved by SADC and GSPT. New appraisal formula in effect since April 7; also, new opportunity for farm stewardship grants to improve economic viability of operations.
- We appreciate the continued coordination with the State Board Legislative and Budget Committees and NJDA staff.
- Oppose the termination of LFPFA and LFS federal funding.
- Major stakes for agriculture on tariffs, USDA layoffs and immigration.
- Small dairy/cheese processing: some operations still need resolution.

- Is there an update on the State Board/NJDA working with SADC to make up for loss of NRCS technical assistance? Assistance to CADBs with Policy 6 for RTF
- Well wishes to farmers as they begin their work in earnest during the springtime weather.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

Bruce Eklund, State Statistician, reported the following to the Board:

- The vegetable report was released and there were three New Jersey vegetables in the federal estimate.
- Coming up will be cranberries, blueberries and peaches on May 7.
- Hemp report released on April 7.
- March 31st, planting intention was 95,000 acres of soybeans and 70,000 acres of corn.
- Census of horticulture is still ongoing.
- Reportedly NASS lost about 40% of its employees due to the cut down of government positions, so everyone is working as hard as they can to continue to get the work done.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, reported the following:

- New Chief Audrey Bettencourt in place as of April 7 at which time she addressed the staff and talked about the farmer focused mission and agenda. She noted the need to modernize our service, including internet connectivity and the corresponding infrastructure that goes along with it; keep the farmers at the center and how can we help them; better quantify the conservation work that farmers are doing so that they can take that to regulatory agencies and then further into the marketplace.
- Sunday, April 27, 2025 marks the 90th anniversary of NRCS working in partnership with farmers, local and state government and other federal agencies to support resource conservation. Later this year, in September, we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Cape May Plant Material Center and would love to have any member of the Board join them for some of the special events that will take place in the Cape Atlantic Soil Conservation District.
- IRA Funds were mentioned earlier for FY25, we are still in a holding pattern while those funds remain under review and we hope to hear soon as to whether we will be able to move forward, she noted that is about \$15 million for New Jersey.
- Agency reorganization and reduction in force plan was submitted on April 14 as required by the Executive Order from the President and they are awaiting approval, and the Secretary has announced the department's downsizing plan will be out in the middle of May.

ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

Laura Tessieri reported to the Board that the most recent meeting of their Board was held last week at Ninety Acres, The Farm at Natirar in Peapack, where they had about 25 people in attendance and about 25 attending online through Teams. The Board currently has six of their seven members as they await the Governor to appoint the final member. There was a discussion on the federal funding freeze impacts including things like ash trees, cover cropping and soil health. There was a discussion on the LFPA and

LFS and how those are now cancelled as of October 2025 and how those are a really integral for New Jersey farmers; food pantries, food hubs and can the State of New Jersey keep that moving forward through the budget somehow into the future in the absence of the federal government doing that noting the importance of farm viability, nutrition and food safety. She reported that the next meetings are scheduled for September 16 and November 18.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported to the Board that from a marketing standpoint, the Jersey Fresh Campaign is underway with billboards, radio, and social media out there right now for asparagus and spring crops. The campaign will run through the summer and Labor Day and if there is any additional funding we'll be doing some fall crops and agritourism as well. He noted that Jeff Wolfe and Jersey Fresh posted the farm equipment safety video yesterday as well as Emergency Management and DOT, so far there have been 5000 plus hits on it, so the message is getting out there. He reported that the annual Eastern Produce Council dinner would be held on Tuesday, May 20 at Demarest Farms and invited the Board members to attend. In addition, he reported that the Division of Marketing and Development continues to plan for hosting the NAAMO Conference, July 20-24 in Cherry Hill. He noted that they have secured the Campbell's Vice President of branding to speak to the group of agricultural marketers from around the Country.

Chief of Staff Tameko Webster reported to the Board that Department staff continue to work on the strategic plan and that surveys had been sent to county boards, delegates, agricultural staff and community partners. Staff will be compiling the data and creating a report for the Board hopefully by the next meeting. She has been working with OFSA to identify potential grants and other philanthropic opportunities for integration of technology to better support agriculture. She attended the Middlesex County Board of Agriculture meeting which was well attended. She continues to work with staff and the Legislative Committee to schedule tours and planning. In addition, she reported that the Department would be kicking off their internship program, looking for a few great interns to come for the Department. She represented the Department at a meeting of Department Chief of Staffs' at a "Chat with the Chiefs". She continues to work on many other ongoing projects.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that they would be starting with LDD Treatments on May 5 in Cape May and Burlington counties. He noted that the northern counties would not be treated until closer to May 15 because of weather conditions. He reported that work continued at the positive *Phytophthora ramorum* quarantine nursery location in March. Department staff joined USDA APHIS to assist the nursery as they installed the solarization and monitoring materials that will be used to sterilize the contaminated soil. The initial temperatures below the cover were still too cold, staff will continue to monitor. He reported that final paperwork and numbers are approved for work to begin on the HVAC system. The big greenhouse is being demolished by Treasury so that work can begin.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, presented the Board with a new flyer on beekeeping as related to farmland assessment, as that is one of the most common questions that we have. In addition, he reported that he would be having training for assessors, which is mandatory once every three years. Finally, he noted that there would be a division grant for manure spreaders so that more producers would have the availability for their farms and surrounding producers.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported that she and staff members participated in a two-day virtual meeting that was presented by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the USDA. The meeting focused upon each of the programs that we administer, and the USDA Regional Office does continue to hold monthly program meetings with each of the programs that includes our staff as well as the other states in the region. In addition, she reported that our Summer EBT program received approval for their plan of operations and management (POM) for the Summer of 2025. We are in the process of finalizing the MOUs with the partnering agencies. Finally, she represented Secretary Wengryn and Chief of Staff Tameko Webster at a tour of the Campbell's Company that was organized by Assemblyman Spearman, Chairman of the Assembly Commerce Economic Development Agriculture Committee where they toured the pilot plant, heard about sustainability initiatives and their work with New Jersey farmers and supporting food security.

