

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

April 24, 2024

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff continues to assist commodity councils in marketing support including marketing assistance for New Jersey Sire Stakes (coordination of ads for industry publications) and for New Jersey blueberry, peach, apple, cranberry and potato councils. Planning for the Jersey Fresh season is almost complete and will focus on the 40 Years of Jersey Fresh.

Plant Shipment Tracing – Plant Industry Division's Nursery Program staff has been working with USDA APHIS PPQ to trace shipments of rhododendron and other known host plants that may be carrying *Phytophthora ramorum*. These plants originated from a California nursery that has since tested positive for this destructive disease. Over 50 plants were sold online to eight separate locations in New Jersey. Inspectors visited the residences that received these plants, collected samples, and submitted them to the approved diagnostic laboratory for testing. We are waiting for the test results.

FFA Career Development Events – More than 350 agricultural education students from 30 different chapters participated in spring Career Development Events (CDEs) on April 18 at Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. There were 29 industry and education representatives who served as event coordinators and judges. These events serve as an extension of the classroom and test students' competency in various areas of agriculture. Events included Agricultural Sales, Agricultural Technology and Mechanical Systems, Agronomy, Environmental & Natural Resources, Floriculture, Nursery/Landscape, and Veterinary Science. All seven first-place teams will have the opportunity to represent New Jersey at the National FFA Convention in October 2024.

USDA Food Purchases for Schools - The Food and Nutrition Division's Food Distribution staff is near completion of USDA Foods purchases for school year '24-25. The orders are determined by the submissions of a commodity selection worksheet from all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. The state entitlement for USDA Foods for next year is \$62,796,359. From this, \$16 million was diverted to the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Program for the delivery of fresh produce into the districts. An additional \$38,036,080 was used to place orders for both processed commodities and monthly bulk commodities. The remaining available balance will be spent in the coming months to finish out the orders.

Pathology Examinations and Testing – The Division of Animal Health's Diagnostic Pathology Laboratory completed a total of 176 tests and/or procedures for March 2024. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic), immunohistochemical, and parasitological preparation and evaluation, and these cases generated additional diagnostic tests for other laboratory sections (e.g., bacteriology, virology, and molecular). Results from these case submissions help to support practicing veterinarians (large, mixed, and small animals), private food and companion animal owners, New Jersey state agencies, racetracks, wildlife, zoos, and nonprofit animal facilities. Cases involved diagnostic testing for disease and/or cause of death diagnosis and routine and/or sporadic disease surveillance for large and small ruminants, companion animals, and exotic/zoo species; sudden death with no clinical symptoms; assessment of backyard and small flock health issues; large scale flock disease; law enforcement forensic investigation, and animals exhibiting neurologic symptoms.

Dairy Summit – Marketing and Development Division staff attended the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center (DBIC) Summit which included planning for the next 10 years in dairy, and looking at the projections of where the dairy industry in the Northeast may be, and what states can do to expand and sustain the industry at all levels. DBIC Grant opportunities are being reviewed and planning is underway to find the best opportunities for New Jersey producers and processors.

Solar Array Installation Standards – The new Standard for Solar Array Installation’s purpose is to address the unique conditions encountered in the installation of elevated impervious solar panels over a variety of land surfaces, especially former agricultural fields which are targeted because of the ease of construction. Little attention has been given to the potential for causing erosion from an elevated impervious surface over erodible land, the difficulty in establishing stabilizing vegetation and the long-term difficulties in reverting agricultural fields to crop production after the array has reached its end of life. The Standards will now go through the public review and comment process before final adoption and implementation.

Spotted Wing Drosophila Program – Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Lab staff has increased production of *Ganaspis brasiliensis*, a parasitoid wasp native to South Korea recently approved for release as a biological control agent of Spotted Wing Drosophila. This month more than 5,460 wasps were produced, and an 18th generation of wasps began emerging. Shipments of 250 wasps went to Michigan State University and 1,000 to Rutgers University. Lab staff received wasps in April 2022 from the USDA BIIRU in Newark, Del., to begin the colony. Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD), *Drosophila suzukii*, is an invasive fruit fly indigenous to Asia. They are currently found in most of the primary fruit growing regions of the United States.

New Jersey Mosquito Control Annual Meeting – A Division of Animal Health (DAH) staff veterinarian attended the New Jersey Mosquito Control Association’s 111th Annual Meeting, which was held in-person on March 20-22 at the Golden Nugget in Atlantic City. The veterinarian presented during the morning session on March 20. The presentation introduced the mission of the DAH and the daily activities and programs the DAH maintains for the well-being of agricultural animals in New Jersey. This was followed by a question-and-answer session, where questions about vector-borne diseases in agricultural animals were discussed.

Summer Food Service Program – The Food and Nutrition Division’s Summer Nutrition Program Specialists and Coordinators continue to review and approve FY 2024 applications. To date, 148 sponsors have been approved. As per the federal regulations, sponsors have until June 15 to apply. We continue to receive outreach calls for new sponsorship. One-on-one training will continue throughout the month.

Summer EBT Update – Food and Nutrition Division staff continues to collaborate with other departments and stakeholders on the launch of Summer EBT. The Division of Food and Nutrition’s Summer EBT webinar was conducted on Wednesday, April 17. In addition to providing live training for School Food Authorities, we were also available to answer their questions about the program.

Heat Stress Information – The Department continues to work with Rutgers and New Jersey Farm Bureau on updating fact sheets concerning heat stress and agriculture. The Center for Disease Control has a new heat stress tool where you can enter your zip code to find heat stress risk at your location at <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/Applications/HeatRisk/>. Also, the New Jersey Department of Health released a flyer on heat-related illnesses and protecting farm workers. It can be found at https://www.nj.gov/health/ceohs/public-health-tracking/climate-change/FactSheets/Protecting_Farmworkers.pdf.