



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

March 26, 2025

(Wednesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on March 21, 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, Rick Gardner and Joel Viereck. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Wengryn; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC; Rachel DeFlumeri, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Tameko Webster, Kaitlynn Dixon, Alyssa Pitt, Christopher LaRegina, Robert Vivian and Jeff Wolfe, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Peter Furey, Executive Director, Ashley Kerr, Alfred Murray, Glen Van Olden, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Lindsay Carragher, Deputy Director, Sarah Lally, Farm Service Agency; Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, NRCS; Bruce Eklund, NASS; Dr. Dave Robinson, New Jersey State Climatologist, Rutgers University; Jasmine Moreano, Organic and Regenerative Farming Board; Pat Butch, Rutgers' Board of Managers; Maria Stewart, Gorgeous Goat Creamery; Jeff Burd, Mercer County Board of Agriculture; Paul Lawler, Cherry Grove Farm; Daniel Herr, Hunterdon County and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2025, regular meeting.

President Blew announced that the previous day marked Secretary Wengryn's first year in office and the Board wanted to celebrate with cake for all.

Secretary Wengryn commented that it has been a great first year and looks forward to the coming year.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Maria Stewart, Gorgeous Goat Creamery, Hunterdon County (on-farm dairy processing) was present to give the Board a brief update on the progress that has been made since she reported to the Board at their February 4 meeting in Atlantic City regarding the challenges that the on-farm dairy processors are experiencing with the NJ Department of Health for licensing and inspections. She reported that they had met with the Commissioner of Health on February 19 for a listening session along with NJDA Secretary Wengryn and Dan Wunderlich, Dairy Program, Division of Marketing & Development. There were five farms represented as part of the listening session. She noted that the listening session was well received by the Commissioner of Health, and she seemed very receptive to the challenges and in the last five weeks they have experienced some improvements in the reporting and conduct of the Department of Health.

Jeff Burd, President, Mercer County Board of Agriculture, read to the Board a letter from the Mercer County Board of Agriculture to the Department of Health Commission Kaitlan Baston noting for her how the Department of Health has stymied their operations since last November, first with an unprecedented embargo on all products they produce and further, with a prohibition against the operation of their pasteurization processing of dairy milk.

Daniel Herr, Hunterdon County, was on hand to report to the Board about S-740, sponsored by Senator Douglas Steinhardt and Senator Andrew Zwicker, which revises elements of offense of agricultural trespass, expands number and type of activities constituting agricultural trespass, and expands definition of "lands" susceptible to agricultural trespass. He reported that they have had problems with neighbors encroaching on their family farm, cutting down trees, etc. He noted that the problems have been increasing over the years as the density of housing around the farm has increased. He reported that they have recently called police to file a report, if the police do not see the trespassing themselves, that is all that they can do and, for the farmer, it is a very high burden of proof. Because of the problems, he has drafted provisions to the existing trespass statute and Senator Steinhardt was very clear with Legislative Services in the drafting of the new legislation that the bill had to be readable by an average person. He reported that the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture, as well as the CADB, have written letters to the legislators to support the legislation.

Paul Lawler, Cherry Grove Farm, reported that he was here to report back to the Board that, thankfully, the embargo had been lifted but that there was still more that needed to be done. He noted that working on the farm right now is extremely busy fixing things for the season as calves are being born and they are about to start making cheese. In addition, he reported that even though the embargo was lifted, there is still a need for significant reform and change. He reported to the Board much on the financial toll the embargo caused for him in costs for labor; legal fees, lost product, direct sales and holidays orders, the amount was staggering. He thanked the Department for their assistance. Secretary Wengryn commented that the Commissioner of Health has made a commitment to make this process get better.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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

- The new Salem County Extension Agent in Commercial Agricultural Production for Salem County, Raman will provide leadership in assessing local agricultural needs and implementing relevant educational programming and research in commercial agronomic crop production beginning April 1.
- It is hoped that the new Warren County Agent will be starting on July 1, and they are currently in the process of holding screening interviews for the Burlington County agent in general crop production with a preference for horticultural background. In addition, they are currently in the process of initiating searches for Atlantic and Bergen County while noting that the looming budget does not make it easy to make these replacements due to retirement. He also noted that he has been made aware of a few retirements that are coming and noted that it will be a challenging year.
- Regarding IPM, they have just brought on a successor to a retired vegetable IPM staff member who will be stationed in Monmouth County for the time being. Maria Kramer is currently being onboarded, and we have very high hopes for her.
- For PSEP, Pesticide Safety Education Program, Pat Hastings has retired and, unfortunately, they are not further along and therefore there is a gap in service but noted that they are advancing the job description, trying to restructure so the position can stand at a higher level and be a little more autonomous.
- NJALDP current class is in Portugal for their international trip and reported that he had received pictures and updates of where they are and what they are doing. Their graduation is currently scheduled for April 17. In addition, he reported that they are currently recruiting for Class 13, the deadline to apply is April 1.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

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

Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP)

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.

