

# **2024**

# **New Jersey Farm**

# **Bureau Policies**

**Adopted by the delegates to the New Jersey  
Farm Bureau 105<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**



***...because agriculture matters!***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
<a href="#">FARM VIABILITY</a> .....	5
<a href="#">AG RETENTION AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION</a> .....	6
<a href="#">SOIL DISTURBANCE/PROTECTION</a> .....	11
<a href="#">THE THREAT TO AGRICULTURE FROM INVASIVE AND NOXIOUS SPECIES</a> .....	14
<a href="#">WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT</a> .....	17
<a href="#">WHITE-TAILED DEER</a> .....	19
<a href="#">MINIMUM WAGE/LABOR SUPPLY AND MANAGEMENT</a> .....	20
<a href="#">TRUCKING/MOTOR VEHICLE REGULATIONS</a> .....	24
<a href="#">WATER QUALITY REGULATION/WATERSHED PLANNING ISSUES</a> .....	26
<a href="#">NJAES AND THE COMMITMENT TO PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE</a> .....	28
<a href="#">NJAES BOARD OF MANAGERS</a> .....	30
<a href="#">FOOD SAFETY</a> .....	32
<a href="#">BIOSECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT</a> .....	34
<a href="#">EQUINE INDUSTRY</a> .....	35
<a href="#">AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT</a> .....	37
<a href="#">INDUSTRIAL HEMP PRODUCTION</a> .....	37
<a href="#">USDA</a> .....	38
<a href="#">CLIMATE RESPONSE AND ADAPTATION</a> .....	42
<a href="#">RENEWABLE ENERGY</a> .....	44
<a href="#">ENERGY USE ON FARMS</a> .....	45
<a href="#">LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY SUPPORT</a> .....	46
<a href="#">ANIMAL CARE</a> .....	48
<a href="#">FDA FEED DIRECTIVE</a> .....	49
<a href="#">BUILDING CODES</a> .....	49
<a href="#">RIGHT TO FARM</a> .....	50
<a href="#">TAXATION ISSUES</a> .....	54
<a href="#">WIC AND SFMN PROGRAMS</a> .....	55
<a href="#">NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BUDGET</a> .....	56
<a href="#">FOOD, AGRICULTURE &amp; NATURAL RESOURCES EDUCATION &amp; FFA</a> .....	57
<a href="#">COMMUNICATION</a> .....	58
<a href="#">NEW JERSEY AG IN THE CLASSROOM</a> .....	59
<a href="#">HIGHLANDS</a> .....	59
<a href="#">EMINENT DOMAIN</a> .....	61
<a href="#">RELIEF FROM EXCESSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS</a> .....	61
<a href="#">U.S. CLEAN WATER ACT</a> .....	62

<a href="#"><u>TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR) AND NONCONTIGUOUS CLUSTERING</u></a> .....	64
<a href="#"><u>LAND USE REGULATION</u></a> .....	65
<a href="#"><u>BEEKEEPING INDUSTRY</u></a> .....	66
<a href="#"><u>OFFSHORE ENERGY</u></a> .....	67
<a href="#"><u>WINE INDUSTRY SUPPORT</u></a> .....	68
<a href="#"><u>MARKETING – JERSEY FRESH/LOCALLY GROWN</u></a> .....	68
<a href="#"><u>MOUNT LAUREL DOCTRINE (COAH) &amp; AFFORDABLE HOUSING</u></a> .....	69
<a href="#"><u>ON-FARM BREWING AND CRAFT DISTILLERY</u></a> .....	69
<a href="#"><u>UTILITY LINE MAINTENANCE &amp; OTHER EFFECTS OF LINE DEVELOPMENT/EXTENSION</u></a> .....	70
<a href="#"><u>NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (NJALDP)</u></a> .....	71
<a href="#"><u>CONSERVATION DISTRICTS</u></a> .....	71
<a href="#"><u>GOVERNANCE BY INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM, EMERGENCY RULES &amp; EXEC. ORDER</u></a> .....	72
<a href="#"><u>FARMING ON PUBLIC LANDS</u></a> .....	73
<a href="#"><u>U.S. SOD PROMOTION PROGRAM</u></a> .....	74
<a href="#"><u>WAREHOUSES &amp; REDEVELOPMENT PLANS ON FARMLAND</u></a> .....	74
<a href="#"><u>CYBERCRIME IN AGRIBUSINESS</u></a> .....	75
<a href="#"><u>FILL DIRT ON FARMS</u></a> .....	76
<a href="#"><u>TRESPASS/VANDALISM</u></a> .....	76
<a href="#"><u>TRADE PRACTICES/PRODUCE PRICES</u></a> .....	77
<a href="#"><u>BIO-ENGINEERED FOODS</u></a> .....	78
<a href="#"><u>WATER SUPPLY</u></a> .....	79
<a href="#"><u>INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM) FUNDING</u></a> .....	80
<a href="#"><u>HUNGER INITIATIVE/GLEANING</u></a> .....	81
<a href="#"><u>COMMUNICATION WITH THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY</u></a> .....	82
<a href="#"><u>AG CONVENTION/STATE BOARD OF AG APPOINTMENTS</u></a> .....	83
<a href="#"><u>DAIRY</u></a> .....	84
<a href="#"><u>ATTORNEY FEE SHIFTING</u></a> .....	85
<a href="#"><u>BROADBAND INTERNET/TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN RURAL AREAS OF NJ</u></a> .....	85
<a href="#"><u>THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT</u></a> .....	86
<a href="#"><u>PRODUCT DISPARAGEMENT</u></a> .....	86
<a href="#"><u>STATE PURCHASE OF NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS</u></a> .....	87
<a href="#"><u>AMERICAN FARM BUREAU</u></a> .....	88
<a href="#"><u>POLICY IMPLEMENTATION</u></a> .....	88
<a href="#"><u>WETLANDS</u></a> .....	88
<a href="#"><u>COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKETS</u></a> .....	89
<a href="#"><u>SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE</u></a> .....	89
<a href="#"><u>PROBLEM SOLVING SERVICES</u></a> .....	90

<a href="#"><u>PLASTIC BAG BAN</u></a> .....	90
<a href="#"><u>FARMLAND ASSESSMENT</u></a> .....	91
<a href="#"><u>SERVICE ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION</u></a> .....	93
<a href="#"><u>NURSERY AND PLANT INSPECTIONS</u></a> .....	93
<a href="#"><u>COMMERCIAL FISHING</u></a> .....	94
<a href="#"><u>SEAFOOD GLEANING PROGRAM</u></a> .....	95
<a href="#"><u>SALES TAX ISSUES</u></a> .....	97
<a href="#"><u>ASPHALT MILLINGS</u></a> .....	97
<a href="#"><u>PINELANDS</u></a> .....	97
<a href="#"><u>MANDATED CONSERVATION EASEMENT DEED RESTRICTIONS</u></a> .....	100
<a href="#"><u>DEER FARMING</u></a> .....	100
<a href="#"><u>HISTORIC PRESERVATION</u></a> .....	101
<a href="#"><u>BRIDGE CHANGES AND ROAD WIDENING</u></a> .....	101
<a href="#"><u>HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX/AGRITOURISM</u></a> .....	102
<a href="#"><u>AGRITOURISM LIABILITY PROTECTION ACT</u></a> .....	102
<a href="#"><u>PROPERTY RIGHTS</u></a> .....	102
<a href="#"><u>USE OF FOOD BY-PRODUCTS/SOURCE SEPARATED FOOD WASTE</u></a> .....	103
<a href="#"><u>HISTORIC PESTICIDES</u></a> .....	104
<a href="#"><u>DEFINING 'FARM MARKETS'</u></a> .....	104
<a href="#"><u>COUNTY BOARDS OF AGRICULTURE</u></a> .....	104
<a href="#"><u>MASTER GARDENERS</u></a> .....	105
<a href="#"><u>BISON PRODUCTION AND INSPECTION</u></a> .....	105
<a href="#"><u>BEEF PROMOTION</u></a> .....	105
<a href="#"><u>LITIGATION POOL</u></a> .....	105
<a href="#"><u>FARM BUREAU POLITICAL POSITION</u></a> .....	106
<a href="#"><u>PLANT-BASED AND CELL-BASED ALTERNATIVES</u></a> .....	106

## **FARM VIABILITY (2023)**

As the top-ranked policy for Farm Bureau in 2023, the farm viability issue was a central topic throughout the year. Consistent with the directive from the delegates, the NJ Ag Experiment Station did indeed lead the way by formalizing a study group that has become the center of attention regarding the various economic pressure factors affecting profitability for production agriculture in the state.