Board member Stephen Lee mentioned to Rose that the Board would like to include a Summer Feeding program stop as part of the upcoming legislative tours.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, reported that after several Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) detections in domestic poultry in NJ, outreach to stakeholders with the poultry industry and partner agencies was conducted. He reported that it looks like, across the nation, that the number of HPAI cases is going down. He reported that the Division is working with the Department of Health on testing milk for HPAI, and so far, all have been negative. Department staff will continue to monitor and work with the Department of Health on the daily surveillance. He noted that they have received some information from USDA regarding those employees that have been let go and other staffing issues that they are having. He stated that New Jersey Veterinary Service office would be losing a person and with that some responsibilities will fall to Department staff.

Matt Distaulo, SADC, reported on that the Statewide formula value is now active and offers are being made to landowners, several offers have already been accepted, and they anticipate that many more revised and improved values to be presented at upcoming SADC meetings. He noted that staff have held two virtual Q & A sessions with preservation partners. He noted that on April 7, the SADC participated in the Assembly Budget hearings. Numerous questions were provided ahead of time leading to a relatively modest number of questions at the hearing itself. On April 14, SADC made its 2025 Appropriations presentation to the GSPT. The request was unanimously approved. The SADC will meet tomorrow at 9:00 am. He reported that the funding for the Next Gen Program was reinstated.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Rick Gardner reported that he had attended the Warren County Board of Ag meeting last week where they decided to move their annual Legislative Dinner to September. He participated via Zoom with the Bergen County Board of Ag. Next week there will be an EPA meeting on PFAS, this situation is very bad. He noted that his call to Legislators regarding budget information went very well and staff seemed very receptive to our request for support.

Joel Viereck also commented that calls to the Legislative Offices about the Department's budget needs seemed to be receptive to the request for support and the request for better funding directly through the State. In addition, he attended Camden County Board of Ag where several topics were discussed,

and Senator Tiver was in attendance, and he spoke with him about the budget needs. Some of the concerns at that meeting were regarding the NJ REAL DEP and the Cata lawsuit. At the Salem County Board of Ag meeting, they stated their concerns regarding the NRCS staff concerns for their local office, many are resigning, most notably the irrigation specialist. It was noted that DEP is putting pressure on some of the landowners that have ponds that have dams in them. He reported that Vegetable Grower Vice President Zach Heiken brought up that certain items for the Convention had not been paid. Finally, he reported that he has been elected to serve on the Board of Farm Credit East. He thanked all that had supported him.

Assistant Secretary Atchison reported that the Convention items were being paid for the next day.

Steve Lee reported that he had attended the Atlantic County Board of Ag where many of the comments/questions were on NJ REAL and inspections on labor camps. He noted that there are challenges, and we need to work on our relationships and work on communication with lawmakers as to what labor camps really are. He reported that Farm Bureau had invited Assemblyman Spearman to one of their tours of labor camps and he was able to get a real understanding about what they are all about and he is taking this issue on. In addition, he reported that they had frost a week ago and we had to do a smudge pot authorization, which the Secretary did, it's a good process. In South Jersey there is a relatively large forest fire in Ocean County, approximately 12,000 that is roughly 35% contained, he noted that at this time last year we had 315 acres burned in New Jersey and we are currently at 16,572 acres. He stated that forest management is something the state absolutely must do. He attended the Ag Society Gala and it was a lovely event with good Board member representation.

David DeFrange also commented that with the ash tree situation, forest management is something that is really gaining concern, specifically in Hunterdon County. We are very concerned because we are starting to see a trend of going dry and arid already and we are seeing moisture levels down even on our nursery operation, 12-18 inches in the ground. He stated his concern that they are just getting into the fields to do our work, and it is already dry. He noted that Heat Stress continues to be a major concern, and we appreciate that the Department and the Farm Bureau are all working together to try to resolve that, but everyone is waiting for the roll out. In addition, PFAS in Hunterdon County continues to be a concern. He stated that many are wondering what is happening with the livestock processing facility. He noted that it might be helpful for a regional meeting (virtual) for discussions on the topic so that everyone has a general understanding of the potential project. On the nursery side, spring is here and even in North Jersey, we are running ahead of schedule and leaf push is coming out. He thanked the RCE Specialists that put on an IPM series for nursery and landscape individuals. He too attended the Ag Society Gala as well and noted that it was very well attended.