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.

Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage (ARCPLC)

The 2025 enrollment and election period for ARCPLC is ongoing and has a deadline of April 15, 2025.

Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC):

Enrollment for 2025 DMC starts January 29, 2025 and ends March 31, 2025.

DMC continues to offer protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer.

The DMC decision tool has been enhanced and was developed in partnership with representatives from the University of Minnesota and University of Wisconsin to help producers determine the level of coverage under a variety of conditions that will provide them with the strongest financial safety net. The decision tool can be found at: <https://dmc.dairymarkets.org/#/>

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture will be continuing the DMC premium and fee reimbursement program for 2025.

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, with any questions.

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.

Farm Loan Programs (FLP)

The Farm Service Agency offers loans to help farmers and ranchers get the financing they need to start, expand or maintain a family farm. Use the Loan Assistance Tool (<https://lat.fpac.usda.gov/>) to check your eligibility for FSA loans, discover FSA loan types, learn about FSA loan requirements, and walk through the easy-to-understand instructions when completing the forms.

Operating Loans can be used to purchase livestock, seed and equipment. It can also cover farm operating costs and family living expenses while a farm gets up and running.

Farm Ownership Loans can be used to purchase or expand a farm or ranch. This loan can help with paying closing costs, constructing or improving buildings on the farm, or help conserve and protect soil and water resources.

Microloans are a type of Operating or Farm Ownership Loan. They're designed to meet the needs of small and beginning farmers, or for non-traditional and specialty operations by easing some of the requirements and offering less paperwork

Youth Loans are a type of Operating Loan for young people between 10–20 years old who need assistance with an educational agricultural project. Typically, these youth are participating in 4-H clubs, FFA, or a similar organization.

Emergency Loans help farmers and ranchers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding, other natural disasters or losses.

The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to designate counties as disaster areas to make Emergency Loans available to producers suffering losses in those counties and in contiguous counties. To request a Secretarial Disaster Declaration, FSA must determine a 30 percent production loss of at least one crop in the county. EM loans are also available following a Presidential major disaster declaration, or an FSA Administrator's Physical Loss Notification (APLN) for livestock-related losses.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

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

- Farmland Assessment meetings continue to be held with the Governor's Office and interested legislators. Progress is being made.
- REAL/DEP proposal – still hoping to meet with DEP Commissioner and staff along with the NJDA and State Board.
- Heat Stress meeting was held with Frank Minch and other NJDA staff; looking forward to the next steps.
- SADC – still seeking Assembly concurrence on pending appropriation. Congratulations to Chuck Roohr as Executive Director.
- FY '26 budget proposal – must rally support to restore cuts Governor made to NJAES budget (\$4.25 million).
- Monitoring the immigration/seasonal worker activity.
- CATA lawsuit: arguments heard on state's motion to dismiss; ruling expected 4–6 weeks.
- Dairy/cheese processing meeting Wednesday with producers, many operations still need resolution.
- Ag Society Gala – NJFB former president Ryck Suydam will be honored along with Viereck Farms and Joni Elliott.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist, reported the following:

- February 20, USDA Secretary of Agriculture Rollins announced that NRCS could proceed with the IRA funds in the existing contracts, so farmers are receiving direct payments for existing equipment CSP and some other programs RCCP and ACEP which were good for our producers.
- March 14, approval was given that they could finish this fiscal year 25 cycle with applications ranking and pre-approvals with Farm Bill funds. She reported that the IRA funding for applications this year remains on pause. They have been able to move some of those over to their Farm Bill funds.
- As part of NRCS' report, they will demonstrate a new web application entitled "Soils Reference Map for Animal Disposal Areas in New Jersey". This web application was created by Edwin Muniz, USDA-NRCS-NJ State Soil Scientist as an additional source of information for our farmers.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

Bruce Eklund thanked the NJ Department of Agriculture, especially Joe Atchison and Frank Minch, for finding office space to house all the statisticians that have now been assigned to work in the office. He reported that on February 17 they released farms and land on farms surveys. In addition, at the end of March they will be working on the prospective plantings including corn and soybeans. On April 17 they will be releasing the national hunt survey. Finally, he reported that they are currently working on the ARMS Survey, which is an economic survey, really it is the Ag Viability as it shows the economic situation of farmers. He commented that it is the hardest survey to get a good response rate, but it is also one of the most important surveys they do.

ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD

Jasmine Moreano reported on behalf of the Organic and Regenerative Farming Board and noted that they would be having their next meeting on April 15 beginning at 4:00 pm at Ninety Acres, the Farm at Natirar where they will be reviewing their Organic and Regenerative Farmer survey results (more than 200 responses) and discuss the federal funding freeze impacts as well as participation strategies for board members with members of County Boards of Agriculture. Finally, she noted that the Ag Leadership Class had visited City Green as part of their northern NJ tour, and it was a great opportunity for them to see firsthand.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary Wengryn announced that he had excused Dr. Patil from today's meeting as he was in the process of writing his federal grant and has a filing deadline. In his absence, he noted that all the live bird markets in NJ are currently up and running and disease free. They have gone through their quarantine, cleansing and programmatic. There was one investigation of a backyard flock in Salem County, a small project, by the time they tested the chick birds and got back the next day, the rest of the birds had died so there was no need for euthanasia, just disposal. He noted that March has been a busy month, March 18 is National Ag Day, as well as NJ Horticulture Therapy week and National CACFP Week (Child Adult Care Program). He reported that we are currently in the middle of budget season and the

Department is scheduled for the Assembly on April 9 and the Senate is scheduled for April 29. Budget testimony is currently being drafted, Division Directors have been answering the initial questions that have been asked, and he would be speaking with the Governor's office in preparation for the April 9 Assembly hearing. He reported that the Department's new CFO, Tony Tarr, will be starting on April 21.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported that last year we spent a lot of time at meetings talking about the drought and weather conditions, water restrictions and where things were headed. With that, he invited Dr. Dave Robinson, Distinguished Professor and New Jersey State Climatologist, Rutgers University, to provide the Board with a brief update on the current situation and where we may potentially be going.

Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC, reported to the Board that the Statewide Formula Value is scheduled to be published on April 7 in the NJ Register, at which time they will be able to start making offers. He reported that they currently have 77 that had paused their applications earlier this year to wait to see what the formula number came out for them to see what dollar value that will be to close. It was commented that one of the biggest problems is that we have to preserve the farmer, because without farmers, there is no reason to save farmland. He reported that the SADC is committed to trying to help the farmers and a meeting was held with the preservation partners to review the new rule. He reported that they would be presenting to the SADC, the next day, its FY '25 appropriation recommendation to the Committee. In addition, he reported that the way that the current budget is drafted, our Next Gen program funding has been eliminated, and the Department will ask for that back during the budget process. Finally, he provided the Board members with a copy of the SADC FY '24 report for their information.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported to the Board that she along with Secretary Wengryn had celebrated National CACFP Week, where they visited one of their centers to highlight the importance of the program. While that was happening, the CACFP unit was also undergoing a Management Evaluation (ME) by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office from the USDA and will be receiving any recommendations or findings that they may have about the program. In addition, they were also able to visit one of the schools in Camden that featured a Farmers' Market for families and students in the area, noting that they were able to provide produce to 246 families, which covered 849 individuals. In addition, she reported that the Summer EBT is ramping up for the summer of '25 as they await USDA's support on their POM (Plan of Operations & Management) which outlines how the program will run for the season. Finally, she reported that we are in the final week of Ramadan waiver, she noted that the waiver is new with the USDA this year and they opted into the waiver to allow our schools to serve non congregate meals for those students who observe Ramadan, so that they can take the meals home with them.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that the Division is gearing up for Spring. He reported that they have received some federal monies for this year CAPS surveys, which will include a Cyst Nematode Survey, an Exotic Wood Borer and Bark Beetle survey and a Soybean Commodity Survey. They continue to work with municipalities to get them ready to go for their LDD treatments beginning May 1. Finally, he reported that Division staff are working with Treasury on work that needs to be done at the lab.

