



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING

February 6, 2024

(Tuesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on January 31, 2024.

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 Philadelphia Inquirer and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Holly Sytsema called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 2:35 pm. Board members in attendance included President Holly Sytsema; Vice President Barney Hollinger, Kurt Alstede, Lisa Specca, Bob Blew, David DeFrange, John Hart and Stephen V. Lee, IV. The meeting was held at Harrah's Resort & Waterfront Conference Center, Atlantic City, NJ.

Also in attendance were Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison, Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, Dr. Amar Patil, Director and Sebastian Reist (TEAMS), Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Susan Payne, Executive Director and Chuck Roohr, Deputy Director, SADC; Christina Rasiewicz, Christopher LaRegina, Nathan Schatz (TEAMS), Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe and Jeff Beach, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Allen Carter, President, Peter Furey, Executive Director, Ashley Kerr, and Ben Casella, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Bob Andrzejczak, Farm Service Agency; Evan Madlinger and Erica Boyland, NRCS; Bruce Eklund, NASS; and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of David DeFrange, seconded by Stephen Lee, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the December 20, 2023, regular meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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

- Announced that the Delegates to the upcoming State Agricultural Convention would be receiving, tomorrow, a report from the Board of Managers on the progress made during fiscal year '23. In addition, he reported that Executive Dean Dr. Laura Lawson would be speaking to the Delegates on Thursday morning.
- Noted that retirements in the IPM (Integrated Pest Management) program are a concern and they are working to back-fill some of those vacancies. He noted that they did have a Tree Fruit IPM person that would be starting on March 1st. In addition, there have been retirements in the fruit and vegetable programs, and they are working to get those positions filled as well. He commented that they are doing everything that they can to be able to make an efficient investment because it is so critical for the industry. He noted that with respect to faculty, there is a roller coaster of retirements but that during his time with Extension, they have had 22 retirements and have hired back 22 but his hope was actually for every one person to leave to bring 1 ½ back so there is room to grow.
- In addition, he noted that they are working on a bear damage survey similar to the one that was done for deer damage. It is hoped that the information will be available soon.
- Searches are underway for staff in Warren, Salem and Essex counties.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA)

Bob Andrzejczak, State Executive Director, represented the Farm Service Agency and made the following report:

Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC)

DMC has been extended for 2024. County Offices will contact DMC producers when the enrollment period begins. Be on the lookout for more information.

Continuous CRP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) signup on January 12, 2024. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can apply to re-enroll beginning January 12, 2024, if their contracts will expire this year.

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by October 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

Additionally, producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire September 30, 2024, could offer acres for re-enrollment beginning January 12, 2024. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring September 30, 2024.

Emergency Relief Program 2022 (ERP 2022) Track 1 and Track 2

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) that provides about \$3.7 billion in financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters occurring in calendar year 2022. The NOFA is available here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-10-31/pdf/2023-24009.pdf>

ERP 2022 Track 1 will provide assistance to producers who were impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms, and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar year 2022 using existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data already submitted to FSA. Producers will be receiving letters and FSA-523 Applications if they received a 2022 Crop Insurance Indemnity or 2022 NAP Payment.

ERP 2022 Track 2 is a revenue-based certification program designed to assist producers who suffered a loss in revenue resulting from 2022 calendar year disaster events when compared with revenue in a benchmark year. The revenue-based track provides an alternative method to establish revenue in cases where there has been a change to operation capacity, circumstances where revenue does not reasonably reflect a normal year's revenue, or for crops that are used within the operation and do not generate revenue from the sale of the crop.

Please see <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/emergency-relief/index> or stop by your local service center for more information.

Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC)

Agricultural producers can now enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting December 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC- Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made. If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

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

- Looking forward to hearing the discussions over the resolutions for the next few days.
- Costs for labor this coming season have many very concerned about not having workers to pick their crops and for those that do, what will the cost be?