NJAES conducted five farmer roundtable sessions on a regional basis; one with young farmers was held online. Extensive background data collection/analysis and review of pertinent ag statutes, regulations and policies were undertaken. Meetings with the three USDA state directors were held to discuss access to those programs for accessibility/collaboration. Briefings on a tentative outlook on recommendations were given to the leadership at the NJDA, NJFB and SBOA members. A brief written synopsis of all activities is in the offing for use during fall-winter farm policy meetings.

Additionally, Farm Bureau reached out to the Senate Economic Growth Committee and worked with its chairwoman and staff to hold a public meeting on farm viability. That took place on December 15, 2022 during the current legislative session, and included appearances by five farmers representing a cross-section of ag sectors. The morning-long hearing brought the viability issue to the attention of legislative policymakers, who expressed interest and support for the informed testimonials provided by the farmers.

The economic pressures now on New Jersey farmers and indeed on farmers throughout the country are significant and constantly increasing. Conditions in marketing structures, worldwide competition and production costs continue to squeeze the farm producer and regulatory intervention is a constant threat.

Farm viability shall be the overall policy orientation for Farm Bureau as an organization. This should unify ongoing objectives toward a goal of seeking improvements in the profitability of farming operations. This theme also recognizes that there are massive changes underway throughout the industry, some of which may require some re-training and business plan evaluation by farmers. It may also mean a greater emphasis on coordinated action among farmers on economic and financial issues.

Farm Bureau works to protect its membership from those things that can negatively impact farm viability, including excessive government regulation, burdensome taxes, wildlife damage, heavy-handed land use regulation, and invasive pests such as the spotted lantern fly.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall take a leadership role in stressing the importance of farm viability. Building on current and updated policies, New Jersey Farm Bureau will:

- Expand plans for new farm business development plans like new use agriculture and renewable fuels;  
Continue its support of Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences/NJAES and work toward their greater support for production agriculture;
- Aggressively explore Internet and e-commerce opportunities; and
- Aggressively pursue the Board of Public Utilities to include renewable energy under their grant program;
- Urge the development of factual and realistic economic and agricultural impact

statements, as required by law, for all rule proposals by all New Jersey agencies.

Notwithstanding the jolts to farm economics that can arise, state government policy in New Jersey in the past has been supportive of taking actions that boost farm viability. The expression of that sentiment was embedded in the Right to Farm Act (“The Legislature finds and declares that: the retention of agricultural activities would serve the best interest of all citizens of this State by insuring the numerous social, economic and environmental benefits which accrue from one of the largest industries in the Garden State.”) (see 4:1C-2a) in 1981. Farmland assessment, exemption from water use fees and priority use during drought situations, sales tax exemption for production-related equipment, financial support for the Agricultural Experiment Station, U-Pick limited liability are just a few examples of these policies that in most cases were advocated by New Jersey Farm Bureau.

Several new ideas for farm industry-wide viability benefits were raised in the debate of the minimum wage carve out. Among them were:

- expanded property tax exemption for single purpose ag structures.
- refundable tax credits for ag labor housing and transportation expenses.
- Accelerated depreciation allowances for capital expenses (similar to federal allowances under Sec. 179).
- ag labor job retention grants from the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development.
- ag labor housing regulation consistency.
- others.

### **AG RETENTION/FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM** (2023)

The preservation of farmland is a benefit to all residents of the State. Once farmland is preserved, it not only remains actively used for production agriculture, it provides for a local supply of fresh farm products, water recharge, scenic vistas and also remains on the local tax rolls with no taxpayer maintenance costs. To date, the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) has preserved over 2,845 farms totaling over 250,000 acres. The SADC is celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the farmland preservation program in 2023.

In general, Farm Bureau continues to support the following overarching precepts as they relate to the farmland preservation program:

- The Deed of Easement is a contract between the landowner and the SADC which severs specific rights from the land. The severance of rights is complete at the time of execution of the Deed of Easement. The SADC may not unilaterally change the nature of the rights severed after-the-fact, even if it could be seen as beneficial to the SADC’s Farmland Preservation program to do so.
- The Deed of Easement is itself not a source for SADC authority to adopt regulations. Regulations can be developed only pursuant to specific authorizing statutes, in this case the Ag Retention and Development Act and the Right to Farm Act.

In the upcoming year Farm Bureau shall:

- Since 2020, the “Preserve New Jersey Act” has permanent funding allocations for constitutionally dedicated CBT revenue at 31%, offering consistent funding year to year in

support of SADC acquisitions and stewardship. Four percent of funds are available for stewardship activities, and the definition of “stewardship activity” was changed to include projects that improve the resiliency of farmland soil. Changes were also made to allow qualified farms preserved through the HDC and PDC programs to be eligible for stewardship funding and it extends the dual appraisal provision for qualifying landowners in the Highlands an additional five years until June 30, 2024. NJFB supported this legislation and will continue to monitor its implementation.

- Expand stewardship activity funding to include equipment and services for climate-smart and precision agriculture.
- Support dedicating a specific percentage of the CBT as a permanent funding source for the purchase of Pinelands and Highlands development credits.
- Continue to monitor the SADC’s interpretation of statutes and rules to ensure that flexibility is maintained to ensure future viability.
- Aggressively oppose the SADC when it attempts to over-regulate preserved farmland beyond the scope of the deed of easement and remind SADC that when farmland is acquired, only the development rights are severed, not the right to conduct commonly accepted farming practices including those that assist in marketing the output of the farm.
- Urge the SADC to scrutinize and discourage the practice of counties and townships transferring farmland preservation funds, historic preservation and open space preservation funds to discretionary accounts for the purposes of “other than” preservation and land acquisition applications, unless those funds are used for conservation practices consistent with the farmland preservation programs.
- Encourage the SADC to improve communication with the farm community.
- Urge the SADC to be more responsive to and better communicate with preserved farm landowners who are trying to navigate the increasingly complex policies impacting them.
- Urge the SADC to be more responsive to CADB administrators.
- Encourage every county and municipality with active agricultural land to participate in the SADC’s Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Planning Process. This program allows counties and municipalities to focus preservation efforts on targeted farms and allows for more efficient processing and funding of approved projects.
- Urge the SADC to not fund Planning Incentive Grants (PIGs) for municipalities that persist in down-zoning farmland despite its negative effects on the viability of the very farm operations the town is showing their interest in protecting. In addition, municipalities enrolled in PIG programs that demonstrate a lack of support for the business of agriculture should lose their PIG funding.
- Ensure that the four farmer member positions and alternate farmer member positions on the SADC be promptly appointed (within 90 days) when there are vacancies. Farm Bureau shall work to ensure that the State Board of Agriculture selects all the nominees that are recommended to the Governor for positions on this board and that they meet the criteria set forth in the Right to Farm Act.
- Support the development of stronger incentives and more funding for the eight-year program.
- Support an amendment to IRS Code 2032A, so that farmers who participate in both the federal farm estate tax program and a state or local farmland preservation program are not penalized financially.
- Work to ensure that all farmland purchased through other programs (i.e. Green Acres, Highlands TDR program) is actively farmed.

