

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

April 23, 2025

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Awareness – After several Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) detections in domestic poultry in New Jersey, outreach to stakeholders within the poultry industry and partner agencies was conducted. Direct messaging distributed to backyard flock owners provided HPAI disease updates, on-site wild bird mitigation recommendations, and a reminder to report illness or increased flock mortality. A Division of Animal Health (DAH) veterinarian presented the role of the Division in the regulation and testing of Avian Influenza in New Jersey poultry, particularly within the live bird marketing system, at the Middlesex County Office of Health Services' Health and Safety Training event. The DAH Emergency Preparedness Coordinator reported on the status of Avian Influenza in New Jersey and the response to HPAI detections during the Infrastructure Advisory Committee meeting. The Emergency Preparedness Coordinator also organized and oversaw the logistics and detailed plans for the depopulation and disposal tasks in response to HPAI detections in domestic poultry in Atlantic, Hudson, and Mercer counties.

Nursery Inspection Program – A representative of the Plant Industry Division Nursery Inspection Program attended a regional meeting of regulatory nursery inspection agencies, Eastern Chapter Horticultural Inspection Society (HIS) at the end of March. This was the 50th Annual Meeting of the HIS held in Dewey Beach, Del. This meeting serves to review and collaborate with member states and federal counterparts on horticultural trade and invasive species control strategies and issues. Among this year's topics discussed were updates on several invasive species of insects, Boxtree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*), *Thrips parvispinus* and Red Imported Fire Ant (*Solenopsis invicta*). Other topics included a panel discussion on invasive plant laws in Delaware, Maryland, Maine and Pennsylvania, using native alternatives to invasive ornamental plants in the landscape as well as issues with illegal plant imports and interstate sales from unlicensed nurseries. Presentations on Beech Leaf Disease, plant pathology diagnostics and an ornamental pest talk about scale insects common on nursery stock were also given.

School Nutrition – Division of Food and Nutrition Specialists have begun the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) process by evaluating school district data to identify potential CEP participants. This includes collecting site eligibility information, notifying all eligible or near-eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs), and providing ongoing technical assistance to schools considering this program. A CEP Informational Video has been created, and staff are developing another training session for SFAs applying to CEP, scheduled for early May. The implementation of DC Medicaid has significantly increased the number of CEP-eligible schools, and the School Nutrition Program Unit anticipates a record number of SFA participants in CEP for the 2025-2026 school year.

FFA Spring Career Development Event – More than 250 agricultural education students from 26 different chapters participated in Spring Career Development Events (CDEs) on April 10 at the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. Thirty-six industry and education representatives served as event coordinators and judges. These events serve as an extension of the classroom and test students' competency in various areas of agriculture. Allentown FFA placed first in Agricultural Sales and Agricultural Technology & Mechanical Systems, Union County FFA placed 1st in Agronomy, Newton FFA placed 1st in Environmental & Natural Resources, Monmouth County FFA placed 1st in Nursery/Landscape, and Hunterdon County Academies placed 1st in Veterinary Science. All six first-place teams will have the opportunity to represent New Jersey at the National FFA Convention in October.

Jersey Fresh – The Marketing and Development Division Director and staff continue to meet with the new advertising agency and develop plans for the coming season. Staff continues to work with OIT and a vendor to tweak the FindJerseyFresh.com website. Technical issues continue to be resolved weekly as the website is fully functional. The Division Director and staff attended the Food Export conference in St. Louis and the Canadian Produce Marketing Association trade show in Montreal.

Summer EBT – The Food and Nutrition Division Summer EBT Unit conducted a live, comprehensive webinar on the Summer EBT 2025 File Upload Process on Wednesday, April 9. School officials and all school personnel directly responsible for student demographic, meal eligibility, and/or enrollment information were strongly encouraged to attend the training. The training ran for approximately 2.5 hours, with more than half of that time dedicated to participating School Food Authority (SFA) questions. Attendance was high, with 466 school district personnel registered, and just under 400 participants logged in. The recording and slides have been posted on the School Nutrition Electronic Application Reimbursement System (SNEARS) resources page. The Summer EBT Team received positive feedback in the webinar chat and through follow-up emails. Several SFAs have already reached out to the team, eager to upload their data and ensure that they follow the correct process - some even attempted to upload data ahead of schedule.

Manure Link Field Day – The Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff, along with staff from the New Jersey Composting Council, have coordinated and scheduled the NJ ManureLink Field Day for May 27 at White Tail Farm in Lambertville. The coordination included a site visit to the farm. So far, the NJ ManureLink website (<https://njmanurelink.rutgers.edu/>) has reached 138 registered users. There are currently 22 manure ads and two compost ads.

Junior Animal Health Science Symposium - Two Division of Animal Health (DAH) staff veterinarians and one DAH animal health technician attended the 2025 Rutgers Junior Animal Science Symposium, which took place on March 29 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. The DAH hosted two sessions running a game-show-style question session where students could put their poultry knowledge to the test. Topics ranged from biosecurity and poultry diseases to poultry husbandry and breed characteristics. The attendees varied from young children new to learning about poultry to seasoned 4-H students participating in the upcoming 4-H Avian Bowl.

Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey – This year's Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) surveys will include a Cyst Nematode Survey, an Exotic Wood Borer and Bark Beetle Survey and a Soybean Commodity Survey. The nematode survey will be conducted at potato farms while the Exotic Wood Borer survey will be conducted at a variety of locations including forests, parks and even urban industrial areas. The soybean commodity survey will be conducted at soybean farms. The target pests for the Cyst Nematode Survey are the pale cyst nematode, *Globodera pallida*, and the golden nematode, *Globodera rostochiensis*. The target pests for the Exotic Wood Borer and Bark Beetle survey are the large pine weevil, *Hylobius abietis*, the six toothed bark beetle, *Ips sexdentatus*, the European spruce bark beetle, *Ips typographus*, the black fir sawyer, *Monochamus urussovii*, and the oak ambrosia beetle, *Platypus quercivorus*. Targets for the Soybean Commodity survey are the silver-y moth, *Autographa gamma*, the golden twin spot moth, *Chrysodeixis chalcites*, the bud borer, *Crociosema aporema*, the old-world bollworm, *Helicoverpa armigera*, and the cotton cutworm, *Spodoptera litura*. All insect trap catches will be delivered to the Rutgers Plant Diagnostic Lab or the NJDA Plant Laboratory for screening.

Dairy Processing – Work continues with 10 new or existing dairy processors at various steps of grant applications or building projects. One new project is going through initial inspection, and they had hoped to be processing by the end of December. Two new operations have inquired about steps to establish on-farm cow milk processing. One new, small ruminant is also requesting technical support. 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.