Nancy Wood reported on behalf of the Division of Marketing & Development that Assistant Secretary Atchison was on vacation and that nominations for the Outstanding Young Farmer are due later this week (March 29). She reported that they are currently accepting applications for the Specialty Crop Block Grants which are due April 10. To date, funds for that program have not yet been released but they are still requesting them in anticipation that when the funds are released, we can proceed with the applications. The Assistant Secretary will be attending the Food Export Conference in St. Louis the first week of April and then he will be travelling to the Canadian Produce Marketing Association trade show the second week in April. Staff are working with the new ad agency and this year's campaign will start with asparagus radio and billboards on April 14.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

John Hart reported that he opened the second on-farm brewery in Pennington, where they grow 80% of their product except for the hops. They are doing a lot of agritourism events that seem to be bringing the people in. He commented on the issue of legislation being drafted by legislators that have not talked to agriculture about what needs to be done. Steve Lee, Chair of the Legislative Committee reported that the Legislative Committee has been inviting the Farm Bureau to be part of Legislative Committee calls so that we can all be working towards the same goal.

David DeFrance commented that the weekly reports that they receive are very important for the Board members to review each week so they can see some of the most important things happening that week. He reported that Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture is moving forward to engage county officials and stakeholders to be part of their annual picnic, and he encouraged others to do the same, so they have that opportunity. He stated that they are trying to broaden their horizon within what their footprint is in the county.

Kurt Alstede reported that Route 80 was closed for repairs, and it has been causing horrible disruptions to all businesses. In addition, he reported that fruit growers love cold winters, it keeps things dormant longer and kill insects and disease vectors and was surprised at how tight everything still is, as much as it has been a more mild March, things have been very slow to come out of dormancy and given the unpredictability of spring weather the past few years he does not mind seeing things tight going into the first week of April, he noted that outside of something crazy happening, the crops are probably in a pretty good place this year in terms of how they are going to do. He reported that there is currently a major disruption in foreign labor visas. For those who are H2B users, in the appropriations bill there was language that allowed for the full release of about 68,000 extra visas in the H2B class. They need to be released as they have already been applied for, and it is causing a desperate situation. He noted that the delegates to our Convention have H2B language that supports visas being released and H2B exemptions for previous returning workers and suggested a letter to our congressional delegation in support of our delegate resolutions urging the release of the visas. Continuing, he reported that there were millions of dollars that are allocated through legislation to be used for and agritourism grant program, the monies are tied up in tourism and through the efforts of Secretary Wengryn and the Department, as well as the New Jersey Direct Marketers Association they sought to get these funds out and available to direct market farmers and it was just about to happen and there was a snag in the system. Taxes continue to be collected and included but none of the funds are available? What can be done? Secretary Wengryn noted that after their discussions, Travel & Tourism hopes to launch the

program with the new budget, they are currently working on the application process and appreciated the materials that we sent, and it is hoped that July 1 is when the program expects to be rolled out. DEP Real continues to create a lot of anxiety up north. In addition, he reported that several producers have discussed the caucus process and there needs to be some clarity on the role of caucus. Finally, he reported that there is a lot going on in the budget world right now and he will be scheduling a meeting so that the Committee can review with Secretary Wengryn the priorities that the Department would be asking for, like the animal tissue digester and the monies for Jersey Fresh.

Rick Gardner thanked Frank Minch for inviting the State Climatologist today. It was very informative, and he learned a lot listening to him. We need to keep the pressure on the Department of Health for producers like Maria and Paul. He was concerned that the same staff are still part of the Health Department, and they may not know exactly what they are doing so it is incumbent upon the Board to keep the pressure and get them the proper relief that they are due. He noted that the gestating cow legislation is outrageous, and he called his local Assemblyman and spoke with his Chief of Staff and told him that the bill should never see the light of day. The bill was introduced originally in 2019 but failed miserably and he noted that it was most likely the animal activists that are trying to get it done.

Joel Viereck reported that most of the County Boards are talking about the same issues, LFPA and Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) uncertainty, SADC funding and funding for Jersey Fresh which is so critical so that we can get away from using SCBG monies for that and the monies can go to other projects. In addition, DEP Real, farmland assessment issues and many of the topics already covered today. He attended the Salem County Board of Agriculture dinner where they recognized Zach and Andrea Heiken for their National Outstanding Young Farmer award, Buzby Farms was awarded the Neil Robson Farmers Against Hunger award and Brian Proch was recognized as the Vegetable Grower of the Year and Steve Williams was honored for his Distinguished Service to Agriculture. Sadly, he reported that Richard Pool, a dairy farmer in Gloucester County had passed away unexpectedly from an aggressive form of cancer. He noted that the sister and her fiancé are hoping to do as much as they can with the farm to keep it going.