- Urge the SADC to deny state preservation funding to municipalities that preserve farmland in partnership with conservation groups that place burdensome restrictions on the farmland.
- Support an elimination of the capital gains tax on income from the permanent preservation of farmland.
- Urge the denial of SADC funding to municipalities that refuse to allow an open bid process in auctions of preserved farmland whereby any farmer has an equal opportunity to bid on the farm.
- Support a legislative change to the Agriculture Development and Retention Act to require that preserved farms going forward be “actively devoted to a commercial agricultural or horticultural use, including activities related to marketing the output of the farm” not just “available for farming.” While this change may not prevent non-farmers from purchasing preserved farmland, it will increase opportunities for New Jersey farmers to lease and farm the properties as part of their overall farm operations. This change will also help address the issue of preserved farmland laying fallow or growing up in invasive species. A legislative change of this language must include direction to the SADC that their interpretation must allow for flexibility so as not to impede the future viability of the farm or the personal enjoyment of the property by the owner of the preserved land.
- Urge the SADC to allocate and distribute farmland preservation funds more equitably to applications in all counties regardless of any economic, political or financial considerations or due to the statewide variation of costs for land acquisition. The timely preservation of open space and farmland is a critical concern in the urban and suburban areas of New Jersey. CADBs have determined their agriculture development areas, ranked their farm preservation applications, targeted the most productive farms for preservation in their respective counties, approved and steadfastly collected their local open space preservation taxes, and planned for the long-term viability and profitability of current and new agribusinesses. Yet, to date there is an indication that many farm preservation applications in urban counties are neither being reviewed in a timely manner nor are they being ranked favorably by the SADC. Passaic County is currently unable to tap into SADC preservation funds because the state criteria are inept for urban farming counties. NJFB urges the SADC to look into this issue and modify its criteria for urban counties.
- Morris County (and others in the Highlands) have more forest than tillable acreage on their farms, which also causes them to lose out on SADC preservation funds because it does not meet the tillable acreage percentage criteria. NJFB urges the SADC to look into this issue and modify the farmland preservation program to include a forestry acquisition preservation program. Forestry activities including preparation and implementation of forest management plans should also be included as part of SADC’s stewardship grants.
- Monitor the use of federal program dollars on preserved farmland where it may be taking large amounts of acreage out of agricultural production. Farm Bureau must work with organizations such as the NJ Audubon Society to encourage them to promote such set-aside federal programs only on marginal farmland.
- Work with the SADC to educate the non-profit organizations involved in preserving farmland about agriculture in New Jersey. Many of these non-profit organizations are taking preserved farmland out of production because of a misunderstanding of the agricultural practices being used.
- Work with SADC staff to ensure that counties and municipalities administer preserved farmland held by government entities or non-profit organizations in ways that are supportive of production agriculture, on the preserved farmland, and do not negatively impact adjacent farmland.



- Urge all municipalities and counties, when making land use decisions for infrastructure on preserved farms (ie: bridge and road maintenance), to consider the impact of those decisions on the future viability of the farms in their community.
- Investigate concerns raised by the equine industry about inadequate access to preservation funds for equine operations that include indoor/outdoor riding arenas, boarding facilities and other like structures. This should include a review of whether case-specific considerations of landowner requests for preservation funds to acquire not only pasturelands on such operations, but also land under any facilities or structures associated with the raising, breeding, care or training of equine animals should also be considered by SADC when making determinations about preservation applications.
- Encourage the SADC to continue to provide funds for deer fencing while developing the stewardship program for preserved farms. NJFB would like to see the rules changed to include lease-holding preserved farm operators as “established farmers” so that they can be eligible for grant funding as well. NJFB also seeks a rule change to make these funds available to all deed restricted farms, regardless of what method of preservation. NJFB seeks to remove the monetary per acre limit and increase allowable project costs.
- Allow SADC to assist CADBs with their administrative responsibilities when they do not have adequate staffing.
- Support an alternate appraisal method for the purchase of farmland that can compete with offers being made by solar/warehouse/pipeline developers.

Farm Bureau believes farmland preservation deed restrictions should be limited to the restriction against development for which the property owner is being paid, where development is defined as the construction of a residential or other non-agricultural structure. (Existing deed restriction contracts are as they read.) All non-development economically beneficial land uses should be allowed, within reason, when such uses promote and enhance the overall agricultural profitability of the farm. The opportunities afforded by ancillary revenues on farmland are imperative for sustained agricultural viability.

#### Preservation in the Pinelands

New Jersey Farm Bureau should maintain its resolve on the issue of fair compensation for preservation in the Pinelands. Farm Bureau should do this by providing legal advice and financial resources in order to maintain the adopted Pinelands valuation formula. Farm Bureau supports and encourages the Pinelands Commission in its efforts to make funds available for the purchase of farmland preservation easements through the farmland preservation program. Farm Bureau shall monitor the distribution of and ensure the current allocation of the funds under the Garden State Preservation Trust Act and any other future preservation program to ensure that it reflects the geographic diversity of the state to the maximum extent practicable and feasible.

#### Preservation in the Highlands

Farm Bureau shall work with the Legislature to enact a long term, stable source of funding to compensate Highlands landowners. This should include the option of imposing a water fee on the users of Highlands water. Farm Bureau supports putting an emphasis on funding farmland preservation in the Highlands Preservation Area. Any new dollars from a dedicated funding source should be available for any farm seeking preservation in the entire Highlands region.

The Highlands dual-appraisal provision expired in June of 2014 and was later extended through June of 2019. The “Preserve New Jersey Act” was amended in 2019, which supplemented the dual appraisal provision for qualifying landowners in the Highlands, extending an additional five

years until June 30, 2024. Farm Bureau should ensure that, while the rules and zoning of January 1, 2004 are used to derive one appraisal, the landowner is not denied the benefit of any long-term appreciation of value that land with similar original zoning outside the Highlands would enjoy.

There is currently a rule in the Highlands regulations that stipulates that once a farm's ownership changes hands that it no longer qualifies for dual appraisal. This rule arbitrarily disqualifies farms from the program and is a deterrent to potential buyers who are interested in preservation, thereby having a negative impact on land values. The dual appraisal feature should remain with the land and not be lost with a change of ownership. Farm Bureau recommends this rule be eliminated.

#### Eminent Domain to Preserve Land

The farmland preservation program has always been a voluntary program. New Jersey Farm Bureau strongly opposes the use of eminent domain as a means of farmland preservation and urges the State Agriculture Development Committee not to reimburse counties or municipalities for their costs in taking lands in this manner. The CADB should use its preservation funds to help protect landowners from eminent domain.

#### Viability of Preserved Farms

There is a concern emerging that with the increase in land preservation, viability issues for New Jersey farms still remain. Therefore, we call upon the SADC and the Administration to consider viability-type incentives for all farm properties.

Further, Farm Bureau urges the SADC to incorporate flexibility and site-specific considerations into any rules governing activities on preserved farmland so as not to be a hindrance to farm viability.