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

State Statistician Bruce Eklund made the following comments:

- Census results will be released on February 13, 2024. He noted that this information is released every five years and that it is very important that farmers, the public and agriculture advocates look at those numbers to see what's going on for expenditures, including labor costs. He noted that the ARM (Agriculture Resource Management) Survey is another source of labor data. In addition, they do four quarterly ag labor national surveys and those show a picture of the price of the labor and the farm numbers.
- He encouraged everybody on the Board and members of the audience not to hesitate to reach out to him to make sure you get full use of the information that you are looking for.
- Annual floriculture survey is underway.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

Evan Madlinger introduced Erica Boyland, the new Acting State Conservationist. She reported the following:

- Just came to New Jersey three weeks ago, she's getting used to the colder climate as she ifrom Arizona. She has been trying to get acquainted with New Jersey.
- FY24 applications are being reviewed and ranked. They are trying to be sure that they are spending every dollar that they receive. She noted that March 13, 2024, will be a listening session for CSP, with the deadline of March 29. In addition, the Notice of Funding will be coming out for the RCCP program.
- The District Conservationist in Woodstown will be retiring shortly, and they are currently working to backfill that position.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported to the Board that he had been asked to give remarks at the Annual NOFA Conference this past weekend and noted that attendance was excellent and that there was a very good discussion. He announced that the Department is unveiling the Jersey Native plants pilot program, and that guidelines and application forms are available at the Department's booth at the trade show. He thanked the Board for the fruit basket that was sent when his father passed recently. He looks forward to having a great convention.

Susan Payne, Executive Director, SADC, reported that the SADC continues to review the comments received to date on the Soil Protection Standards (SPS), the deadline for comments is February 23. She noted that the SPS SubCommittees of the SADC and the State Board are continuing discussions which have been positive. The next step after the public comment period closes would be for the full SADC to review all of the comments received. In addition, she reported on January 8, 2024, P.L. 2023, c. 233 was signed into law. This law enhances the NJDA and State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) Fencing Programs, which make cost-share funding available for the installation of wildlife fencing on farms and could include deer, bear or other wildlife fencing as determined by the NJDA or SADC. Farm owners, operators or lessees may receive up to 50 percent matching funds (\$50,000 maximum) if their application is approved. Farms enrolled in a 'permanent farmland preservation program', as defined in

SADC Policy P- 53, are eligible for the SADC program. The new law clarifies that all other farms may apply to the NJDA program. Applicants who lease or operate but do not own the farmland described in their application must receive authorization from the landowner. NJDA grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until all funds for the fiscal year are expended, and applicants must review a copy of the Standard Agreement before applying. SADC grants will similarly be awarded on a rolling basis until funding is exhausted. Additionally, she announced that the SADC has been conducting municipal outreach sessions throughout the State to help them know what information is needed and what approvals are necessary etc. To date, they have held one in South, Central and North Jersey, all have been received well and they have received some great feedback. She noted that they are working with appraisers to try and teach them some of the new technology that is being used to help make their job easier. Finally, she reported that P.L. 2023, c.245 became law on January 8, 2024. This law authorizes the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to adopt rules establishing a Statewide Farmland Preservation Formula ("Statewide Formula") as an alternative method for the valuation of farmland to be acquired for Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) purposes. The SADC has adopted an Interim Policy (P-56) for processing applications submitted for preservation in advance of the adoption of the Statewide Formula. She stated that the Committee encourages those interested in farmland preservation not to wait to apply for preservation until after the Statewide Formula is adopted. The continued submission of applications will enable eligibility reviews, approvals, and additional processing that will speed up the process to closing once the Statewide Formula is adopted. More information is available on the website.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, announced to the Board that HPAI has been taking a winter break because of the weather. He noted that that once the warmer weather returns, we will be watching very closely. He noted that the Division recently implemented an online permitting system for moving birds to the live bird marketing system, noting that Pennsylvania and New York send birds to our live bird markets, and this will help to identify any problems. He reported that the shortage of large-animal veterinarians continues to be a concern but noted that the Veterinary School that will be part of Rowan University. Finally, he reported that the Humane Standards Rule has been published in the NJ Register and urged farmers to make comments no later than April 5.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that the Apiarist received a several calls and emails regarding dead honeybee colonies. This is common in the winter months amongst beekeepers who did not prepare their colonies by controlling Varroa mite levels. As expected, there was a higher-than-normal winter loss observed by beekeepers, due to mismanagement of mite populations, winter temperatures, and seasonal precipitation. He noted that the NJDA Nursery Program maintains quarantine-compliance agreements with nine individual growers. These agreements have been renewed for the 2024 season and nursery staff will review these agreements with the growers for signature. There were 1,047 nursery inspections, 650 dealer inspections and 413 federal and domestic phytosanitary inspections conducted throughout 2023. In addition, he reported that an Aerial Treatment and Defoliation Mapping RFP was sent to eight aerial applicators for their prospective Bid submission for the 2024 season. Their bids are due for submission to the office by the 31st of January. T&E reviews of the 2024 municipal and state land treatment blocks were also sent to the NJDEP Natural Lands, NJDEP Historic Preservation as well as the USDA F&W Service to see if any T&E species may be impacted by the upcoming treatment operations beginning in May.

Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported that in the February edition of the Gardner News, the Division of Food & Nutrition was featured on the cover and there was an extensive article about all of the work that the Division does. She thanked Tom Castronovo of the Gardener News. In addition, she reported that in January, Governor Murphy signed the Working-Class Families Act that expands meal access to families who fall between 186 and 199% of the federal poverty level, the new legislation will expand that to 224% of the federal poverty level and will also include non-public schools. She noted that the original legislation was just for public schools, so Division staff will be working on that with the non-public schools as well as the expansion with the already participating schools for the new school year in September of 2024. Finally, she reported that Division staff has created an interactive map for the \$5 million LFS Grant (Local Foods for Schools) for the procurement of locally grown produce for schools. She noted the QR code on the bottom of the map to see what is available and where. She noted that the information will be available at the trade show.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported that the minimum wage issue continues to be a concern and they are continuing to work with the Department of Labor. He noted that the wildlife fencing program is ready to go and appreciates all of the help that SADC staff provided in helping to make it all work smoothly together. He noted that DEP had reached out to him and that they will be issuing consent orders for 10 blueberry growers who have not responded to several attempts to coordinate a visit fairly soon to hopefully work towards compliance. Finally, he asked Division staff member Sandra Howland to provide the Board with a brief overview of the New Jersey J ManureLink program:

- The New Jersey ManureLink website was designed to help connect those who have manure or compost with those looking to acquire manure or compost via an online tool. The connections made create the possibility of tapping into the natural source of organic fertilizer that is local and available from a New Jersey equine farm owner or a New Jersey farmer who is looking to find an outlet for their excess composted manure or homemade compost.
- The New Jersey ManureLink website was developed as a collaborative effort between the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources, Rutgers University Office of Research Analytics, and New Jersey Compost Council with support from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grant Award No. NR222B29XXXXG002. The website was designed by Rutgers University Office of Research Analytics.
- This project will put the power in the producers' hands by creating an open and accessible website interface facilitating coordination between livestock farms (manure generators) and composters or farms in need. The key objectives of New Jersey ManureLink are to recycle valuable nutrients, generate accessibility to organic materials, reduce animal waste stream in landfills, and protect/improve waterways adjacent to livestock/equine farmland.

The Board thanked Ms. Howland for the overview.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

John Hart reported that the ground has started to dry out and corn prices have been dropping.

David DeFrange reported that it was trade show/conference season, and he has been having conversations with growers in New Jersey and the consensus is SPS and the Invasives legislation are the

most talked about subjects. He reported that he was encouraged because growers are spending their time digesting the legislation and getting more involved. He attended the American Farm Bureau Convention in Utah and thought that the discussions covered many hot topics, it was a very good experience.

Kurt Alstede announced to the Board that former State Board Vice President Dan Farrand was gravely ill and had been hospitalized since January 2. Dan had a heart transplant several years ago and continued farming till just recently. He noted that the NJ Agricultural Society had already chosen to honor Dan with the President's Award for the family continuously farming for more than 250 years in Morris County, what an achievement! He attended the Hershey Show last week which is the premier growers show for the MidAtlantic and Northeast and commented that growers are looking forward to 2024 but sharing a lot of anxiety about the many issues in front of us. He noted that climate change continues to be a concern with the crazy weather that we have been having and making many growers a bit nervous. Additionally, he noted that SPS continues to be a constant topic of discussion as well as interest rates which have not increased most recently.