Steve Lee reported that he would be attending the Ag Society Gala that coming Saturday evening and was looking forward to seeing those being honored. He attended the Atlantic County Board Legislative night on March 12 and there was good attendance by Legislators as well as members of the Camden County Board of Agriculture. He noted that Camden's Legislative Event will be held on April 17 beginning at 6:30 at Springdale Farms and strongly encouraged anyone interested should attend as Camden is working very hard to continue to generate interest within their Board and noted that Assemblyman Spearman has confirmed his attendance. At the Burlington County Board of Ag, they are still struggling to replace County Ag Agent Ray Samulis who has been out of that role for at least five years. He noted the challenge of getting some of these core positions filled, it is one of the biggest concerns that many have. He appreciated the State Climatologist being present today to talk with them and noted the importance of forestry and forest management to the point where he went to Trenton to listen to the Assembly Environment Committee meeting where they passed a resolution out of the Committee that encouraged the Highlands Council, Highlands Commission and the other land governance organizations to work on forestry plans in terms of thinning trees. He was there as a concerned landowner in the Pinelands to talk about that and noted that it is scary how much of a threat

there is. He noted that there will be a drone demonstration at the Rutgers Research facility at Lake Oswego on April 22.

Vice President Specca reported that she and a few other Board members had attended the FFA Advocacy & Leadership Day at TCNJ and noted that it was a great event, and it was so good to see so many blue corduroy jackets and very encouraging to see so many young people still getting involved. She also attended the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture dinner where there were close to 150 people in attendance, including four Legislators and many of their county commissioners. Peter Furey was honored with their Distinguished Service award. She noted that Monmouth County has been having a speaker come to their meetings and recently had Chuck Roohr there to speak about all things SADC and he did a terrific job. In addition, Randy Peck from Farm Bureau reminded all that in these uncertain times, with immigration issues that we need to be sure that our I9 forms are completed for our workers and to keep them on file for three years. Finally, she reported that she had attended the Ocean County Board of Agriculture meeting which met for the first time in a while, and they have really come a long way with attendance. She shared the budget information with the counties, and many had questions about the tissue digester. She reported that Ocean County has great support for the shellfish grading standards and that she has learned so much about fishing that she never knew.

President Blew reported that he had attended the Cape May County Board of Agriculture Industry night, and it was well attended with about 50 to 60 people and six or seven vendors. The meeting was very fast, and the only topic was the shellfish standards legislation, he noted that that topic is something that he has heard at several meetings that he has attended. In addition, he attended the Ag Society Board meeting last week and reported that they are making a push to increase their membership and noted that they have a few events coming up and they are working on doing an Agriculture night at the Somerset Patriots Ball Park. Their Gala will be held this coming weekend, and they are expecting a large crowd. He reported that he had missed the Cumberland County Board of Ag meeting but they held an Executive Organizational meeting where they discussed the problem of getting members to participate, he noted that this seems to be a problem with several Boards and it was suggested that before the Boards break for the summer, that we all check in with the counties that we visit, how are they doing financially, have they not been able to make a quorum, membership issues? How can we find ways to revitalize the county? He stated that he feels that during COVID many counties really struggled, and we really need to try to get back to where we were before.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Steve Lee, Chairman, Legislative & Grants Committee, stated that Farm Viability, means a strong Department and a strong working SADC, we have talked about several things that we can improve in terms of what we do when it comes to Farm Viability and a lot of that has to do with some of the things that we have talked about today. He stated that with the new Executive Director at the SADC, to look at our outreach, he has participated in many meetings as a municipal official and unless you are engaged in farming, a lot of people that get elected have no idea what in the world we are doing and as Kurt said earlier, that is the one place that you do not want to be if you've got to talk to someone about farming. In addition, he reported that Billy Connors did an outstanding job working with the Office of the Food Security Advocate in putting together an RFP for the \$9.9 million that was going to be awarded from the USDA for the LFPA program, we had an RFP structure that was put together that we are very proud of and

