

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
December 18, 2024

USDA Foods Conference – The annual USDA Foods Conference, hosted by the Food and Nutrition Division's Food Distribution Unit was held December 5 at the New Jersey Exposition and Conference Center. This year more than 400 attendees participated in the Division's training and exhibit. The exhibit showcased 45 state-approved processors offering healthy meal options for the school lunch and breakfast programs, focusing on the 2025-2026 school year. Also, 55 students along with their chaperones from six school districts were in attendance. After an educational session, students sampled various food options at the exhibit and completed a detailed survey on their experience, including their favorites and any items they did not enjoy. The collected feedback was shared with processors, school districts, and food service operators to help guide school lunch programs toward a more demand-driven approach based on student preferences. Students accessed a web-based survey by scanning a QR code.

Jersey Fresh – Secretary Wengryn joined the Marketing and Development Division Director and staff at the New York Produce Show on December 11 to promote Jersey Fresh products to potential food buyers. Marketing and Development Division staff also continue 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. However, all registered users have been contacted to review and update their information and staff is working to update undeliverable email addresses.

Farmland Assessment Online Application Process – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff participated in a Farmland Assessment Teams meeting to discuss moving forward with creating an online portal for the Farmland Assessment paperwork that is submitted annually to tax assessors and the NJ Forest Service when applicable. Attendees of the meeting included staff from the Governor's Office, NJ Division of Taxation, NJ Forest Service, and National Agricultural Statistics Service New Jersey Field Office. Tyler Technologies Inc. has been selected to create the online platform. The goal is to have a beta test website in the spring of 2025.

Emergency Preparedness Response Preparation – In preparation for potential livestock evacuations as a response to a natural or technical disaster, the Division of Animal Health has maintained information on facilities throughout the state that can accommodate housing livestock. The animal emergency preparedness coordinator has identified additions and deletions to the Department's current database of such facilities. Additionally, details on each facility have been updated, including the stall capacity, special premises features and capabilities, and primary points of contact for management of the premises. With these updates, the county coordinators, County Animal Response Team directors, and state ESF#11 staff will have accurate information on the local capabilities of livestock emergency sheltering, which is critical in times of natural disasters.

Lymantria Dispar Dispar (LDD – formerly known as Gypsy Moth) Treatment Plan – A total of 25 municipalities requested ground egg mass surveys be conducted during the fall season to determine if treatments would be necessary next spring for Lymantria Dispar Dispar (LDD – formerly Gypsy Moth). All requested surveys were completed. From the surveys, over 24,882 acres of municipal and 1,266 acres of state lands have been proposed for single and double applications of Btk for the spring of 2025 in Burlington, Cape May, Morris, Passaic and Sussex counties. Of this number, two municipalities in Sussex County declined participation in the Program reducing the municipal acreage to 14,215 and state land treatments to 596 for the spring of 2025. A public LDD Scoping Session is scheduled for the PHEAL auditorium on January 9, 2025, and regional meetings are planned with the 12 municipalities that have agreed to participate in the 2025 aerial suppression program on Jan. 13-14.

Summer EBT – The Food and Nutrition Division's Summer EBT team has been working to close-out Summer 2024 benefit issuance before starting planning for the 2025 Summer EBT program. The Summer EBT and NJDA-IT units continued their collaboration with the New Jersey Office of Innovation (NJOOI) to

advance the deduplication outputs and algorithm fine-tuning to optimize results. The NJDA is pleased to report that the final deduplication process is nearly complete for children aged 6-16 receiving SNAP, TANF, Foster Care, or Medicaid benefits, who attend non-participating schools. After extensive refinement and comprehensive review, a cut-off percentage has been finalized for each agency's match file, and a detailed timeline outlining the remaining steps required over the next two weeks from each agency (NJDA, NJOOI, and Department of Human Services), was provided to all parties on Friday, December 6 in order for Summer EBT cards to be issued to the last cohort of beneficiaries before the end of the year. The Team is pleased to report that the amendment to the Summer EBT Data Access Agreement with NJOOI for additional data usage allowance via USPS Addresses 3.0 API has been finalized and signed by all agencies. This additional data check will ensure that deduplicated students' address information is valid, before sending a Summer EBT card in the mail.

FFA Teach Ag Event – The Agricultural and Natural Resources Division's Office of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Education hosted its annual Teach Agriculture Recruitment Event at the Cook Student Center at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University on December 14. The event is made possible as the result of the State Teach Agriculture Results (STAR) Program. Forty-one high school and collegiate students were registered for the event. The day included ag teacher round table discussions, a recruitment workshop, a panel discussion of college students majoring in agricultural education, highlights of attending Rutgers University and Delaware Valley University for agricultural education, tips for a successful college experience and a tour of the Cook campus. Fifteen guests and presenters aided in making the day a success. There is an expected need for several new agriculture teachers within the next few years due to retirement and attrition

Avian Influenza Testing for Poultry – During November, Division of Animal Health technicians (AHTs) conducted unannounced inspections at 28 registered NJ live bird markets and sampled poultry from 11 markets for avian influenza. Additional activities included the quarterly closure of 15 live bird markets, which consists of cleaning and disinfecting the entire market, followed by at least 24 hours of "down time." Following the "down time," environmental samples are taken for testing. Division staff also inspected one poultry distributor and tested 43 backyard flocks for avian influenza.

Spotted Lanternfly Program – Plant Industry Division and USDA staff are working to reduce spotted lanternfly (SLF) populations at high priority locations such as seaports, airports, commuter lots and high-volume shipping operations to slow the spread of this pest. Properties where permission for treatment is secured need to be assessed for the presence of the tree of heaven and during this reporting period six properties were assessed. In addition to treatments, this project also has a trapping component. Although trapping has concluded for the season, the traps still must be taken down. This month 115 traps were taken down. Population control of spotted lanternfly in the winter primarily consists of scraping and crushing egg masses. This month 14,379 egg masses were destroyed. In addition, sometimes intact egg masses are collected for use in scientific research. This month 501 egg masses were collected and delivered to the Philip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory.

Livestock Processing – The North Jersey Processing Center has been working on alternative funding from groups that fund nonprofits. NJDA Marketing and Development Division staff supplied support to the group as it works to secure land for the site. A site committee has been formed to complete the steps of securing the property and prepare it for building starting in 2025. The project continues to move forward slowly with hopes for final approvals from the county for the land on which the plant will be built to be coming soon.