

Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
March 25, 2020

While almost all New Jersey Department of Agriculture employees are working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the department is functioning as close to normal as possible while performing its regular business. We have placed COVID-19 information related to agriculture on our website at nj.gov/agriculture and will continue to update that site with more details as they become available.

Horticultural Exposition – In order to overcome challenges presented by COVID-19, the office of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources held its first virtual Horticultural Exposition this year. There were more than 400 horticultural and arrangement entries from 17 schools. Teachers uploaded photos of students' projects to an online form. Staff organized the entries using a wiki page for judges to access. Judges are working remotely to evaluate entries and provide valuable feedback to students. Keep an eye on Facebook for the posting of results and pictures of the entries.

Emergency Planning and Preparedness – The animal emergency preparedness coordinator, provided the County Animal Response Teams (CARTs) accurate information about the relationship between the Coronavirus and pets. After inquiries from CART leaders that coincided with a heightened national concern about the global spread of the virus, it was appropriate to disseminate the universal understanding amongst health officials regarding coronavirus and pets. The CART leaders were supplied resource material from the CDC and WHO, which they could then provide to their team members. Additionally, the Division has been fielding questions from producers regarding preparedness in a health emergency.

Hemp Program – The hemp program is in the process of finalizing laboratory equipment purchases. To date, a total of 40 hemp licenses have been issued to applicants for the upcoming growing season. Of this number issued, there are 27 growers, eight processors, and five handlers. The movement to hire the final position for the hemp program has been temporarily frozen due to the COVID-19 situation.

Marketing and Development – The month of March was highlighted by agricultural economic development and marketing work that should benefit New Jersey growers. The Department was represented at the annual North Jersey Fruit and Central Jersey Vegetable meetings sponsored by Rutgers Cooperative Extension. The division participated in a third meeting with representatives of the New Jersey Department of Health and influential New Jersey direct marketers related to the Minimum Food Safety Requirements for Product Sales at Farm Markets and Community Farm Markets. Staff responded to a handful of requests from individuals that were interested in developing small scale growing operations. We provided guidance to several local government and municipal organizations that are working on developing community farmers markets.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – TEFAP foods were allocated for March from Safeway Cold Storage. A total of 404,059 cases and 9,985,248 pounds of TEFAP Foods were available for distribution to six Emergency Feeding Organizations (EFOs) from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) suppliers. At the time of this report, a total of 58,569 cases and 1,016,070 pounds of TEFAP foods were scheduled for direct shipment to New Jersey for several EFOs from USDA vendors during the month.

Spotted Lanternfly – There are 137,128 properties in the Spotted Lanternfly Survey and Treatment Project encompassing 432,931 acres. Of this number, trees on 12,118 parcels (16,512 acres) have been assessed and do not need treatments, while trees on 677 parcels (11,395 acres) have been added for treatment this coming spring.

Live Bird Marketing System – During February, animal health technicians conducted unannounced inspections on 28 registered New Jersey live bird markets and sampled 14 of these markets for avian influenza by sampling poultry located in the markets. Additional activities in February included: The quarterly closure of seven live bird markets. Quarterly closures consist of cleaning and disinfecting the entire market followed by a minimum of 24 hours of “down-time.” Following the “down-time,” environmental samples are collected at the market for testing; the inspection of one poultry distributor. Records were reviewed as well as ensuring compliance with 2:9-4.2(c), reviewing vehicle cleaning and disinfection logbooks; avian influenza testing of four poultry distributors. This includes any poultry being delivered to live bird markets at the time of inspection; avian influenza testing of nine backyard flocks throughout New Jersey.

Summer Food Service Program – The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Coordinator and Legal Specialist are working on the 2020 New Jersey State Health Department Inspection Services contract. The NJDA SFSP contracts with the State Health Department allow complete on-site meal service health and sanitation checks of summer sites during the months of June, July, August and possibly September. Applications for new sponsors are due March 25, and applications for existing sponsors are due March 27.

State Soil Conservation Committee – The SSCC approved the consolidation of the Sussex and Warren Soil Conservation Districts and appointed a new Board of Supervisors. It is anticipated that the new district will become effective July 1st. At this time, all operations continue to be handled through the Warren office in Hackettstown.

Dairy Dealer Status Update – The Dairy Farmers Association has entered into a contract agreement to purchase most of the Dean Foods assets. The Garelick plant in New Jersey and the Tuscan Lansdale/Lehigh plant are among the list of plants announced in the agreement. Other plants of the Dean Foods group that ship into New Jersey were also on the list. To date, normal production has been taking place at all local Dean Foods Plants and there has not been any disruption in service to New Jersey customers. Dean Foods has compiled a list of all licenses they hold in New Jersey and the Department has informed them of the procedures required to grant a new license to any new entity that purchases the assets of the company. Dean Foods was informed of the procedure of changing the bonding of milk from one entity to another and the time frame of holding the old bond per regulation.