the USDA completely pulled the rug out from under us and terminated the program. He stated that he very disappointed because the staff did a really good job in terms of putting together a structure for administration of the grant program. The good news is that we are working directly with the Food Security Advocate in terms of looking at other funding sources and opportunities. He did note that this is getting the attention of not just the folks that work in the Legislature, but also our federal partners. There have been questions from our congressional representatives asking how many people this program touched. He noted that he is hopeful that we can work on finding some ways to be able to administer a particular program, we cannot walk away from this. Additionally, he noted that with the Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) the Committee decided to stay the course and ask for applications so that we will have them ready to go in case those funds are released by USDA. He reported that the Legislative Committee has been working on the Legislative Ag tours and those scheduled will be announced soon. We are working on a three-month schedule to give Legislators an opportunity to get on their calendar and we are trying to do these tours in conjunction with current hot topics.

Board member Kurt Alstede stated concern about the tenuous situation with NRCS and its interactions with SADC and whether we should have a committee take on this issue. He is very concerned about how disruptive the situation could be. The interactions between soil and water conservation plans and a host of exemptions that farmers have and if we lose the ability to get a plan prepared, what do we do? He stated that years ago, someone figured out that if we tie in exemptions to having a soil & water conservation plan prepared by the experts at USDA, it checks off the box for the Legislators who thought that there was no way that we can give a blanket exemption to agriculture. In addition, he commented that now there is a catalog of rule exemptions based on the Soil & Water Conservation Plan. If we lose the ability to access soil & water conservation plans for farms because they are not covered, producers will have to hire a private expert who is certified and follows the manual who can certify the work, but again, producers will have to pay for all the technical service providers needed, instead of NRCS. NJDA staff Frank Minch said that changes are currently being made to the cost share rule.

President Blew suggested that a working group of himself, Kurt Alstede, Dave DeFrango and Vice President Specca, Frank Minch, Chuck Roehr, NRCS, FSA and Farm Bureau.

NEW BUSINESS

President Blew asked the Board for their approval of the draft letter provided to the Board to State Treasurer Maher Mouio urging her to resume the practice of naming the executive director of the Garden State Trust (GSPT) as Treasury's representative to the State Agricultural Development Committee. (SADC).

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to approve the letter as written.

Board member Steve Lee stated that the annual Caucus meeting was held last week and there has been some dialogue with those involved who organized the meetings and with other Board members to firm up some of the processes we go through in terms of the caucus location, time and actual process. Board member Kurt Alstede provided a copy of a document that was established in 1996 by the State Agricultural Convention that are essentially the guidelines of the Caucus and the State Board. He stated

that while it is not the Department's responsibility to ensure that there is a structure in place for delegates at the Convention to be able to select members for the State Board as well as to have a regional dialogue with all the counties and really talk about the issues and the caucus meeting is an opportunity to be able to do that. But it is the responsibility of the Department/Board to create the structure for our delegates to be able to utilize. Board member Kurt Alstede commented that while the information in the document is still relevant, that maybe we just need to educate and create a more formal process. It is not the job of the Board to run the process, it is the Board's job to make sure the process is being followed and to provide the resources to facilitate that. The discussion continued and Board member Steve Lee asked Legal Specialist Chris LaRegina and Chief of Staff Tameko Webster review the document and report back and when available have the information sent to the County Boards of Agriculture for their reference.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Lisa Specca, a roll call vote indicated that the Board voted unanimously to have Chris LaRegina and Tameko Webster review the document for changes/suggestions to the process and report back so that going forward the information can be reviewed and used for guidance at Caucus meetings.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pat Butch, President of the Board of Managers reported to the Board that there was an issue with a Right to Farm ordinance, Policy 6 which is the SADC model Right to Farm Ordinance that says what the farmer is entitled to do, if they qualify for Right to Farm. This covers what permits you had to have, how much you had to pay to get them and what you could and couldn't do during the events. They are trying to rewrite the Right to Farm Act. They were determining whether the farm was a commercial farm or not, a municipality cannot do that, only the CADB or the SADC so it is getting cloudier. She reported that this issue has been going on for some time and she is here today to ask the State Board and the SADC and get the education out there to the farmers as to what this is all about and to the municipalities, the role they play in this process. She is hoping that this issue can be resolved quickly. It was suggested that municipality staff receive training on the role of agriculture.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Lisa Specca, seconded by Kurt Alstede, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 6:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward D. Wengryn