

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

April 22, 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.

School Feeding Programs During COVID-19 – The Food and Nutrition Division's School Nutrition Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program are working to make sure as many students and children as possible are being fed through the federal nutrition programs. Staff are working directly with school districts and sponsoring organizations to ensure they are operating in compliance and within the parameters offered through the meal program flexibilities USDA has provided during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FFA Convention Virtual Event – The Food, Agriculture & Natural Resources team is creating a virtual State FFA Convention, as Monmouth University has cancelled all events scheduled for May due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Convention is scheduled to take place May 20 - 22, 2020.

Animal Health Diagnostic Lab – The Pathology Laboratory Section for the month of March 2020 completed a total of 594 tests and/or procedures. Tests and/or procedures involved gross necropsy examination, histopathologic (microscopic) 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 animal), owners of food and companion animals, New Jersey state agencies, racetrack, wildlife, zoo 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 ruminant, companion animal 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.

Spotted Lanternfly – Spotted lanternfly field work continues with procedural modifications due to the COVID-19 situation. Currently 20 temporary full-time workers are working in the field doing spotted lanternfly grid survey and conducting property assessments at locations where permission has been secured. To ensure the safety of the workers, all workers are working independently (alone) and are not to have any interaction with the public. Field crews have ceased door to door visits to ask permission and are mailing letters to homeowners to get permission for survey and treatment. Although this process has dramatically reduced the number of permissions received, the number of survey grids completed throughout the state has more than doubled for a total of 584 (1km x 1km grids).

Canadian Blueberry Fruit Certification – Applications for the 2020 Canadian Blueberry Fruit Certification (BCP) and Blueberry Plant Certification programs were prepared and mailed to previous participants by Plant Industry Division staff. New Jersey blueberry growers who wish to be certified by either of these programs enroll after April 1 annually.

Commodity Inspection and Grading – The Marketing and Development Division's Commodity and Inspection and Grading Unit has remained busy during COVID-19. The unit has continued conducting USDA inspections, completed mandatory review of fruit and vegetable certificates, reviewed producer food safety plans for future and potential audits, audited and reviewed previously completed

feed inspections as required by AFRPS grant, and completed compliance review of feed, fertilizer and lime labels.

Emergency Planning Preparedness – As a part of the COVID-19 response, the animal emergency preparedness coordinator is supporting the ESF-11 partners. Each county Office of Emergency Management has been contacted to inquire about any foreseeable need for animal sheltering. At this time, no County Animal Response Teams (CART) have been activated. Communication with CART leaders has been established for situational awareness and sharing information, such as organizations providing donated pet food to families in need. The Division has been addressing inquiries from animal owners and veterinarians regarding the current guidelines for interacting with animals.

Collaboration with Departments of Education, Human Services – The Food and Nutrition Division continues to engage and collaborate with the New Jersey Department of Education and New Jersey Department of Human Services to ensure we are providing the most up to date and accurate information to those in need during COVID-19 as the purview of their programs overlaps with the Division of Food and Nutrition’s programs.

Ad-hoc Labor Committee – Agricultural and Resources Division staff is coordinating weekly meetings with the Ad-hoc Labor Committee with the New Jersey Farm Bureau and four farmer members to serve as an information clearinghouse on issues regarding agricultural labor, during this growing season.

Marketing and Development – The compilation of 2020 Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) applications is continuing and the division is responding to SCBG questions.