The earliest pioneers of the Farmland Preservation program are facing hurdles in maintaining viability because they often do not have any areas excepted out of the deed of easement. Exception areas allow a preserved farm owner to have flexibility in that area of the farm to do activities that may not be allowable on the portions of the farm that fall under the deed of easement. Farm Bureau shall work with the Legislature to enact legislation that would allow the owners of the earliest preserved farms that were not given the opportunity to take an exception area, the option to buy back a small area of the preserved farm as a non-severable exception area.

With the passage of the Rural Micro Enterprise Act, New Jersey Farm Bureau should make sure the SADC rules and regulations for the program encourage and are broadly applicable for the types of businesses and activities that are the intent of the legislation and that other preserved farms have easy access to those farm related activities.

One increasingly popular viability option for New Jersey farmers is to partake in on-farm events. Through site-specific cases, the SADC has taken the position that weddings and other life celebratory events on farmland do not qualify for Right to Farm protection and are not allowable under the deed of easement. Farm Bureau believes that weddings and other life celebratory events may be considered acceptable under the deed of easement on preserved farms if there is a relationship to marketing the agricultural output of the farm. This should also be the standard when looking at protecting these activities on non-preserved farms and farms other than wineries.

A law to allow a specific number of special occasion events (SOE) on preserved farms was enacted in the spring of 2023. The first season of hosting these events is concluding, and Rutgers NJAES has been charged with monitoring the success of the program, with input from the SADC. NJFB encourages this evaluation to maximize SOE opportunities and ensure compliance with local towns and the DOE and will monitor the process.

Additionally, NJFB encourages the SADC to adopt an AMP for alcohol-based agritourism to protect on-farm businesses such as wineries, breweries, distilleries, cideries and meaderies who are currently hosting events. The SADC should include agricultural stakeholders in the AMP-drafting process.

#### Renewable Energy on Preserved Farmland

It is now law that installations of solar, wind or biomass energy generation systems on preserved and non-preserved farms that meet certain criteria are eligible for Right to Farm Protection and Farmland Assessment. Many preserved farms have rock ledges, unused gravel pits, old barnyards and other areas that are not farmed. In some cases, these unused or underused areas would be more suitable for solar or wind energy installations than other actively farmed portions of the preserved farm. As such, NJFB shall encourage the SADC to streamline the approval process for installations sited in these non-farmable areas on preserved farmland. It has become extremely onerous for some preserved farm owners to get all the necessary approvals to erect allowable solar arrays on any portion of their farm. NJFB supports streamlining this process that creates undue burden on the preserved farm owner. NJFB also supports virtual net metering for multiple electrical services where there are solar installations on farms. NJFB also supports a change to the law that allows solar on preserved farms to exclude exception areas from the regulations.

#### **SOIL DISTURBANCE/PROTECTION** (2023)

The original proposal from SADC staff to impose new restrictions on "soil disturbance" activities on preserved farmland, later re-named "soil protection standards," was tabled in favor of additional dialogue with agricultural stakeholders. A subcommittee of such stakeholders, commissioned by the State Board of Agriculture, convened to express its dissatisfaction with the original proposal and set forth its priorities for consideration if the topic of soil disturbance continues to be evaluated by SADC.

The subcommittee's report included the following principles, which NJFB continues to support:

1. The Deed of Easement (DOE) is a contract between the landowner and the SADC which severs specific rights from the land. The severance of rights is complete at the time of execution of the Deed of Easement. The SADC may not unilaterally change the nature of the rights severed after-the-fact, even if it could be seen as beneficial to the SADC's Farmland Preservation program to do so.
2. The Deed of Easement is itself not a source for SADC authority to adopt regulations. Regulations can be developed only pursuant to specific authorizing statutes, in this case the ARDA and the Right to Farm Act.
3. The Deed of Easement prohibits non-agricultural development of the Easement Premises but does not prohibit agricultural development. The DOE does not generally require prior approval of agricultural development by the SADC.

4. In addition to encouraging development of a vibrant agricultural industry, the ARDA also seeks to retain a land base for future agricultural use. The SADC should encourage practices to preserve precious soils and the capability of soils for future use in agricultural production. Due to the wide variety of soil types, structures and elevations in New Jersey, including muck, sand, clay, loam etc., the SADC must recognize that every farm is different, both in the nature of the land, and in its farming business, so no single standard or limit can work always on every farm throughout the State. Nevertheless, some guiding principles can be readily agreed:
  - a. Soil, if not being used or being removed as a part of an agricultural purpose, shall be stored on farm for current or future use with proper management.
  - b. When top soil is moved, any mixing with rock and other such materials must be merely incidental to avoid causing significant harm or unreasonable damage to the land's capacity for growing agricultural crops.
  - c. When soils are banked, detailed farm conservation plans such as those developed by NRCS and approved by Soil Conservation Districts must be in place for sediment control and prevention of soil erosion, and to assure soil retention on farm. Good practices will also afford consideration to and protect adjoining property owners from unwarranted runoff and silt deposition.
  - d. Agricultural development permitted under the DOE may include practices of deep cut and fill when necessary for the agricultural purposes, with the approval of the NRCS and or Soil Conservation Service.
  - e. It is important for landowners to determine how to continue their farming operations in a sustainable manner when agricultural development does take place on particular farms. Accordingly, while the SADC should offer guidance and encourage buildings and other significant soil disturbance to take place in already disturbed areas and areas of lesser agricultural soils, or where reclamation is likely to be less difficult, the conclusions will be reached by landowners after review of all of these circumstances.
  - f. The SADC should encourage and help develop understanding of building methods that make restoration of soils to agricultural production most feasible (such as avoiding instrumental compaction and encouraging use of geotextiles under stone). Development of such responsible management practices can be a constructive channel for the concerns about continuing availability for agricultural use of land generally and preserved land in particular.
5. Farming, like any business, seeks certainty and timeliness. Nonetheless, it is recognized that, there likely are practices that could limit the future use of land and soils for agriculture and could be actionable for enforcement under the DOE. The SADC should seek input from all other agricultural interest groups such as the State Board, NRCS, Farm Bureau, academic experts and specific producer groups, as the SADC develops policy and regulatory initiatives. The SADC should timely address agricultural development matters brought forward by landowners, CADB's, or others. The State Board should also keep active a subcommittee to advise the Board on an ongoing basis about these issues arising at the SADC.

In October 2016, the Appellate Division of Superior Court issued a decision on the point of having standards governing the preservation program's deed of easement (DOE). The ruling in the Quaker Valley Greenhouse case also set aside previous court decisions in the case that endorsed SADC sanctions against the greenhouse operator. In doing so, the new court opinion noted the

“tension” between the sometimes-competing objectives in the DOE of simple land conservation and seeking reasonable economic objectives of the farm. The court remanded the nine-year old case back to Superior Court for a new consideration of the facts of the case.

In November of 2016, the SADC filed an appeal of this decision despite Farm Bureau’s urging that it seek mediation with the defendant. The Supreme Court granted certification on March 17, 2017. Farm Bureau filed a motion to file an amicus brief in May, contending that the SADC has no enforcement authority until it adopts guidelines/standards for soil disturbance on preserved farmland. That motion was granted.

The case was argued before the Supreme Court on January 2, 2018 and then decided in a 12-page decision on August 14, 2018. The court reversed the judgment of the Appellate Division and ruled in favor of the SADC’s enforcement action against Quaker Valley Farms despite the absence of advisory standards for soil disturbance. The court noted that these standards have “a dual purpose: to strengthen the agricultural industry and to preserve farmland. Both are important goals; neither is subordinate to the other.” It further stated farmers are entitled to sufficiently definite guidance by the SADC so that administrative decision-making is fair and predictable.

Farm Bureau joins the State Board of Agriculture in urging the SADC to adopt non-regulatory standards for soil protection in the deeds of easement that embraces the principles stated in the court decisions and original legislation.

During 2023 the SADC and State Board of Agriculture subcommittees met numerous times to try to come to a resolution for an adequate relief valve for preserved farms wanting to expand. The idea of a waiver process was floated. Unfortunately, no consensus was reached.

The proposed draft soil protection standards were published in the New Jersey Register in August of 2023, at which time preserved farm landowners were first notified of the proposed regulations through the mailing of a letter and maps from the SADC outlining the disturbance on every preserved farm. There were discrepancies found with many of the maps, and a large number of preserved farm owners did not receive them as expected. Farm Bureau agrees with the preserved farm criticisms that round hay-bales, run-in sheds and other farm feed/animal equipment that can be moved should not count as disturbance.

At request of the State Board of Agriculture, the comment period for SPS has been extended twice until the end of February 2024. All of the County Boards of Agriculture and over a dozen CADBs have already submitted comments in opposition to the retroactivity feature of these rules. NJFB stands with its members who believe these rules are unfair and that they will jeopardize the viability of their operations and the future of the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP). The SADC has been meeting with County Boards of Agriculture to explain their proposal and garner feedback. NJFB supports the continuation of this process and encourages more interaction with the ag community as to the possibility of an acceptable alternative that will support their future operations.

New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the SADC to withdraw the current proposal, because it is unworkable and cannot be fixed. The proposal is in direct contradiction to the prime mission of the SADC which states, “to lead in the preservation of New Jersey’s farmland, and to maintain the viability of agriculture in the state.”

In place of the current proposal, new soil protection guidelines should be developed in consultation with NJFB, NJDA, State Soil Conservation Committee, SADC, NRCS and Rutgers Cooperative Extension, as well as preserved farm owners.

It is hoped that the SADC will work collaboratively with the State Board of Agriculture and others including Farm Bureau to seek an alternative means of adopting the SPS that does not infringe on the existing deeds of easement currently in force.

### **THE THREAT TO AGRICULTURE FROM INVASIVE AND NOXIOUS SPECIES (2023)**

Land upon which farming has stopped, whether row crops, grains or orchards, quickly grows up in volunteer vegetation that can be invasive and even noxious to crop plants. NJ's woodlands too have become infested with invasive, alien plants resistant to deer depredation, some of which have been valuable ornamental species grown in NJ nurseries, especially for use in urban situations.

Weather problems, depressed market conditions and/or other problems have caused the termination of some fruit farm operations in recent years. Fruit orchards, and other open spaces, when neglected or abandoned, can become a significant problem as a source of disease and pests to neighboring farms. The NJDA has organized a New Jersey response to a growing national movement to protect agricultural producers from the biological harm of invasive pests: insects, diseases and weeds that have found new pathways into agricultural and horticultural crops. The increase in global trade is a major contributor to the problem. By requiring the NJDOT, NJTA, and the SJTA to prioritize the use of native vegetation for landscaping, land management, reforestation, and habitat restoration, we can reduce the quantity of non-native species being transported by ship or airplane into the American market.

The NJ nursery industry is particularly at risk from invasive species in two respects. First, noxious weeds can spread to nursery stock, increasing the need for costly herbicides or cultivation. Second, parties concerned about the potentially harmful ecological effects of the widely spread nonnative species have developed a very long list of plants that users could be mandated to avoid planting.

NJFB should continue to work on favorable amendments in the invasive species bill that would permanently establish the New Jersey Invasive Species Council and require the permanently established council to review and revise the 2009 New Jersey Strategic Management Plan for Invasive Species, establish initial comprehensive lists of invasive species and likely invasive species, develop procedures and provide recommendations for the designation of new invasive species in New Jersey, and perform various other tasks related to the management of invasive species in the State.

Regarding noxious weeds, abandoned orchards, and other neglected public open spaces. The New Jersey Farm Bureau should encourage the Department of Agriculture and the State DEP to enforce the laws that are in place to control invasive species that are found growing in the state.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau will call upon all public open space program administrators to take account of neglected/abandoned orchards and other neglected properties in the review and consideration of land acquisition projects. Ornamental fruit trees owned by private nonfarm landowners are more prevalent now than production orchards and pose a similar risk. Those

organizations that purchase or assume control of these properties should be required to manage the properties for invasive weed control.

New Jersey Farm Bureau recommends all publicly owned open space, including the increasing number of greenways and farmlands, must be required to develop noxious and invasive weed management plans that require those lands to be maintained in such a way as to prevent it from harboring invasive insects and noxious weeds that become a nuisance to neighboring properties. The management plan could include timely mowing or herbicide control prior to the establishment of seeds to prevent the spread of weeds to neighboring properties.

NJFB supports a legislative change that would require municipalities, counties, and state agencies and non-profit landowners to adopt Best Management Practices (BMP's), such as timely mowing schedules, which would discourage and prevent invasive weeds from growing to a maturity, allowing seeds to spread to nearby farm fields and encourages the planting of flora that would out compete those invasive species. Current laws addressing thistle alone are not sufficient to protect farms from other invasive species and needs to be expanded to include mare's tail, and other invasive weed species as well. This is becoming an increasing nuisance due to lack of control in public areas.

The NJDA currently has the authority to control any disease or pest threat if determined by the State Board of Agriculture that it is dangerous to plants or humans. An example of this would be the authority used to control the Asian Longhorn Beetle and the spotted wing drosophila. Farm Bureau shall seek legislation to ensure that the authority to enforce proper land maintenance related to plants, animals, and diseases rests with the NJDA.

The Farm Bureau should also seek legislation that would shift the removal expense to the public or private owner of the property. It should also research other means of control such as model ordinances that help local health departments control such noxious species as poison ivy.

Since the recent discovery of the invasive Asian longhorn tick in New Jersey, there is a heightened concern since the tick is known to carry various diseases which could affect humans, livestock as well as pets. The NJFB should support legislation to include tick control as part of the county mosquito control department's mission. The legislation needs to include a mandate for research to develop effective tick control methods and appropriate funding to meet the new mandate.

### Stink Bugs

Instances of BMSB (brown marmorated stink bug) *Halyomorpha halys* control has improved with insecticides and use of biological controls, it is imperative that the monitoring for BMSB continues. Current trends indicate that populations of BMSB will continue to spread and increase. As such, it is essential that action continue to curb the prevalence of this species.

USDA APHIS is part of an EPA - USDA task force, led by the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS). ARS is actively researching and coordinating research with cooperators on the best pesticides to control BMSB, along with trapping and timing tools. ARS also has brought in potential biological control agents for BMSB from abroad, which are currently being tested for host specificity in a quarantine facility in Newark, DE. EPA is also part of the task force and promptly issues the appropriate labels for BMSB-related insecticide applications under Section 18.

NJDA has established a BMSB colony in the Philip Alampi Beneficial Insect Lab and is ready to work with any parasitoids the USDA ARS allows for release. The colony is in its 19th generation. The NJDA currently supplies the USDA ARS Newark lab with BMSB nymphs and adults as well as eggs to Rutgers and other research institutions to assist in further research.

NJFB encourages the NJDA to undertake mass rearing of BMSB parasitoids, when made available by USDA ARS to help control BMSB in the future.

While these coordinated efforts at the federal level are essential, equally important is adequate funding for stink bug research. Currently, research on the best means of managing stink bug populations and limiting stink bug-related damage on farms is being conducted.

Therefore, NJFB should:

- Urge New Jersey's Congressional Delegation to support the efforts of the aforementioned coalition that is pushing for action by USDA and EPA.
- Encourage the NJAES/RCE to develop short-term solutions to effectively monitor and control the BMSB.
- Work to secure additional funding for NJAES/RCE to be used for research on the best methods for limiting BMSB damage on New Jersey farms.
- Work to ensure that current crop insurance programs provide adequate coverage for damage due to the BMSB (written agreements will need to be implemented for NJ crops that don't qualify for a RMA insurance program).

#### Spotted Lantern Fly

The NJFB should support the NJDA in the effort to control the spread of the spotted lantern fly and support for funds necessary to assist in control methods. In order for control methods to be effective, a rule change would be needed for state-owned farmland, to allow producers to remove the trees preferred by the Spotted Lantern Fly. Financial assistance from the State to conduct tree removal or treatment is also needed. The Department of Agriculture is assisting all New Jersey counties, up to \$15,000 by reimbursing counties for costs they accrue for chemical treatment activities associated with spotted lanternfly control. This reimbursement program expanded the amount offered to counties to \$50,000 and \$15,000 to municipalities.

The spotted lantern fly (SLF) was first detected in Berks County Pennsylvania in 2014. This invasive pest feeds on many crops grown in NJ including ornamental trees, woody trees, vegetables, herbs, and grape vines. The NJDA has enacted a SLF quarantine all counties of the state.

The quarantine triggers the need for a permit to move regulated material in and out of the quarantine areas for businesses, municipalities, and government agencies. The public is required to complete a compliance checklist to inspect any regulated articles that are moving in and out of the quarantine area. The regulated items include:

- Any living life stage of the Spotted Lanternfly.
- Landscaping, remodeling, or construction waste.
- Firewood of any species. • Packing materials (e.g., wood crates, boxes).
- All plants and plant parts including logs, stumps, or any tree parts.
- Outdoor household articles like RVs, lawn mowers, chairs, grills, tarps, tile, stone, deck boards, and trucks or other vehicles not stored indoors.

The main effort is to contain the infestation and prevent a severe outbreak in NJ.



The outbreak of SLF has caused other non-infested states to begin the adoption of a rules to quarantine product from infested states unless the required phytosanitary requirements are met. This could severely impact commerce between states, if more states follow California's actions therefore necessitating the need for increased financial support and research to control the pest.

NJFB should support increased additional state funding as well as an increase in federal funding to the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory to improve biological controls against this invasive pest.

The Emerald Ash Borer was discovered in New Jersey in 2014 and the Southern Pine Beetle in 2001 and because of these pests many forests have suffered significant harm to ash trees and pine trees. These invasive species have caused high mortality of trees and created a nuisance of dead trees falling on livestock fencing and deer fences on farms. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in New Jersey has a program for addressing tree mortality. This program can be used for trees impacted by the emerald ash borer. The program will require at least 50% of the trees removed to be replaced as part of the practice under the EQIP program.

### **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT** (2023)

Wildlife damage to agricultural crops remains a chronic concern for New Jersey farmers and a top priority for New Jersey Farm Bureau.

#### General Wildlife Issues

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall:

- work to educate municipal officials about wildlife-caused crop damage, and strongly encourage them to include agricultural exemptions in any “no discharge” or “no projectile” laws.
- Advocate for the adoption and implementation of wildlife management plans on all properties purchased with public funds.
- Strongly encourage private landowners, like corporate parks, golfs courses, etc., that serve as deer refuges, to participate in wildlife management activities.
- Oppose any plan to shift the control of the Fish & Game Council to non-hunting or non-farming interests or to the DEP.
- Support the relocation of the Division of Fish & Wildlife, and any associated funding, from the Department of Environmental Protection to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.
- Support an amendment to the law that protects landowners from liability when allowing hunting on their land, even when the landowner charges a fee.
- Support the creation of a publicly funded indemnity program used to reimburse farmers suffering from damage caused by these public resources. NJFB shall research other state wildlife indemnity programs to help craft similar legislation in New Jersey.
- Oppose any measure banning the baiting of wildlife, or the sale of agricultural products for bait.
- Support the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife having the authority to make all rules to facilitate and encourage baiting under and around tree stands, with guidance from the F&G Council.

#### Depredation Permits

Depredation permits are a very useful tool in combatting crop damage caused by wildlife. However, receiving these permits in a timely way is essential to their efficacy. New Jersey Farm

Bureau supports the following modifications to the way permits are currently issued and enforced, to improve the effectiveness of this management tool.

- Streamline the application process for depredation permits. This includes making on-line applications available, and saving application information from previous years, so it does not need to be re-entered each year. All depredation permits should be valid and allow for control activities for one year on the entire farm, regardless of harvest season or area.
- Allow applications to be edited or updated as needed, instead requiring a new application each time a change is needed.
- Seek a regulatory change by the Division of Fish and Wildlife to allow farmers to use a shot gun and/or bow when utilizing a depredation permit, eliminating the need for two different permits.
- Update the automated check-in system currently used for the hunting season, to also allow farmers to check in deer taken on depredation permits.
- Clarify what qualifies as proper disposal of carcasses.
- Strengthen communication between the agricultural community and law enforcement to ensure all rules and regulations are clear and enforced uniformly.
- Issue black bear permits earlier where past damage is documented so bears can be taken before corn is too tall for safe and effective shooting. Bear depredation permits should be valid for 12 months.

#### Fencing

Farm Bureau supports the following:

- The creation of a deer fencing cost-share grant program for lands preserved under Green Acres, similar to those of the SADC and NJDA.
- The adoption of USDA-NRCS practices to make deer fencing eligible for cost-share grants in EQIP.
- Research and funding for other types of fencing that may be less expensive or labor intensive to install.
- Legislative amendments to the current non-preserved farm deer fencing law to improve the program and make it more workable for farmers to use.

#### Black Bears

NJFB supports:

- The recent adoption of the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Plan and the resumption of an annual two-part bear hunt on both private and public land.
- Removing the requirement that killed or injured livestock be “protected” by active electrified fence to be considered a Category I incident. Any attack or kill of livestock of any size, should never be downgraded lower than a category 1 bear incident. It is proven and recognized that this bear behavior will be repeated, and these bears pose a threat to life and property.
- The initiation of a drone survey of black bear damage in Northwestern New Jersey, as well as a survey of farmers to document financial losses due to crop damage caused by black bears.

#### Other Species

- There should be an increase in the number of available turkey permits.
- NJFB supports the continued, legal use of propane cannons for bird damage control.

- NJFB shall oppose any legislation to prohibit or restrict the use of any tools for wildlife management including cable restraints.

#### Federal Wildlife Issues

- New Jersey Farm Bureau supports an increase in the federal funding for the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services federal program and budget and will oppose the annual attempts of environmental groups to cut and divert their funding.
- Specific attention needs to be given to expanded control of resident Canada goose and snow goose populations, including increasing the number of animals allowed to be taken on a depredation permit.
- New Jersey Farm Bureau should explore the possibility of becoming a statewide permit-holder for black vulture control.

#### **WHITE-TAILED DEER** (2023)

Crop damage caused by deer continues to be one of the most significant concerns for New Jersey farmers. Drone studies to estimate deer populations as well as farmer surveys to document the amount of deer-caused crop damage have demonstrated the growing problem that deer pose to production agriculture. In addition to the effects on agriculture, increased automobile collisions, damage to landscaping, depletion of the natural landscape and an increased risk of Lyme disease and other diseases are other major concerns with the current deer over-population.

