



State of New Jersey

## **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**October 22, 2025**

**(Wednesday)**

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on October 16, 2025.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by giving written notice of the time, date, location and to the extent known the agenda of this meeting. At least 48 hours in advance this notice has been posted on the third floor, Riverview Plaza, Trenton, New Jersey; mailed to the Newark Star Ledger; the Camden Courier Post; the Trenton Times and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Bob Blew called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 1:05 pm. Board members in attendance included President Bob Blew; Vice President Stephen V. Lee, IV, David DeFrango, John Hart, Joel Viereck, Rick Gardner, Hillary Barile and Holly Sytsema. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Secretary Wengryn; Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison; Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Rose Chamberlain, Director, Division of Food & Nutrition; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Chuck Roehr, Executive Director, SADC; Tameko Webster, Chris LaRegina, Tim Idland, Anthony Tarr, Robert Vivian, Jeff Beach, Kaitlynn Dixon, Alyssa Pitt, William Connors, Shatima Murphy, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Ashley Kerr and Al Murray, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the September 24, 2025, regular meeting.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Maria Stewart, representing the New Jersey Dairy and Cheese Guild, noted that the organization has been newly established nonprofit to represent the interests of small dairy farms, on-farm processors and small dairy processing facilities. She was present to provide the Board with an update of the last six months for on farm dairy processing and to share some developments that she hopes that the Board will support. She reported that the dairy industry has been in a doom and gloom situation with a lot of

farms closing. She noted that a large milk processor in Pennsylvania just closed so there is a lot of tension in the dairy industry. She noted that on the positive side in New Jersey, we welcomed our latest on farm dairy processor whose is licensed to pasteurize and bottle their own milk. She reported that we have seen a lot of farm dairy processing, especially in NJ as it is a growing sector of industry within the last five years and that there are now three facilities that have been licensed to process their own milk on farm. She noted that they have been challenged with some regulatory authority as the Department of Health currently handles that. She reported that since the major issues that they experienced last year and into the winter of this year, they have had some resolve with the Department of Health and are working towards a more amicable relationship with them. However, they are severely understaffed, in the last year they've lost three of their field inspectors as well as the individual who is leading the program as a result of the decreased staffing. She noted that this is causing challenges to get inspections done, sampling done, in a timely manner. She reported that for their August sampling of raw milk that the Department of Health was taking a buy. They were saying that they were not picking up samples, although they are required to do so for facilities like hers, which is a seasonally operated grading facility, which caused the FDA to step in and tell the Department to do their job. She reported that they are making progress toward rectifying this in a more permanent manner with legislation that has been introduced in July 2025, A5939 and S4711, which requires the Department of Agriculture to conduct inspections of on-farm dairy processing activities. This legislation would transfer the licensing and inspection authority from the Department of Health to the Department of Agriculture. She reported that members of the organization have been active at the County Board meetings, especially in Hunterdon and Mercer Counties as well as having listening sessions with legislators to gain support for the legislation.

#### **RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board adopts a resolution to enter executive session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b)(8), to evaluate the performance of an employee. The Board will evaluate the employee's performance in implementing strategic outreach to stakeholders and in reviewing and implementing hiring practices at the Department.

The Board will disclose the contents of the closed session as soon as we are able to do so. Minutes will be approved at a future Board meeting.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Stephen Lee, the Board voted unanimously to enter executive session.

ON the MOTION of Stephen Lee, seconded by Joel Viereck, the Board voted to go back into public session.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Holly Sytsema, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Closed Session minutes from the September 24 meeting.

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by David DeFrango, the Board voted unanimously to allow the Nominations Committee to review the applications received for Distinguished Service and to decide and notify candidates within the next ten days.

Board Vice President Stephen Lee had to leave the meeting at that time to get back to the farm for harvesting of cranberries.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Jeanine Cava, Executive Director, NJ Food Democracy, stated that they learned mid-September that there would be money for a state version of the LFPA Grant. They convened some farmers and food hub folks who participated with LFPA to get a sense of what people had heard, share information around the table and to get some additional information as to what would help on their farm operations. She noted that they prepared a letter and asked those who participated to sign the letter and sent it to the Board's Grants Committee prior to their regular meeting on October 22, 2025. The letter provided the farmers' recommendations for the New Local Food for Pantries Grant Program. She reported that the LFPA Program demonstrated how public investment in local food purchasing can strengthen small farm viability, deepen partnerships with food pantries, and bring fresh, culturally relevant New Jersey-grown food to families in need. It offered reliable market opportunities for small and beginning producers, fostered coordination among regional partners, and proved that farm-to-food-assistance purchasing can advance both agricultural and community goals.

President Blew reported that at the last State Agricultural Convention there was a meeting about the LFPA Program, and we took a lot of notes on what worked and what did not work and what were the concerns that people had. In addition, he noted that now that the ball is in our court, we have been trying very hard to make sure that when the RFP goes out that we try to solve some of the problems that were already communicated to us. He stated that we are trying very hard to make this work for both farmers, producers, distributors and for people that need food.

Jen LaMonaca thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak to them. She is a vegetable grower for a CSA market and has a roadside stand and has been for the past 15 years. She stated that the LFPA Program changed the dynamic of their farm. In addition, she stated that farm viability is the number one issue for farmers. She reported that the LFPA program gave them many opportunities and provided income through November, but LFPA gave us a steady reliable income. She stated that the program has taken their farm to the next level, and she hopes that it can continue not only for their farm but for other farms like theirs.

President Blew stated that one of the best things we can do as a Department right now is to try to create marketplaces for farmers to make money on their farms.

James Kleet of Fairground Farm reported that they were one of the main providers and benefitted a lot from the program and one of the things that helped us a lot was they wanted to work with us as beginning farmers, so they really advocate for the farmers and they were able to give them a strong price that was close to retail and they were able to create three new jobs in their organization because of that. He stated that LFPA was a huge success for them and hopes that the new program will do the same.

## **INDUSTRY REPORTS**

Due to the Federal Government shutdown, there were no representatives from the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service or the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

### **REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Brian Schilling represented the College and reported on the following topics:

- Currently recruiting for the Pesticide Safety Education program search is moving to the candidate interviews and noted that he has heard that they have a strong candidate pool and hopes that they will be able to fill the position soon. In addition, other positions include a position in Bergen County for an Ag & Natural Resources; a search for a new equine specialist, following the retirement of Dr. Karyn Malinowski as well as a vegetable IPM position.
- Matthew Newman was appointed Chair of the Department of 4-H Youth Development. On July 1, Matthew Newman began a three-year term as Chair of the Department of 4-H Youth Development. He succeeds Rachel Lyons who served as chair for four terms.
- Stop the Bleed Program has scheduled two events for this program, which is related to Farm Safety, each group will have approximately 20-25 participants.

President Blew reported that he and Secretary Wengryn had gotten word from USDA that some FSA offices and operations would be starting back as soon as tomorrow and would be working on disaster recovery payments and loan payments.

### **REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU**

Ashley Kerr represented the Farm Bureau and reported the following:

- Halfway through our lame duck legislator meetings, thank you to the SBOA members who participated.
- We appreciate the coordination with NJDA staff on legislative issues and look forward to connecting with the SBOA legislative committee. In addition, she thanked the Department for being a part of last week's legislative tour to the cranberry bogs.
- Farmland assessment – hearing from grain farmers that they will not be able to meet the proposed threshold of \$1900 on small parcels with the current prices of corn and soybeans. Additionally, an application fee needs to be minimal, at MOST \$50, as this cost will almost certainly be passed on to the tenant farmer who completes the paperwork.
- Lots of discussion happening around PFAS, potential legislation for Lame Duck. Speaking to other states dealing with this problem to gain their insights.
- Still looking for consensus in the ag community on urban agriculture – is the compromise to house the program in SADC since it will be using SADC dollars? This is the direction supported by the NJFB Board of Directors.
- RTF bill awarding reasonable costs and attorney fees to farmers (A4603) – passed by both Houses on 6/30/25. Still waiting on the governor's signature.
- Working with the Senate Majority Office to get the S76 heard, which would provide civil liability protection to farmers who host agritourism activities. The Senate sponsor committed to moving the bill during the recent hearing on agritourism.
- Bear Hunt – Segment A is complete with approximately 130 bears harvested. Segment B will be from December 8-13. Also last week, the Appellate Division rejected another challenge to the

black bear hunt that claimed the Policy and Game Code amendments were arbitrary and capricious or inconsistent with the governing statute and judicial precedent.

- Federal shutdown is preventing any work from being done. AFBF is seeking a bridge support program to assist farmers during this very difficult time.
- NJFB Directors have met with both gubernatorial candidates and will be following up with the Ciattarelli campaign on the role of the State Board of Agriculture.
- NJFB has hired a new Research Associate, Tara Smith, a recent graduate from Rutgers in Animal Science.
- Successful Resolutions meeting with 12 county boards of agriculture represented. New policies introduced on the State Redevelopment Plan and Urban Agriculture. NJFB Convention will be November 17–18 in Cherry Hill and will honor Pete Furey at the banquet.

### **ORGANIC & REGENERATIVE FARMING BOARD**

Jen LaMonaca reported that as a follow up to the report from Jasmine Moreano last month about the survey that was completed and noted that the report was not a census survey but a needs assessment survey. She reported that Meredith Melendez will be doing a follow-up and doing some additional regression analysis to see if they can get some additional information. She reported that the next quarterly meeting of the Organic Farming Board will be held on December 2, 2025 at the Rutgers Food & Innovation Center in Bridgeton from 4–6 pm and will have an online option for those not able to attend. Finally, she reported that they will have their first quarterly meeting of the new year at the NOFA Conference.

### **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Secretary Wengryn thanked the NJ Food Council for honoring him with the Good Government award. He noted that it was from their previous working relationship, but it was an honor to elevate the Department and the role that they have. He reported that the Department is working to connect local farmers with the distribution systems. There have been a few meetings on this and we will continue to work together. He reported that he recently attended the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bergen County Horticulture Program at their Community College. In addition, he reported that he would be visiting Montclair University next week to talk about their agriculture classes and opportunities for careers in agriculture and what we do here at the Department of Agriculture.

He attended the Tri-National Accord meeting which is an annual meeting between the Providence and State Agriculture Ministers, Secretaries, Commissioners and Directors from Canada, Mexico and the United States. The meeting affirmed the support of renewal of the USMCA and made recommendation for areas to better support agriculture in the three countries. The focus of the meeting was on Animal Disease Preparedness, Women in Farming and the International Woman Farmer in 2026, and the continuation of free trade between the three Countries in a way that builds a better agriculture industry. He reported that the discussions really noted the importance of the North American Trade agreements. He reported that he attended several events that were held for National School Lunch Week which applauds the successes of serving nutritious meals.

Rose Chamberlain reported that in addition to the report that she submitted, the Division has begun to receive federal funding for FY26, just over \$80 million, which is very good news for us as we move forward to providing reimbursement to their sponsoring organizations.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, reported that Division staff are continuing to watch the drought conditions and noted that the northern counties are extremely dry but that Atlantic County, due to the recent storm, was no longer dry. He noted that they had received preliminary results on both the livestock testing and the initial crop sampling. He reported that they are processing that and are working with the toxicologist at the Veterinary School to start to analyze the information that was collected.

Secretary Wengryn commented that he had attended the ribbon cutting at Rowan University for the grand opening of the new Veterinarian School and noted that there was a huge crowd on hand for the event and they look forward to their first class of graduates.

Board member Holly Sytsema congratulated Dr. Ernie Beier if he was listening, he worked tirelessly to see that project come to life.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, reported that New Jersey has much to celebrate on One Health Day. He stated that New Jersey led the nation as the first state to pass legislation creating a One Health initiative. He reported that they would be holding a workshop and encouraged those that were invited to attend as it will be very informative. He reported that New Jersey's agricultural industry sits at the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health. By working across state departments, we're recognizing how important it is to maintain balance among all three. It's important to recognize that our communities stay healthy when our environment and farms are healthy too. In addition, the Department has been monitoring West Nile virus in mosquito populations to tracking bird flu in wildlife, New Jersey's One Health approach allows us to detect and respond to threats early. The New Jersey One Health Task Force (NJOHTF) comprises representatives from the New Jersey Departments of Environmental Protection, Health, and Agriculture, plus 10 public appointed members including veterinarians, physicians, and environmental scientists. The NJOHTF aims to strengthen interdisciplinary research and collaboration, foster a holistic understanding of health among New Jersey residents, promote data accessibility, and facilitate the development of new approaches for identifying and responding to health threats that affect people, animals, plants, and ecosystems.

Chuck Roohr, Executive Director, SADC, reported that the soil & water cost share amendment final draft will be published in either the December 1 or the December 15, 2025 NJ Register for comments.

Board member Joel Viereck asked about the recent TDR Bank Board meeting that was held where they discussed the issue that has been on-going with Woolwich Township, it was reported that Chuck was given the authority to work with the Township arriving at a resolution, with guidance on parameters to a path forward. He noted that they are waiting to hear what happened at the local meeting. Chuck reported that there would need to be an agreement of terms before any preservation can be started.

Anthony Tar, CFO, reported that the fiscal office will be undergoing restructuring now that there is a CFO position and noted that they will need additional staff and training so that all fiscal units are using the same standard operating procedures.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that total of 32 LDD (aka "gypsy moth") municipal egg mass surveys have been completed (84 percent of the total) in Atlantic, Cumberland, Bergen, Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Warren counties. To date, only one municipality in Sussex County had an area that qualifies for treatment for the spring of 2026.

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison reported that he had just returned from the International Fresh Produce Association trade show in Anaheim, CA, this is the largest trade show that they attend every year with more than 40,000 in attendance. He reported that he would be setting up three meetings, two with large national brokers who are interested in doing regional local Jersey program and a large retailer in Southeast PA/South Jersey. He reported that the MOU for the Travel & Agritourism Grant is nearly completed and that he hopes to have it finalized as soon as possible. A question was asked about the milk licenses and if the fees are high enough to discourage the behavior. It was discussed that the fees might need to be adjusted going forward.

