

**Assistant Secretary's Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture**  
**December 20, 2023**

**USDA Foods Conference** – The Food and Nutrition Division's Food Distribution Unit organized and prepared the program for the USDA Foods Conference on December 12. The attendance for the conference was approximately 450 people from the school food authorities, administrators, and students from schools around the State who participated and ranked the foods they sampled. Forty-four processors were on hand to highlight their available foods for the 2024-2025 school year.

**FindJerseyFresh.com update** – Marketing and Development Division staff continues to work with OIT and a vendor to finalize the FindJerseyFresh.com website so that agricultural businesses will be able to edit and update their own profiles for the 2024 season. Work on the development of a Jersey Native Plants website continues, including identifying artwork/photos for each plant. Division staff has also contacted the NJ Native Plant Society to assist in finalizing draft rules for the Jersey Native Plants program.

**Manure Link Website** – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff had a Teams meeting with the Rutgers Office of Analytical Research, which included learning how to use and populate the NJ ManureLink website on both the beta and administrative sides. Staff uploaded nutrient management links from universities and government agencies to the newly developed website. Additionally, staff also added assistance/cost share for Best Management Practices factsheets and resources to the ManureLink website. Division staff also met with the New Jersey Compost Council (NJCC) to address questions regarding the NJ ManureLink field day course the NJCC has been working on.

**Sick Bird Call** – The Division of Animal Health received a sick bird call on November 21 from a backyard poultry owner in Ocean County. One layer hen in a flock of 13 hens was found recumbent on the ground with excessive clear oral discharge. The following morning, the hen was found dead. A NJDA staff veterinarian performed a site visit on November 22 to assess the flock and test for Avian Influenza. The remaining 12 hens were apparently healthy. The carcass was submitted for necropsy at the NJ Animal Health Diagnostic Lab. Avian influenza Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) was negative for the deceased hen. Necropsy findings indicated the hen died from crop impaction, a condition where food and foreign material can become solidified in the crop, resulting in the restriction of food and water into the digestive tract. The hen was found to be emaciated and dehydrated from the crop impaction. The flock owner was educated about the cause of death in their hen and was provided educational materials on intestinal parasites in poultry, cleanliness, and information on biosecurity.

**Spotted Lanternfly Egg Masses** – Plant Industry Division staff have been working with USDA APHIS PPQ in a joint effort to reduce spotted lanternfly (SLF) populations at high priority locations such as seaports, airports, train yards, highway rest stops and high-volume shipping operations to slow the spread of this pest. Normally at this time of year the focus would be on crushing and scraping egg masses, however egg masses are being collected instead. These intact viable egg masses are being delivered to the Philip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory (PABIL) to be used to rear SLF nymphs or to be shipped to the USDA for use in SLF research. In November, 364 egg masses were collected and delivered to PABIL.

**School Nutrition Programs** – The Food and Nutrition Division's School Nutrition Program central office staff completed and submitted the Food Safety Inspections Report to the USDA. State agencies are required to report the number of food safety inspections obtained annually by each school under their jurisdiction to ensure they are in compliance with Federal regulations. In New Jersey, there are more than 700 participating school districts, each differing in the number of school sites within the district. The

Division received the information from participating school districts within the required deadline for submission to the USDA.

**Pathology and Examinations** – The Division of Animal Health’s Pathology Laboratory Section for November 2023 completed 205 tests and/or procedures. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic), immunohistochemical, and parasitological preparation and evaluation, and these cases generated additional diagnostic tests for other laboratory sections (e.g., bacteriology, virology, and molecular). Results from these case submissions help to support practicing veterinarians (large, mixed, and small animals), private food and companion animal owners, NJ State Agencies, racetracks, wildlife, zoos, and nonprofit animal facilities. Cases involved diagnostic testing for disease and/or cause of death diagnosis and routine and/or sporadic disease surveillance for large and small ruminants, companion animals, and exotic/zoo species; sudden death with no clinical symptoms; assessment of backyard and small flock health issues; large scale flock disease; law enforcement forensic investigation and animals exhibiting neurologic symptoms.

**Livestock Processing** – The initial producer working group that is focused on developing the statewide organization and a North Jersey processing center formed a 501-C3, completed a feasibility study and business plan that was included in the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program grant submitted to the USDA on November 22. More information regarding the structure of this project will be released in the near future.

**Ag Education** – State Program Leader for Food, Agriculture & Natural Resources Education Erin Noble attended the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) CareerTech VISION Conference and National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Convention. She attended various business meetings, award ceremonies and professional development workshops. The event was packed with professional development and direct access to thousands of individuals representing all facets of career and technical education. Erin also attended the Agricultural Education Summit which brought together leaders of all the agricultural education related organizations that support school-based agricultural education, and she was a panelist for a State staff breakout session later in the week.

**Nursery Inspections** – Plant Industry Division nursery inspection staff detected boxwood blight (BWB) at a large shipping nursery in southern New Jersey during their third and final compliance inspection this month. Once samples were taken and the laboratory determinations were made, inspectors met with the boxwood producer, and arrangements were made for the removal and destruction of the infected plants. The site was relatively large resulting in the removal and destruction of over 2,000 plants. This was the first significant instance of BWB for New Jersey growers this year.