In 2023, the Division of Fish & Wildlife presented a proposal for discussion to simplify the deer section of the state Game Code. The proposal contains three major concepts: 1. Eliminate Antler Point Restrictions regulations entirely; 2. Simplify the regulations by reducing the number of regulation sets to 3 and aligning season dates; and 3. Expand the Multi-zone permit option, to allow hunting in multiple zones, with a reduced permit price. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports these proposed changes and urges the Division of Fish & Wildlife and F&G Council to move forward with these changes.

To further help abate the impacts of deer over-population, New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the following:

- Legislative clarification to make the deer fencing program for non-preserved farms a workable program.
- Reinstatement of Earn-a-Buck in problem areas and encourage the F&G Council to consider requiring the harvest of multiple antlerless deer in the areas suffering from the most damage.
- A legislative change to create a pilot project to allow for the commercial harvest of venison.
- Continued funding for venison donation programs, and support for the Hunters Helping the Hungry program that utilizes a refrigerated trailer to store deer harvested on depredation permits.
- Incentives for more butchers and meat processing facilities in New Jersey to handle the increase in venison donations.
- A legislative change to allow Sunday bow hunting on public lands, with public landowner permission.
- Expand weekend hunting days specifically to increase hunter participation including a legislative change to allow firearm hunting on Sundays.
- A legislative change to allow license fees to be set by the F&G Council instead of by the Legislature.

- A decreased license fee for senior citizens.
- The development of a state indemnification program for farmers suffering financial losses due to deer.

### **MINIMUM WAGE / LABOR SUPPLY AND MANAGEMENT (2023)**

The Minimum wage bill signed by the Governor increased wages for all NJ employees. The first increase took effect July 1, 2019. The non-agriculture employee wage will increase to \$15.13 per hour on January 1, 2024, and the agricultural wage will increase to \$12.81 on the same date. The status of the agricultural wage beyond 2024 will be based on recommendations of the Secretary of Agriculture, Commissioner of Labor, and a representative appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate to be a deciding vote, if needed. The law did provide a formula to increase the agricultural wage if an alternative action is not decided by the three-member committee. The formula in the law will escalate the agricultural wage to match the non-agricultural wage by 2030. The three-member committee will have until June 30, 2024, to determine whether to approve or disapprove the wage increase, as directed in the law, or approve an alternative manner of changing the agricultural minimum wage after 2024. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the adoption of a lower “training” wage for new employees, to not exceed the first 120 days of employment.

NJFB should consult with Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station to develop an economic study on the impact to the agricultural industry from future agricultural minimum wage increases. This should be an ongoing study to document the impact of the wage increase, since in 2024 the law directs the Commissioner of Labor and the Secretary of Agriculture to evaluate the following impacts on agriculture.

1. Impact on farm employers and the viability of the State’s agricultural industry;
2. Potential impact of the future increases as recommended by the law beyond 2024;
3. Comparisons with the wage rates in the agricultural industries in other states.

The increased payroll expenses and inability to set prices to offset revenue will cause a significant impact on the viability of labor-intensive agriculture. This will require a need to explore opportunities to offset farm employers’ additional payroll cost. Some of these offsets could include the following recommendations from the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture.:

1. Farmworker Job retention Grants - This would be an annual grant assistance to NJ farmers based on the difference between the constitutionally mandated minimum wage levels and the newly scheduled increases under the new law.
2. Definition of Agricultural Worker - Redefine the definition of Agricultural worker under the minimum wage law to include retail employment on farms.
3. Tax credits for Farmworker Housing and Transportation – Many growers are responsible for the housing and transportation cost for workers to travel to their farm for employment from another state or country. The enactment of the tax credit would help offset some of these added expenses beyond the minimum wage increase.

NJFB must oppose any future agricultural employee wage or benefit increase if it does not include an exemption for agriculture or some form of offset for NJ farm employers. The off-set justification is based on the additional cost for housing, utilities, transportation among other expenses that other industries do not provide.

Labor supply

Critical issues of economic viability of farms affect hired labor availability and affordability. It is a factor for farms in all commodity groups, not just those using large numbers of seasonal workers in the field and packinghouse.

Growers who employ workers on their farm are concerned about the availability of reliable workers who are accustomed to farm work. Shortages appear in some short-season commodities like blueberries and many farms report having an insufficient number of workers relative to the total number desired.

The availability of a legal workforce remains a critical, unresolved issue because there has been no movement of an immigration reform bill. There should be a new concentrated effort to resume the push for a congress to develop and pass an immigration reform bill.

#### Immigration reform

NJFB should advocate for an immigration reform legislation that contains the following policies:

- Adjustment of status or workers ability to remain in the country on a guest worker program.
- H2A reform or by way of another new guest worker program that streamlines the process and uses only farm field workers wage to determine the adverse wage rate and eases the requirement for advertising prior to hiring in local newspapers.
- A guest worker bill should not have a cap at all or have a cap that is sufficient to provide an adequate number of agricultural workers in the U.S.
- A work visa that provides a year-round labor force for agribusiness such as Dairy.
- NJFB opposes the requirement to use E-verify absent a revised agricultural industry supported guest worker program.

The NJFB opposes the misuse of the USDA Farm Labor Survey to determine the adverse effect wage rate for the H2-A visa. The survey should only include the wages from the specific occupation that is being carried out on a farm. The survey for field workers uses data from field workers and other agricultural occupations and creates an inflated artificial wage.

Many New Jersey farms use the H-2A agricultural worker visa program; however, many additional farms, forest product producers, dairy producers, commercial fishermen, and Landscape/Nursery businesses also use the H-2B visa program to meet their seasonal labor need as the H-2A program is unavailable to them for non-farm production job positions. This is especially true in a state like New Jersey where there are many farm businesses that need employees for their retail, value-added, and customer facing operations. The H-2B visa program is a critical source of reliable labor for jobs that are difficult, if not impossible, to fill with domestic workers. While these are good paying jobs, many domestic workers aren't interested in seasonal full-time employment that may only last for a period ranging from a few weeks to several months. Yet these workers are critical for farm, forest, dairy, fishing, and landscape businesses to serve their customers' needs during their peak seasons.

These H-2B workers are key to these farm businesses' success and which in turn make them a key part of the state's economy. Agriculture, in its broadest definition, is the Garden State's third largest industry and Farm Credit East, New Jersey's primary farm lender, recently estimated that agriculture and related activities contribute over \$11 billion to the state's economy, which includes over 50,000 jobs.

The utilization of this legal source of temporary labor; however, is stymied by an annual cap on the total number of H-2B visas that can be issued per federal fiscal year. The cap, 66,000, is estimated to be less than half of what the current demand for these workers truly is. The consequence is that impacted businesses cannot source sufficient labor for their businesses, hurting them financially and impacting their ability to maintain the long-term viability of their businesses.

For these reasons, NJFB supports all legislative efforts to increase the annual H-2B visa cap. NJFB also supports any means by which cap relief can be achieved on a temporary basis, including "returning worker exemptions," seasonal cap waivers, Executive Orders, actions by the Secretary of Homeland Security, and more. NJFB also supports recent USDOL proposals to amend recruitment advertising for H-2A and H-2B to be accomplished by online advertising as opposed to newsprint.