Tameko Webster reported that November 3 has been named One Health Day, we were able to get a proclamation from the Governor's Office, and we will be celebrating. She reported that our Department just completed the gubernatorial transition packet and it will be reviewed by the Board prior to sending it to the Governor's Office. In addition, she noted that we are in the process of budget planning and we are working to be sure that we are on task there.

#### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Hillary Barile reported that in Salem County there is a woman who was starting a non-profit that she is calling Salem County Preservation and they are planning an AG Summit for some time in February and noted that it seems to be focused on small business marketing strategies. She noted to the woman that some of the efforts that she talked about seemed duplicative of some conferences that are already available to agriculture, but she was firm that she's spoken to a lot of farmers in the Salem, Gloucester and Cumberland area and they were supportive. She noted that perhaps we are not reaching all the agricultural population that is in need of services, and we need to figure out how we can better serve all our constituents.

Joel Viereck reported that the LFPA did seem to be a very positive program and it's helping farmers that are producing their stuff without marketing the way Jen LaMonaca was talking about how it directly impacted her farm. That is the heart of the program, and it should be something that can be imagined for both big and small farms. He commented that it was sad to see crops being plowed under because of the low prices. Finally, he reported that the Budget Committee did meet and noted that staffing and training is a big part of what is needed moving forward.

Holly Sytsema attended the meeting with the Ciattarelli Campaign and noted that they seem to have a good pulse on what is going on. She noted that there was an agricultural forum in Sussex County, they are concerned with access to markets and the proposed processing plant and wondered where we are on

that? She reported that there is a market for local beef in New Jersey, but we need to come up with the distribution process. She reported that the price for corn and soybeans has been very low, not only are they fighting with commodity prices, but everything was late going in the ground because they had such a wet spring and now with a late harvest and moisture is high so you are going to get locked moisture. She noted that a lot of guys are shipping right out of the field and they don't have the ability to dry. She reported that it is very, very dry in Sussex County, the rain that everybody else got, they did not. Finally, she noted that those that have state land leases would like to see if we could come up with something like a good stewardship discount or reduction so that farmers that are staying on those properties and putting implements into these properties, could there be some discount.

John Hart reported that he had attended the Monmouth County Board of Ag meeting where there was discussion on the problem with geese and it seems crazy that nothing can be done federally, they are only allowed one goose per day and that is not going to help the situation at all, Mercer County also has a similar problem. He noted that it was very dry in Mercer County as well and they are having problems because the ground is too hard to get anything planted. He noted that deer problems continue and they need to be able to attract more hunters. It was also noted that they need to up the prices that they pay for the vouchers.

Rick Gardner reported that there was a legislative meeting in Warren County and they brought up the subject of trying to move ahead on a processing facility and noted that Senator Steinhardt is fervently in their corner and it was suggested to the Commissioners that they need to have a unified letter going to the DEP because they need to put a green light on the piece of property that has been discussed. He reported that the county does have a few other properties that could be used that have the qualifications that are needed for the facility. He is hopeful that they can use the location that has been considered because it is a great location because lower New York doesn't take that long and Pennsylvania is also close by. He reported that at the Warren County meeting there was a discussion about the by-laws and mou's and the Board is collectively examining the by-laws and making some changes since they had not been updated since the early 90's. Finally, he reported that he listened to the Budget Listening Session on October 1 and commended both Joel Viereck and Secretary Wengryn on the excellent job they did answering questions and listening to the comments of those on the call. He reported that there was some discussion about dairy fees that he was not aware of and was going to ask for more information in order to report back.

David DeFrange reported on the passing of Dave Bond from Hunterdon County, he served the agricultural community for many, many years and noted that his historical knowledge will be greatly missed by the entire ag community. Embrace the old timers, they've got a wealth of knowledge and we've got to try and grab it. He reported that he was present for the Budget Listening Session and thought that it was a great opportunity to hear the concerns of the ag community and gave the Board some things to think about. He reported that he is working with others to coordinate a Committee that would work with the Community Colleges and trying to put together an initiative to try to pull together Ag viability issues, workforce development that specifically gets somebody into agriculture environment quickly and gets them the schooling that they need to either choose to go to a four year school or gets them into their practice quickly. They are working to coordinate around the state to see what programs are going on, he noted that there is a lot of ag innovation that is going on in Sussex County with drones.



He noted that Hunterdon and Mercer County boards would be meeting on November 7 and looks forward to the exchange of information.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

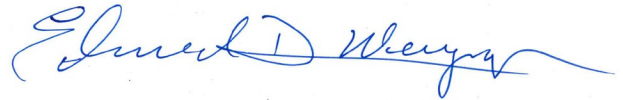
**MEETINGS**

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, November 19, 2025 at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

**ADJOURNMENT**

ON the MOTION of Joel Viereck, seconded by Rick Gardner, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 4:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Edward D. Wengryn", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edward D. Wengryn