

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
September 25, 2024

School Meals and Summer EBT – The month of September marked the start of the 2024-2025 school year, and operations are in full swing. With the increased number of students eligible for no-cost school meals and Summer EBT benefits, it is vital that families submit a School Meals and Summer EBT Application. This message was communicated to all School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs through multiple channels, including the School Nutrition Program's Unit "Back to School Updates and Reminders" Memo, the NJDA's School Nutrition Electronic Application and Reimbursement System (SNEARS) Announcements, and via NJ DOE's Broadcast Messages. Additionally, a School Meals and Summer EBT Application Outreach Toolkit, created in partnership between Hunger Free New Jersey and the NJ Office of the Food Security Advocate, was provided to districts as a resource to assist families in gaining access to free school meals, Summer EBT benefits, and additional resources. School Food Authorities were also reminded that the last day to upload any newly eligible SEBT students (as of 8/31/2024), and/or any address changes, was Friday, September 13, 2024. The Summer EBT portal in SNEARS will not allow any file uploads after that date.

Second Eastern Equine Encephalitis Case for 2024 – A Salem County geriatric gelding was identified as a confirmed case of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), a serious mosquito-borne illness in horses, in New Jersey. It was the second reported case of EEE for a New Jersey horse in 2024. Fever, front and rear ataxia, and inability to rise were among the reported clinical signs, and the unvaccinated pony was euthanized as a result of the disease on September 4, 2024. Press releases were provided to citizens and veterinarians in New Jersey to educate about this disease.

National Teach Ag Day – National Teach Ag Day took place on Thursday, September 19, 2024. The Day is designed to encourage others to teach school-based agricultural education and recognize the important role that agriculture teachers play in our schools and communities. The National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) launched the premiere of their first short documentary following the journey of pre-service agricultural education students as they completed their student teaching experiences. New Jersey Office of Food, Agriculture & Natural Resources Education staff attended a watch party at Rutgers University with students who might be interested in teaching agriculture. Support for Teaching Agriculture was made with social media posts on National Teach Ag Day.

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff are shipping and delivering point-of-purchase materials, writing articles, and continuing to publish and disseminate Jersey Fresh social media updates. The Jersey Fresh media campaign continues to be monitored weekly and fall placements are being scheduled. Upcoming trade shows to promote Jersey Fresh include the International Fresh Produce Association in Atlanta in October, and the New York Produce Show in December. Staff will also be attending a Food Export Conference in October as well to assure receipt of New Jersey funding as part of our agreement.

Mexican Bean Beetle Program – Plant Industry Division staff at the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory continue to monitor 50 soybean field locations in Central and Southern New Jersey for Mexican Bean Beetle. The breakdown of the monitoring fields are: seven in Cumberland, 16 in Salem, two in Gloucester, 10 in Burlington, four in Mercer, and 11 in Monmouth counties. Each of these fields were surveyed four times this month, for a total of 200 surveys. A total of 26 releases were conducted monthly by field staff in these monitored soybean fields, with each release containing 1,000 adult parasitoid wasps, resulting in 26,000 adult parasitoid wasps being released. The breakdown of these releases were: four in Cumberland, six in Salem, two in Gloucester, four in Burlington, three in Mercer, and seven in Monmouth Counties.

Emergency Preparedness Training – The Division of Animal Health Emergency Preparedness

Coordinator and (State Animal Response Team (SART) members participated in a New Jersey Department of Human Services Office of Emergency Management training event at Stockton University. The training brought together stakeholders in the planning and operations of a state evacuation shelter, including the American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), County Animal Response Teams (CART) and SART members, and local Office of Emergency Management coordinators. The exercise was composed of four different stations that the volunteers rotated through. One training session focused on the companion animal sheltering component of a shelter, supported by the NJDA. Attendees were educated on the fundamentals of emergency pet sheltering and were given an opportunity to handle SART equipment, such as kennels, carriers, and slip leashes.

Dairy and Livestock Processing – Marketing and Development Division staff continues to work with dairy and livestock processors to further define programs and monies available for each specific project. Work continues on the idea of expanding the innovation center to have poultry and dairy defined in the current Red Meat project. There is renewed interest in setting up pick-up routes for poultry to transport to a custom processor in the state. This idea will help solve travel distances of individual producers to the plant from all areas of the state.

Bee Colony Condition – The State Apiarist in the Plant Industry Division is reporting that overall bees are looking good. During Apiary inspections, the Apiarist has seen less European foulbrood (EFB) and small hive beetles (SHB) but have found more colonies with bald brood, which is likely due to the hotter temperatures this season. The honey flow has ended in most areas and beekeepers have observed more robbing of weaker colonies. The Apiarist is also continuing inspections of nuc and queen producers.

Summer Food Service Program Performance – The Community Food Bank of New Jersey has made progress in implementing the Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) in New Jersey. The program has been impactful for the many NJ producers, with hundreds of partners throughout the state receiving the product, and people enjoying fresh, local produce and protein items. To date, CFBNJ has contracted with 31 New Jersey producers, including 19 self-identified as socially disadvantaged and nine as beginner. These include two farm cooperatives and three other produce aggregators, which have greatly expanded the reach of the LFPA program. The outreach continues to onboard additional farmers and producers. As of July 2024, more than \$6.2 million has been spent with \$5.7 million going towards food purchases.

Right of Way Road Access Issue – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff answered an inquiry regarding purchasing a property in Monmouth County to create farmland, yet there is currently no road access. Division staff researched deeds to determine which property owner they would need to work with to obtain access to the right of way.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Outreach – With the migratory bird season underway, the Department posted a letter to poultry owners on the Division of Animal Health webpage as a reminder that migrating wild birds in the Atlantic flyway have the potential to carry Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. Poultry owners are urged to review their biosecurity practices and remain on alert for clinical signs of HPAI in their flock. Multi-species operations, particularly those with both poultry and ruminants on-site, are encouraged to mitigate areas in which the spread of disease between species may be at risk. Read the letter and more at <https://bit.ly/3D2Uw07>