

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

August 23, 2023

**Jersey Fresh Produce Promotion Days** – Marketing and Development Division staff coordinated and attended the Tomato Promotion Day on August 7 and Peach Promotion Day on August 22 in observance of National Farmers Market Week and National Eat a Peach Day, respectively. The response was overwhelming with 180 flats of tomatoes and 105 boxes of peaches distributed. In addition, staff has developed fall marketing TV, radio, and billboard creatives to promote fall produce, agritourism and Jersey Grown and Jersey Native Plants.

**Mexican Bean Beetle Program** – Plant Industry Division staff at the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Lab (PABIL) are monitoring 50 field locations in Central and Southern New Jersey for Mexican Bean Beetle. The breakdown of locations is 16 in Salem County, 10 each in Burlington and Monmouth counties, seven in Cumberland County, five in Mercer County, and three in Gloucester County. Mexican Bean Beetle (MBB), *Epilachna varivestis*, is a Coccinellid beetle that can produce severe leaf damage in bean plants, making it a serious agricultural pest in the mid-Atlantic region. *Pediobius foveolatus* is a parasitoid wasp, originating from India, that attacks and kills MBB. Since the wasp is unable to overwinter in New Jersey, PABIL maintains the colony perpetually and makes targeted releases throughout the state each summer to keep MBB populations suppressed. Laboratory production of *Pediobius foveolatus* is now at maximum capacity. Approximately 107,875 adults were produced from 4,315 mummies during the reporting period.

**School Nutrition Programs** – The Food and Nutrition Division's Schools Unit has recognized the districts of Woodbury City, Bethlehem, Jefferson Township and Bogota for excelling at incorporating Healthy Meals Incentives and receiving a USDA Healthy Meals Incentives Grant. The USDA awarded nearly \$30 million in grants to 264 School Food Authorities across 44 states and the District of Columbia. These funds are being provided by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. New Jersey schools are encouraged to apply at <https://healthymealsincentives.org/recognition-awards/>. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis through June 30, 2025.

**Ag Education Bootcamp** – The Ag Ed Boot Camp was held August 3-4 at the EcoComplex in Burlington County. This initiative of the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Program provided new and early career teachers with thorough information and a foundation for understanding how to balance the three components of a quality agricultural education program – classroom/lab instruction, supervised agricultural experience, and FFA. Eight individuals presented content and modeled effective teaching strategies throughout the two days. The New Jersey Association of Agricultural Educators also held their annual dinner during the conference and engaged 26 attendees in valuable conversations and mentoring activities. The night also recognized teachers for years of service and highlighted the NJAAE/NAAE Awards winners.

**Live Bird Market Testing** – 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 the quarterly closure of 19 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 "downtime," environmental samples are taken for testing; There was also the inspection of one poultry distributor. Records, vehicle cleaning and disinfection logbooks were reviewed ensuring compliance with 2:9-4.2(c); Division staff performed highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) testing of 32 backyard poultry flocks. In addition, poultry from two other markets were sampled for surveillance purposes because of the trace to New York Live Bird Market HPAI detections.

**Summer Food Service Program** – The Food and Nutrition Division highlighted the Summer Food Service

Program with a visit to the Raritan Bay Area YMCA Summer Stars Day Camp at Rose M. Lopez Elementary School in Perth Amboy on Wednesday, August 16. The visit promoted the sponsor's successful summer operation, and we also 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.

**Spotted Lanternfly Program** – The Department's municipal and county spotted lanternfly (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. The SLF funding guidance for counties and municipalities was completed and posted on the NJDA website at the start of July. The document was also sent to the clerk's office of all counties and municipalities to ensure all potential applicants were aware of the funding opportunity and reporting responsibilities. During the following two weeks, outreach staff received a significant volume of calls with questions. The Division was met with positive feedback due to the ability to choose more treatment options.

**Pathology Examinations** – The Division of Animal Health's Pathology Laboratory Section for the month of July 2023 completed a total of 95 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, 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 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.

**Dairy, Livestock Processing** – Marketing and Development Division staff continues to work with dairy and livestock processors to further define programs and monies available for each specific project. Work is also continuing to expand the innovation center to have poultry and dairy defined into the current red meat project. The initial producer working group that is focused on developing the statewide organization and a North Jersey processing center have filed a 501-C3 application and have filed applications with various agencies for funding of the feasibility study. Plans are to contract for a feasibility study to be prepared for the next margin protection program grant round that could be announced at any time.

**Soil Erosion and Sediment Program** – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff aided several soil conservation districts in reviewing plans for multiple county road culvert replacements, dam spillway replacement, large mining site reclamation and closure, offsite stability analyses, sediment basin and long-term interim stabilization of large sites. Division staff also met with a municipal engineer seeking assistance in finding a solution to a large, natural ravine which collects and drains significant amounts of runoff as well as rocks and boulders and washes them down slope between two single family homes. Rocks and debris block storm sewer system inlets and flood properties and municipal roads.