Stephen Lee reported that Burlington County Board of Agriculture held their annual meeting in January, Matt Stiles is the new President of the Board, unfortunately he was not able to attend as he was attending the swearing-in ceremony for our new Legislature. He noted that seven elected officials and several key staff members would be joining the Convention over the next two days. This is an excellent opportunity for the agricultural community to get to know them, talk to them about who we are and what we do, this is a great opportunity for us to shine as an industry and its critical that we develop relationships with these officials as some of them have not had any engagement whatsoever with agriculture, not everybody in New Jersey believes that agriculture is important like we do. He attended the Atlantic County Board of Agriculture meeting along with Farm Bureau President Allen Carter and there was some good dialogue and some good understanding of SPS, and he looks forward to discussion tomorrow with the delegates. He reported that the delegates will hear from Mark Dinglasan, Director, New Jersey Office of Food Security Advocate, he is working on food security and wants to understand agriculture and production agriculture and how we can work collectively together with his mission, which is essentially feeding New Jersey. He thanked the Department staff for their hard work and dedication to putting this annual Convention together.

Bob Blew reported to the Board that Salem County had not met but that Gloucester County did and there was a serious discussion by former Board Vice President Dr. Ernie Beier's concerns that with the new Veterinary School coming to Rowan University, we need to do more to keep more of the veterinary students as they graduate, here in the Garden State. Dr. Beier's concern is that many will come and get their degree and then leave the state for higher wages. This should be a very big concern to the agricultural industry.

Lisa Specca reported that Ocean County met on December 20 in person for the first time in several months and reported that they amended their bylaws to allow them to join with Ocean County Farm Bureau. She noted that there was concern about the impacts of offshore wind on avian, marine mammals and shellfish and the impacts on commercial fisherman's ability to sufficiently navigate the waters offshore. She reported that Monmouth County met during a snowstorm on January 16 and there was a very good turnout to hear the SADC presentation from Susan Payne and Chuck Roohr, they did an

excellent job detailing the soil protection rule summary which was well received and easily understood by the audience.

Vice President Barney Hollinger reported that Cape May did not meet and that the Cumberland County Board met and reorganized. Tim Eachus is now president.

President Holly Sytsema commented that she was excited to see some new faces in the crowd and looks forward to hearing what everyone has to bring to the table. She reported that Sussex County did not meet but that someone from the Department would be coming next month to discuss Organic Sustainable, Regenerative Agriculture. She noted that Bergen County was sending a letter to the SADC regarding SPS. She reported that many are doing work on the farm to get ready for next season and that they are still expecting snow this winter. She thanked everyone for attending and looks forward to the next few days!

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Budget Committee – Kurt Alstede reported that the Committee had received the budget and reviewed it with members of the Governor’s Office staff and noted that we did receive some additional funds to complete improvements to the Bug Lab and it is hoped that the new HVAC system will be in place in order to be more productive. It is also hoped to have some increased funds for Jersey Fresh.

Invasives Committee – Dave DeFrange reported that the absolute veto on the Invasives legislation was very unfortunate, but the Board’s Committee will address this moving forward and stay on top of it and keep the industry updated.

SPS Committee – Dave DeFrange reported that there has been a great deal of dialogue on this subject, and he thanked the SADC for all of the time and effort and for doing everything in their power to be sure that everyone understands. He noted the importance of getting this done so that other things can be done. He looks forward to the discussion with the delegates.

Legislative Committee – Dave DeFrange reported that there are a lot of new faces in the Legislature and the Committee is gearing up for the new legislative session. He stated that the Board’s Legislative tours have been very successful and gives the Board the opportunity to speak one on one with them, helping them to understand agriculture and looks forward to them continuing.

Personnel Committee – President Holly Sytsema commented that the Committee is waiting to hear from the Governor’s Office on the Secretary of Agriculture.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, March 27, 2024 beginning at 1:00 pm at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Barney Hollinger, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joseph A. Ott III", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture