



State of New Jersey

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

MINUTES OF MEETING August 23, 2023 (Wednesday)

Public meeting notice was certified by communication on August 17, 2023.

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 Philadelphia Inquirer and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State.

President Holly Sytsema called the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture to order at 12:45 p.m. Board members in attendance included President Holly Sytsema; Vice President Barney Hollinger, Kurt Alstede, Lisa Specca, Bob Blew, David DeFrango, John Hart and Stephen V. Lee, IV. The meeting was held at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ.

Also in attendance were Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison, Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health; Nancy Wood, Division of Marketing & Development; Susan Payne, Executive Director, SADC; Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources; Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry; Christina Rasiewicz, Robert Vivian, Jeff Wolfe, Jeff Beach, Christopher LaRegina and Nathan Schatz, Office of the Secretary. Also in attendance were Allen Carter, Peter Furey, Al Murray and Ashley Kerr, NJ Farm Bureau; Dr. Brian Schilling, Rutgers University; Bob Andrzejczak, State Director, Farm Service Agency; Evan Madlinger, Acting State Conservationist, NRCS; Justin Zappan, National Agricultural Statistics Services, and Linda Walker, NJ Department of Agriculture.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

ON the MOTION of Bob Blew, seconded by Lisa Specca, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2023 regular meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jeff Burd, Mercer County Board of Agriculture, distributed the latest New Jersey Beekeepers Association's informational pamphlet to the Board members.

REPORT OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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

- Currently in a holding pattern on position hirings.
- Snyder Research Farm Open House and Great Tomato Tasting will be held on Wednesday, August 31 from 1:00–7:00 pm.
- Snyder Farm Twilight Tour & Meeting will be held that evening focusing on fiber hemp production, drones in agriculture and agrivoltaics research.

REPORT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY

State Director Bob Andrzejczak reported the following:

Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)

The 2023 Organic Certification Cost Share Program is now open and FSA will be accepting applications through October 31, 2023 for certification expenses paid October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023. Organic producers will be reimbursed up to 75% of costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 per scope (crops, wild crops, processing/handling).

Loss Adjusters

New Jersey Farm Service Agency is seeking Loss Adjusters (LAs) for the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Loss Adjusters are required to have knowledge of field crops and specialty crops, as well as a thorough understanding and execution of crop adjusting guidelines and program provisions, as applicable to FSA programs. If interested, please contact Aly Dyson, NJ FSA Farm Program Disaster Specialist, Alyson.Dyson@usda.gov, with any questions.

Important Dates:

- **September 30:** NAP application for coverage deadline for Aquaculture, Christmas Trees, Flowers, Sod, small grains, grasses, mixed forage, garlic, other value loss crops not including nursery.
- **September 30:** Acreage reporting deadline for value loss crops, except nursery, for the following crop year.
- **November 20:** NAP application for coverage deadline for all fruit trees, cranberries, grapes, blueberries.

REPORT OF NJ FARM BUREAU

President Allen Carter represented the New Jersey Farm Bureau. He reported that the Farm Bureau Board of Directors had voted the prior evening to petition for a public hearing on the proposed soil protection standards rule in the SADC.

REPORT OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

Justin Zappan reported that New Jersey farmers expect an average of 45 bushels per acre of soybeans for 2023. Last year's yield averaged 28 bushels per acre. Expected acres harvested is 108 thousand acres. Nationally, soybean production for beans is forecast at 4.21 billion bushels, down 2% from 2022. Corn production for grain is forecast at 15.1 billion bushels, up 10% from 2022. He reported that New Jersey cranberry growers expect to harvest 550 thousand barrels, the third highest nationally. Peach producers expect to harvest 16 thousand tons, up from 9 thousand tons last year.

REPORT OF NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Evan Madlinger, Acting State Conservationist, reported they had received reports of the weather event that happened in Warren County. They are working to help those affected and applications can be made until September 13. In addition, they are also working with SADC to become certified so that they can also review easements. Finally, he noted that they are also looking at a new program for hazard tree removal following the discussion by Board member Kurt Alstede about dead yet standing hardwood trees. He stated that NRCS is hoping to have some financial help available soon to assist farmers to safely remove such trees.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison commented that he had attended a Summer Food Service Program Event at the Raritan Bay Area YMCA Summer Stars Day Camp at Rose M. Lopez Elementary School recently. The visit promoted the sponsor's successful summer operation. The Department announced that New Jersey was No. 1 in the country in feeding children during the summer, according to a report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). He noted that the kids at the school were very excited about the event and they were fully engaged with the reporters on hand. Earlier today, he returned from Boston where he had attended the New England Produce Council Trade Show. He reported that there was excellent participation and that they had made several good connections while there. He noted that they were able to have a Jersey Fresh display with fresh produce so that people could actually see what Jersey Fresh looks like. He reported that he has been travelling to most of the County Ag Fairs, later that evening he was travelling to Hunterdon County for his 10th fair. He reported that it has been a great opportunity to see the different styles of fairs that each county has. He reported that the Division of Markets will be welcoming a new staff member to help search/apply for grants on September 11. He noted that the Jersey Fresh Fall campaign would be starting soon and that a fall marketing TV, radio and billboard creatives to promote fall produce, agri-tourism and messaging to support Jersey Grown and Jersey Native plants. In addition, he reported that Division staff attended the Tomato Promotion Day on August 7 and the Peach Promotion Day which was on August 22 to highlight National Eat a Peach Day on the boardwalks of Seaside, Atlantic City and Wildwood. The response was overwhelming with 180 flats of tomatoes and 105 boxes of peaches distributed.

Susan Payne, Executive Director, SADC, reported that there was no SADC meeting for the month of August but the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, September 28. She reported that the proposed SPS rule was published in the NJ Register on August 7 and the mailing went to the 3,000 affected farms on August 15. The 60-day formal public comment period ends October 6. She stated that the SADC held an SPS Overview and Map training for easement grantees on August 2 to review the rule and map features. The letter explains the SPS, lists the calculated disturbances for their specific farm, includes a map of the farm highlighting observed disturbances and includes a unique PIN number that gives them access to an online version of the mapping. All grantees holding farmland preservation easements will also receive a copy of the SADC's soil disturbance letters and maps for each farm easement the grantee holds. She reported that they had received the request from the New Jersey Farm Bureau for a hearing this morning and it is being reviewed. Finally, she reported that more than ten SOE applications have been submitted to County Ag Development Boards and they are working through some of the questions with those.

Frank Minch, Director, Division of Agricultural & Natural Resources, commented that the Division is working with FSA and NRCS to come up with cost share money for the diseased ash trees. He reported that the Farmland Evaluation Committee had recently met and we are set with the Division of Taxation on the next round of farmland assessment tax rates. He noted that they have been receiving applications for deer fencing. He noted that the Stormwater Management Rule has been taking a good deal of time. He noted that DEP has said there would be set asides for some ag structures. Finally, he reported that the Division has also been working on the emergency burn permits in order to streamline the communication efforts to have this done in a much easier way.

Joe Zoltowski, Director, Division of Plant Industry, reported that the 2023 LDD Aerial Defoliation Survey began on June 15 in the southern counties of the state and was completed by July 11. An overall 5% increase in defoliation was observed throughout the state compared to the previous year. Most of the defoliation was observed in Sussex, Cape May, and Camden Counties. A total of 15,902 acres of forestland were found to be defoliated in 52 municipalities in 14 counties of New Jersey. In addition, the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) continues to expand its range and destroy millions of ash trees throughout the Central United States, the Mid-Atlantic and parts of New England. It was also noted that the Department continues to release egg and larval parasitoids in wooded ash sites containing low levels of EAB from April through September. In 2023 to date, a total 14,553 egg and larval parasitoids have been released since May at three locations located in Bergen, Sussex and Warren Counties. To date, the Department's municipal and county SLF treatment reimbursement program has encumbered over \$2,635,000 to reimburse 159 municipal and five county governmental agencies that have applied for this opportunity.

Board member Kurt Alstede asked about the status of repairs at the Beneficial Insect Lab. Director Zoltowski reported that they are still reviewing the plans that have been developed and that additional monies may be needed to complete the repairs that are needed. Director Zoltowski reported that Senator Zwicker from the Senate Budget Committee was scheduled for a tour of the facility for the following day but had to be postponed because of his schedule. Board member Kurt Alstede commented that the members of the State Board's Budget Committee should try to attend the rescheduled tour so that they have an opportunity to speak with the Senator regarding the needs of the building and importance of the facility to New Jersey.

Dr. Amar Patil, Director, Division of Animal Health, reported that there had been two quarantines recently regarding pigs and human biting incidents. Dr. Patil commented that the Division of Animal Health's animal health technicians (AHTs) conducted unannounced inspections at 22 registered New Jersey live bird markets and sampled poultry from 13 markets for avian influenza. Additional activities included quarterly closure of 19 live bird markets. Quarterly closures consists of cleaning and disinfecting the entire market followed by a minimum of 24 hours of down time. He noted that New York has recently had two findings. Testing on high risk markets will continue. He reported that the Department has been working on the proposed changes to the scrapies regulation and that public comment is open till September 1.

Linda Walker, Division of Food & Nutrition, reported that the Coordinator for Food Distribution had organized a department-wide Back to School Drive that was very successful and that the supplies would be delivered to Mercer Street Friends, an organization in Mercer County that serves the surrounding communities of Trenton. The Summer Food Service Program is winding down from a very successful summer program and the School Nutrition Unit is working with school sponsors on the changes to their programs through the Working Class Families legislation.

Assistant Secretary Atchison reported that he had just received word from USDA that all of the Specialty Crop Block Grants that were approved last April have been reviewed by USDA and approved for the coming project year which begins October 1.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Kurt Alstede reported that the fruit crops are good, the peach harvest is well underway, blueberry growers had a great crop but there were too many on the market. He noted that he has heard concerns regarding the SPS rule. He noted that there is an issue with apple crop insurance and suggested that a letter be sent to RMA regarding such, in addition to that there is a question regarding 105 acres of grapes in Hunterdon County to expand grape coverage to Hunterdon County. He noted that if this can be accomplished by the end of August, coverage could begin next year. He had the opportunity to attend the Young Farmers & Ag Professionals event recently at Cowtown Rodeo and had a wonderful time.

Dave DeFrance reported that the Hunterdon County Fair opens that evening, and everyone is very excited. He reported that the North Jersey Caucus is actively looking for candidates to serve on the State Board. He noted that Hunterdon County will be commenting on the SPS rules as well. He noted that he is happy that NRCS / FSA expedited the ash tree issue. He commented on the Round Table Discussion that was hosted by Kurt Alstede and stressed the importance of having the ability to speak directly to those that are writing the legislation.

Lisa Specca commented that the County Boards that she visits have not met over the summer. She reported that the summer season was winding down but that yields were up and demand was high.

Stephen Lee reported that there was a tour of their cranberry farm that morning for the North American Cranberry Research and Extension Workers Conference. They are essentially all of the researchers that do any cranberry work in North America. They are here with Rutgers and had a great event at the Rutgers Research Station in Oswego. It was a very big deal to have them here in New Jersey talking about the importance that the Rutgers Station has had in the industry. He reported that he would be scheduling a meeting of the Nominating Committee soon. Finally, he asked about the disposal of old pesticides and if anyone had suggestions for that.

Bob Blew stated that it's the sleepy time of year in South Jersey, the peaches are winding down, apples are ready, and the tomato crop has been great. He reported that there are no ash trees in that part of the state. Finally, he reported that the Salem County Farm Fair was outstanding with record crowds.

John Hart reported that Mercer County had received substantial rains recently. He noted that there are many that have rented lands that are covered with ash trees. He noted that the corn crop looked good, but the deer population has been causing tremendous damage.

Vice President Hollinger reported that they are bringing in seed and planting seed out in the bay to get ready for the fall. He reported that there has been a recent issue with bacteria in sea water specifically, clams and oysters. He noted that the water temperatures have contributed to the issue. Those that are immune compromised should not eat raw shellfish.

