

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
November 20, 2024

Drought Conditions Update – As drought conditions persist across the state, the NJDEP held a Virtual Public Hearing on Statewide Water Supply Drought Warning on Tuesday, November 12. Statewide dry conditions were discussed, as well as the rain-free forecast. Moving from a drought watch to drought warning means that the DEP Commissioner issues an order urging the public to voluntarily use water sparingly. The DEP may issue orders to purveyors to manage supplies in the most affected regions. Mandatory water use restrictions would only come under a drought emergency issued by the Governor. The U.S. Drought Monitor is used by federal agencies, such as the USDA-Farm Service Agency, to determine applicability of relief programs. For most programs, farms must be in an area designated as “D2” for 8 weeks, or any amount of time in D3. To provide input, producers and the public may submit conditions reporting to the UD Drought Monitor via the Condition Monitoring Observer Reports system (CMOR) at go.unl.edu/cmor_drought

Summer EBT – The Summer EBT and NJDA-IT units met with the New Jersey Office of Innovation (NJOOI) on October 28 and again on November 6 to review the latest deduplication outputs and adjust the algorithm to optimize results. This effort continues to be a work in progress, and the teams will reconvene to review the data once the model has been fine-tuned based on the NJDA's most recent recommendations. The NJOOI anticipates sharing a new model with the NJDA that will hopefully further refine first name and address comparisons, as well as address cases involving twins.

USDA Live Bird Market Continuing Education Training – A Division of Animal Health Animal Health Technician (AHT) attended the USDA Live Bird Market Continuing Education Training held at the University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. The first day of training included lectures regarding avian influenza (AI) programs, live bird market surveillance, records auditing, respiratory diseases of poultry, and response issues regarding the 2022 HPAI outbreak. Day 2 of the training was a field trip to live bird markets in San Francisco and Oakland. The AHT was able to view how live bird markets operate in other states and the specific state regulations that pertain to them. Biosecurity and emergency scenarios were also discussed. The final day of the training included a mix of lectures and a wet lab. During the wet lab, the attendee was able to get practical experience handling birds, collecting samples, euthanasia, and how to perform a necropsy on various poultry types. Lectures discussed the producer's perspectives during the 2022 HPAI outbreak, pathology of Virulent Newcastle Disease (vND), National Veterinary Services Laboratory updates on avian influenza, and cultural and religious awareness. The day ended with a scenario exercise that sharpened the participants' communication skills.

Dairy Processing – Marketing and Development Division staff continues to work with nine new or existing processors at various steps of grant applications or building projects. The Department provided technical support for a goat milk producer application for a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant to study roadblocks in developing goat milk production in NJ. Others have expressed an interest in alternative dairy production and Department staff is re-evaluating an alternative dairy development project, which would fall under an innovation center once established.

Thousands Cankers Disease Study – Plant Industry Division staff are assisting the NJDEP Forest Service with their Thousand Cankers Disease (TCD) study this year. This disease is detrimental to walnut species and could impact a component of our forest lands. The study is designed to detect the presence or absence of the known vector for TCD, the walnut twig beetle; *Pityophthorus juglandis*. The NJDEP Forest Service set Lindgren Funnel traps on walnut trees for six weeks in May-June 2024 at five locations. This period, trap catches were collected weekly. NJDA Entomologists have already screened these trap catches for *Pityophthorus* species, they all were all found negative for the walnut twig beetle. The bi-catch from these traps is now also being screened to help determine the present population of bark beetles and any prospective new species to the region.

International Avian Influenza and One Health Summit – A Division of Animal Health staff veterinarian attended the Second International Avian Influenza and One Health Emerging Issues Summit, which was held virtually and in-person from September 30 to October 3, 2024, at the University of Arkansas. Attendees from 55 countries attended the Summit to view presentations and participate in workshops that deepen our understanding of the intricate relationships between avian influenza and the broader One Health Framework. Some highlighted presentations of interest were lessons learned from the outbreak of avian influenza in Texas dairy cattle and a retrospective on one year of vaccinating ducks in France for HPAI. The Summit was excellent in representing the state of avian influenza internationally and fostering collaboration that may lead to actional solutions worldwide.

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff attended the International Fresh Produce Association in Atlanta at the end of October and will be at the New York Produce Show in December. The Apple Council Fall social campaign and trivia contest, and other Fall social media efforts have wrapped up. Staff continues to work with OIT and a vendor to finalize the FindJerseyFresh.com website. There have been some technical glitches that continue to be resolved weekly. Division staff are shipping and delivering point-of-purchase materials, writing articles and continuing to publish and disseminate Jersey Fresh social media updates. Staff is also finalizing the Consumer Awareness Study bidding process since the State is currently without an ad agency contract.

Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory Tour – PABIL staff gave a laboratory tour to the Alonzo F. Bonsal Preserve group, a non-profit organization associated with preservation of the Bonsal Wildlife Preserve in Montclair, N.J. They were most interested in biocontrol of invasive knotweeds and provided coordinates for a stand of Giant knotweed on their preserve. Only Japanese and Bohemian knotweeds have been found during the last 10 years of statewide knotweed surveys.

Farm to School Workshop – The Farm to School team hosted a Farm to School professional development workshop at the Rutgers Cranberry and Blueberry Research Center. Participants included educators, food service directors, and community members. The professional development included a morning session on Farm to School with hands-on learning, a visit to the cranberry bog for the harvesting of cranberries, and a working lunch for project planning. The participants worked in teams to develop a plan to implement their Farm to School project in their community, projects included starting a school garden, hosting a school-wide farm festival, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program implementation using Jersey Fresh, and tastings in the cafeteria in collaboration with cafeteria/education.

Solid Waste Recycling Exemption – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff reached out to a landowner in Monmouth County to further discuss their application for solid waste recycling exemptions so that they can receive woody material to create woodchips on a farm that they can use as a soil amendment on their crop-able acreage. Furthermore, the farm has engaged in clearing activities and the sale of firewood from their farm stand. Staff discussed all the necessary requirements, regulations, and exemptions the landowner must meet to be in compliance with these activities.

Contagious Equine Metritis Program – Earlier this month, the NJDA released a call for applications for a new CEM quarantine facility in the state. The official call for proposals was posted as a legal notice in three newspapers of general circulation as well as on the NJDA website. Individuals who had previously expressed interest in the application of a CEM facility were directly alerted of the announcement. The application period will remain open until January 3, 2025, after which an extensive evaluation and inspection process will commence to identify if any applicants meet the state and federal standards to become a licensed CEM quarantine facility. A newly created CEM page is now live on the NJDA DAH website (Department of Agriculture Contagious Equine Metritis) in which information on the application process is available.