

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

February 4, 2025

Summer EBT – The Food and Nutrition Division's Summer EBT, NJDA-IT, and New Jersey Office of Innovation (NJOOI) Units worked through the holiday break, alongside leadership at NJDA, and with tremendous support from the USDA-Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO), to ensure that the last round of Summer EBT 2024 benefits was dispersed before the end of the year. On December 31, the USDA approved the NJDA's request for an additional \$9,743,280 in FY24 Summer EBT funding, bringing the total federal allocation to \$85,343,280 to cover 81,194 additional children (711,194 children in total). The USDA confirmed that no further action was required to issue benefits beyond December 31, as the request was received prior to the expiration of the waiver. The approved funding was deposited into Department of Human Services' (DHS) state account, and all files were sent from DHS to Conduent for benefit issuance processing on December 31. Conduent confirmed receipt of files on January 2 and confirmed that all SEBT cards were mailed no later than Monday, January 6.

Farmland Assessment Online Application Process – Agricultural and Natural Resources Division staff met to review the Farmland Assessment-1 (FA-1) form to identify areas that seem to present confusion for farm owners. The creation of the Farmland Assessment online application website will provide an opportunity to address those areas. Division staff who daily input FA-1 form data compiled a list of items they consistently see entered on the form incorrect or it appears those filling out the form haphazardly fill in areas they shouldn't. It was agreed that information icons should be included to provide clear and precise definitions and examples of what they should report. Common errors include adding acreage to non-appurtenant woodland without having a woodland management or forest stewardship plan, and misreports of acreage due to multiple cuttings of a field crop.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Awareness – The NJDA drafted outreach letters with updated information on the progressing Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak, including the disease status in domestic poultry, dairy cattle, and wild birds. Individualized letters were created for backyard poultry owners and dairy farmers to alert them of the developments in the disease. This included information about the uptick in detections within wild birds, the importance of on-farm biosecurity, separation of multi-species on-farm, and reporting mortality and morbidity to the Department. The letters were provided directly to farmers, posted on the NJDA website, and provided to Rutgers Extension for distribution. As an increase in HPAI detection within the wild bird population in New Jersey and surrounding states arises, the focus of public awareness and farmer education, while working with our partner agencies, becomes key in preparedness and disease prevention.

Jersey Fresh – Marketing and Development Division staff continue to work with OIT and a vendor to finalize the FindJerseyFresh.com website as technical glitches continue to be resolved weekly. All registered users have been contacted to review and update their information. Jersey Fresh also exhibited at the USDA/NJDA School Lunch Conference coordinated by the Food and Nutrition Division that took place in December. The Division also continues to plan for the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials (NAAMO) conference to be held in New Jersey in July.

Spotted Lanternfly Outreach – Plant Industry Division staff reported that the Spotted Lanternfly Outreach campaign featured more than 76 million public impressions following campaigns on NJ Transit Busses, Beach Boat Billboards, Digital Online Advertisements and Digital Billboards on major transportation corridors.

School Nutrition – Food and Nutrition Division specialists are preparing for spring training sessions on the Community Eligibility Provision and New Sponsors Training series. Contract staff have also been providing various training sessions, including recent ones for Food Service Management Companies and Commercial Vendors on registration. Upcoming training sessions will focus on key aspects of Requests

for Proposal (RFPs) for Food Service Management Companies in specific key contract requirements. The Electronic Contract Approval System (ECAS) opened February 1 for school district representatives initiating a Request for Proposal to submit the documentation on April 1 for school district representatives renewing their contracts

FFA State Officer School – The Agricultural and Natural Resources Division’s Office of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Education had 26 FFA members, three advisors and six parents attend State Officer Candidates’ School on January 25. This event prepares potential state officer candidates and nominating committee members for the state officer selection process. The conference provides insight for each round and covers areas such as behavioral interviewing, conversation skills and key messages. State officer candidates will participate in practice selection process rounds and potential nominating committee members will participate in an orientation to the process. Additionally, parents and advisors will attend a workshop presented by State staff on what a year of service would look like for their child or student.

Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory – During December, the Division’s Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory (AHDL) performed and/or reported 964 and 1061 tests in November and December 2024, respectively. The chart below provides an overview of the number of major tests performed and/or reported by the AHDL from October 2024 through December 2024.

Test	October 2024	November 2024	December 2024
Aerobic/Anaerobic/Bacterial Culture	154	45	79
Avian Influenza	330	295	219
Aquatic Virus Isolation and PCR	42	7	1
Brucellosis	12	6	13
Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM)	115	114	135
Fecal Parasite Examination	38	6	17
E. coli	30	18	14
Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA)	21	17	23
Equine Infectious Anemia	452	270	306
Johnes (Culture, ELISA, and PCR)	0	5	1
Pathology Carcass Examinations	35	29	29
Pathology Slides Examinations	80	71	102
Salmonella (Animal Food and Clinical)	40	23	15

Lymantria Dispar Dispar (LDD – formerly known as Gypsy Moth) Treatment Plan – A total of five municipalities in Passaic and Sussex Counties declined to participate in this year’s aerial LDD treatment program, reducing the initial proposed treatment acreage by 16,179 acres, bringing the new 2025 LDD treatment program to 7,581 acres of both single and double applications in nine municipalities in Burlington, Cape May, Morris and Sussex Counties.

Dairy Processing – Work continues with nine new or existing processors at various steps of grant applications or building projects. One new project is going through initial inspection and had hoped to be processing by end of December. Two new operations have inquired into steps to establish on-farm cow milk processing. One new, small ruminant is also requesting technical support. Others have expressed an interest in alternative dairy production. NJDA staff is re-evaluating an alternative dairy development project which would fall under an innovation center once established.