President Sytsema said that with the departure of Secretary Fisher, Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison has really stepped up to the plate and everything has been going very smoothly and appreciates all that he is doing. Again, she wanted to comment on the exciting news that New Jersey was No. 1 in the country in feeding children during the summer. New Jersey is one of three states that houses Food & Nutrition in the Department of Agriculture. She reported that Sussex County did not meet in August and Bergen County held a Twilight Meeting regarding deer management that was very well-attended. She noted that Farm Bureau President Allen Carter and Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison travelled to Sussex County to attend their annual Farm Fair. She reported that she along with Vice President Hollinger have established three new Committees for the Board. Ag Viability will be chaired by Kurt Alstede, Right to Farm, chaired by Lisa Specca and Invasives, chaired by Dave DeFrange. These Committees will be added to the State Board listing. She too commented about the Roundtable Discussion that was held with Congressman Gottheimer and the importance of farmers having the ability to talk directly to legislators about what is happening on their farm.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

President Sytsema reported that the Personnel Committee will continue to work on the Secretary search, as of right now things are seamless but did ask on behalf the Personnel Committee that they be given authority from the Board to have all jurisdiction over matters pertaining to hiring the Secretary going forward. This includes date changes, meeting logistics, etc. that need to be made. She also stated that they would like to revisit the use of prior Board members with the search.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Bob Blew, the Board voted unanimously to give the Personnel Committee jurisdiction to make decisions regarding the Secretary search.

ON the MOTION of Holly Sytsema, seconded by Barney Hollinger, the Board voted unanimously to extend the deadline for submission for the Secretary of Agriculture search to September 29, 2023.

It was noted that any those who had requested an application packet would be made aware of the extension of the deadline.

It was noted that no completed applications had been received as of the meeting today.

Kurt Alstede who is Chairing the Operations & Budget and the Ag Viability Committees reported that he had provided the Operations & Budget Committee members with copies of the Department budget for the current Fiscal Year which began on July 1, 2023. He talked about setting up a committee meeting at the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Rearing Laboratory with Senator Zwicker on September 8, following the tour. He reported that as Chair of the Ag Viability Committee he would like to meet with Brian Schilling to continue the work that has been started.

Dave DeFrance reported that as Chair of the Legislative Committee he has already met with Rob Vivian to discuss legislation so that we can all hit the ground running. He noted that the Invasives Committee will have its work cut out for it. He stated that “these will be some very dynamic discussions” on the pending legislation.

It was also noted that the tour for legislators in Hunterdon County would be held on August 29 in Hunterdon County and they will be visiting Melick’s Town Farm in Oldwick, Spring Run Dairy in Pittstown and Beneduce Vineyard also in Pittstown.

The newly established Committees will be meeting soon to see what steps need to be taken to move forward.

Stephen Lee commented that the Nominating Committee would be meeting soon as will the Grants Committee.

John Hart reported that the Livestock Committee had met regarding the confinement standards and the changes that are being discussed. The Committee will be meeting again on this prior to the next Board meeting.

Vice President Hollinger commented that the Convention Committee would be meeting soon to discuss ideas for topics/speakers for the upcoming convention. It was reported that Farm Credit East has agreed to pay the cost again for a dinner speaker. The speaker that was at the Delegates Dinner last year that was provided by Farm Credit was very well received.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval – Specialty Crop Letter

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by Stephen Lee, the Board voted unanimously to approve the draft letter regarding Crop Insurance with any changes that need to be made.

ON the MOTION of Kurt Alstede, seconded by David DeFrange, the Board voted unanimously to send a letter to RMA asking them to include Hunterdon County for the 2024 growing season.

Stephen Lee abstained from the vote.

Dave DeFrange commented that there was an issue with neonics. He noted that everyone should be receiving information for getting their new license information and that as of October 23 you will no longer be able to use neonics. He noted that with the Spotted Lanternfly that may be an issue.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEETINGS

The next regular meeting of the State Board of Agriculture will be held on Wednesday, September 27, 2023. It was noted that new member orientation will be held that day beginning at 9:30 am.

ADJOURNMENT

ON the MOTION of Bob Blew, seconded by Barney Hollinger, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the regular meeting at 3:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Assistant Secretary of Agriculture