Kurt Alstede reported that it was very beneficial to have the burn permit for the one critical night, every farmer needs every tool they can have. He noted that everything was looking good so far. He reported that Route 80 roadwork continues to really plague North Jersey transportation, and the ripple effects are shared throughout. Most North Jersey county people try to avoid that mess. He hopes that the DOT and the Governor will come through on their promise to have two westbound lanes open by next Sunday and a couple of eastbound lanes open a couple weeks after that. He asked about the status of the tourism dollars that is earmarked for agriculture farms that has been held up for a while, do we have an update? He noted that in attending the Essex, Passaic and Morris County Board meetings the most consistent

theme is the challenge of regulatory compliance, whether it is dairy producers sharing their challenges, Ag Development Boards that don't want to hear problems or whether it is frustration with the SADC, it is important for the Board to recognize the importance of establishing a culture within the Department that seeks ways to say yes and to facilitate compliance for producers. Finally, he commented that the ash tree situation is very real.

Kurt Alstede, Chair of the Operations & Budget Committee, reported that the Committee did meet after our March meeting and prepared an action plan to advance the budget priorities to communicate with key partners. He is working with Farm Bureau on this and he attended the Assembly Budget hearing on April 9, it was a long meeting with most of the questions being directed to the DEP Commissioner regarding NJ REAL.

John Hart reported that he had attended the Mercer County Board of Agriculture meeting and reported that the agricultural community had lost a true leader in agriculture, former State Board President Steve Jany. He attended the Middlesex County Board of Ag as well as the Hopewell Township Municipal meeting and he is concerned about their rate of them taking all the prime lands for affordable housing. He reported that his new brewery was doing well although they are hoping to get some rain on their spring barley.

John Hart, Chair of the Livestock Committee, talked to Cherry Grove today, and they had a meeting last week and a surprise inspection by someone who was not qualified to do inspections, and the business continues to be delayed in producing. He stressed the need for the Department of Agriculture to take back control of the inspections because the Department of Health staff is not qualified. These producers keep being delayed and it is costing them money every day.

President Blew reported that Cumberland County did not meet as usual due to the Easter holiday, he attended the Cape May Board of Agriculture where the annual chicken barbecue was discussed. He noted that their 4-H program is flourishing as they have 30 brand new Clover Kids just from the winter sessions of classes that started. They have a new 4-H Director that is doing a fantastic job. He asked if there was any disaster recovery funding for people who lost backyard flocks? He also attended the Ag Society Gala and reported what a wonderful evening it was and encouraged all to attend next year. A great organization doing great things. He noted that the deadline for applications to the Ag Leadership Program was extended to May 1.

Dr. Patil reported that there is reimbursement depending on the number of birds that you have. He reported that one of the backyard flocks that tested positive decided to quarantine for 120 days so there was no reimbursement but for the other flock that tested positive, USDA reimbursed them for the birds that were euthanized.

President Blew commented that in the South Jersey area there is great concern about HPAI.

Steve Lee reported that the Grants Committee met earlier today to review the Underserved, Beginning and Military Veteran Farmer Mini-Grant Program. There were 35 applicants with a total of \$74,670.21 available. After review, the Committee awarded 18 applicants these monies. Some staff review still needs to be completed to be sure that the awards we are giving line up with what the USDA

requirements are. So, the Grant's Committee is asking for the authority to give staff direction in terms of final approval for these grants.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted to give the Grants Committee the authority to make the decision once the paperwork is done to award the \$74,670.21.

Kurt Alstede abstained from the vote.

In addition, he reported that the Specialty Crop Block Grant applications did go out. We have no promise of monies from the USDA, but the theory was that if we could get the application process started and when the monies are released, we will be ready to go to spend the money as quickly as we can.

He continued with the meeting of the Legislative Committee earlier that day to discuss a timeline for the Legislative tours that the Board would like to hold over the next few months. The first tour being planned for June 6 in Monmouth County; Camden County where we will visit a Summer Feeding Program, etc., planning is ongoing. He also reported on a meeting that was being scheduled to discuss the caucus meetings and the processes that are being followed.

President Blew stated that we need to draft a letter to send to USDA about the IRA funding but for the sake of getting it done feel like we could grant power to the Policy Committee to work with Jeff Beach to draft that language and get it sent out in a timely fashion.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board unanimously voted to allow the Policy Committee the authority to send the letter to the USDA Secretary and the new NRCS Chief Diana Morrison and FSA.

NEW BUSINESS

Commercial Fertilizer Values

There was discussion regarding the information provided for the Commercial Fertilizer Values and without some further information, the Board voted table the discussion until the next meeting.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted to table the discussion until the following month for clarity.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, May 28, 2025 beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

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 Stephen Lee, seconded by Kurt Alstede, the Board voted unanimously to go into Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of David DeFrange, seconded by John Hart, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph A. Atchison III