### USDOL/MSPA

Reform of the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSPA) is needed for provisions related to housing, transportation, wages and benefits, and recruitment of migrant and seasonal farm workers. 1) The Joint Responsibility mandate must be clarified. The farmer should not be considered a joint employer unless he/she performs a certain number of employer-like functions, such as supervision of work, preparation of payroll, and payment of employment taxes. 2) A 10-day grace period should be given to farmers to correct MSPA related paperwork errors before a fine is levied. 3) To avoid conflicts and duplicative enforcement actions, federal housing standards should be applied only in the absence of applicable state or local standards. 4) Return the responsibility for regulation of farm worker transportation insurance to the states. 5) Impose a statute of limitation on MSPA enforcement actions and lawsuits brought under the MSPA private right of action.

Agricultural employers feel that the USDOL has changed their emphasis from education for compliance to monetary violations for compliance. The growers feel that they are experiencing increased scrutiny by USDOL inspectors than in the past. Growers also feel federal USDOL purposely omitted information at county labor meetings regarding future policy enforcement on kitchen charges. The lack of specific guidance by USDOL on some regulations has left growers questioning meal charge allowance for workers. NJFB should require the USDOL to provide more clarity on the meal charges since many growers suffered violations under this regulation. NJFB should investigate if data is available quantifying that number of fines levied each year by the USDOL to verify if there is an increase in fines levied against agriculture under this administration.

NJFB should also advocate for a level of confidentiality regarding fines levied by DOL. Publication of fines by DOL only serves a political agenda and besmirches an entire industry that has an overall clean record.

Farm employers need to be aware of a current emphasis on rules pertaining to the Fair Labor Standards Act, Migrant Seasonal Worker Protection Act and Child Labor laws. New Jersey Farm Bureau can assist with providing information in each of these areas.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should oppose any legislation that would remove the overtime exemption for agricultural workers and support the overtime exemption currently in place.

The NJFB is also opposed to using a constitutional amendment as an avenue to amend the current minimum wage. NJFB should continue to oppose constitutional amendments as an avenue to change policy and law.

Possible ergonomics regulation remains a concern for agriculture. Regulation of work motions that are repetitive and sustained would be incredibly onerous for agriculture. Farm Bureau shall oppose a future ergonomic regulation without the results of a proposed study from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Even with those results, ergonomics regulations must contain an exception for agriculture. Farm Bureau supports an NSF study and an exception for agriculture.

In order to address the need for skilled “middle management” employees, New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with county colleges and Rutgers to develop 2-year degrees in targeted agricultural areas.

#### Health Insurance

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law in 2010 requires large employers (business employing more than 50 full-time workers) to provide health coverage for their employees or pay an excise tax penalty for those employees. Full time employees are those that work 30 hours per week and more than 120 days. Employees working less than 120 days are considered seasonal and do not count towards the 50 employees.

With many NJ farms producing crops from early spring until late fall the production season last much longer than 120 days. This means many of the larger farms would be subject to the requirements of the law.

The NJFB should work with the American Farm Bureau to seek a change in the definition of seasonal worker to 6 months or have agricultural workers defined as seasonal workers.

New Jersey Farm Bureau opposed the Earned Sick Leave legislation; however, the bill passed the legislature and was signed into law by the governor and took effect on October 29. The bill contained no exemptions for any business regardless of size. The law requires 1 hour of sick time for every 30 hours of work with a max of 40 hours of sick time to be accrued. NJFB shall seek appropriate rule changes to provide as much relief for the ag industry and seasonal employers as possible.

Increased payroll expenses negatively impacted the affordability of Workers Compensation for all farms in every commodity group. NJFB should advocate that the basis of a Workers Compensation Premium should only include remuneration for actual labor. Any remuneration for sick leave, vacation, holidays or bonuses should not be a basis of the premium and therefor help to offset insurance costs.

#### Potable Water Well and septic Inspections

The NJDEP has an initiative to make sure agricultural workers are provided clean potable water and that wells are properly permitted. The NJDEP has a similar initiative for septic systems that service agricultural labor housing requiring New Jersey Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NJPDDES). In order to qualify for this permit, the aggregate design volume of sanitary sewage generated on the property from the farm labor housing must be greater than 2,000 gallons per day. NJDEP started their initial inspections of farms concentrating on the blueberry industry in

the Hammonton area. The NJDEP surveyed the fruit and produce farms with ag labor this spring and inspections are expected to occur in the future.

NJFB believes farm workers should have access to clean potable water and testing requirements already exist per the U.S. Department of Labor to confirm agricultural labor housing wells meet potable standards. NJDEP should work with NJDA to notify growers prior to inspections and perform inspections during times when farms are not in production. The NJFB should continue to work with the NJDA to explore funding to help comply with this NJDEP mandate.

### **TRUCKING/MOTOR VEHICLE REGULATIONS** (2023)

The motor vehicle laws and regulations affecting agricultural vehicles are numerous and complex. In an effort to keep the farm community up to date on these laws, New Jersey Farm Bureau continues to update and distribute its handbook on motor vehicle regulations for farmers to any Farm Bureau member or law enforcement entity upon request.

#### State Regulations

Farm Bureau should seek legislative changes for the following state motor vehicle regulations.

- A legislative change that would allow farmers to use their farmer trucks for private snow plowing contracts.
- A regulatory change to allow the personalization of “farmer” plates.
- A regulatory change for oversize agricultural equipment. The current law requires flags at four corners of vehicles and equipment over 8 feet wide. Warning lights should also be allowed to be used as an alternative to flags since most new equipment has lights installed at its widest points.
- Legislation that would allow UTV/gator-type vehicles to be used on the road as farm equipment, by farmers or farm workers.
- A regulatory change is recommended to allow the transportation of farm equipment up to 18ft wide on public roads without any special permit if the appropriate safety precautions are taken. Pennsylvania recently expanded theirs with limitations and NJ could mirror the Pennsylvania law.
- There is a need to review the current inability to register with NJMVC self-propelled sprayers that are used for hire.

#### Federal regulations

- The heavy use tax exemption should be expanded beyond the current 7,500 miles. Farm vehicle travel is limited based on the seasonality of the industry, but the mileage limitation should be expanded to 15,000 miles.
- NJFB should support the permanent exemption for the electronic logging device requirement for livestock. (Currently agricultural commodities are exempt from the ELD requirement within 150 miles of the farm.)

NJFB opposes that adoption of the proposed rules that will incorporate by reference California’s Advanced Clean Cars II (ACC II) regulation, which will require manufacturers of passenger cars and light-duty trucks to meet an annual zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) requirement intended to require only ZEV sold in 2035. The target date is not a long enough transition period for such a drastic change that will cause added expense for many businesses for vehicles and infrastructure upgrades.



The New Jersey Farm Bureau should encourage the NJDA to explore the process for adopting planting dates for the state. These planting dates are needed since some FMCSA regulations are dependent on those dates. Many states have adopted year-round growing seasons with the use of indoor and greenhouse production.

The Garden State Parkway (GSP) does not permit vehicles over 10,000lbs registered gross vehicle weight to travel north of milepost 105 of the GSP. This regulation creates a burden on farmers to reach markets in central and North Jersey in a timely and direct route. NJFB supports a regulation change to allow Farmer plated vehicles to travel on the GSP north of milepost 105. The vehicles would be limited to 26,000lbs or less with height restrictions.

Periodically, Farm Bureau should undertake a comprehensive review of all relevant motor vehicles regulations affecting agriculture. This review should serve to identify any outdated or inconsistent regulations. To assist in this process, Farm Bureau should establish a working group of farm operators to provide guidance and insights about specific regulations or regulatory interpretations that should be evaluated as part of this comprehensive review.

The NJFB should investigate the obligation to use tow trucks dispatched by law enforcement. These tow companies can often be overpriced and take advantage of a situation involving an inoperable vehicle.

The NJFB should encourage the state to promote public awareness during most active times of the year when farm machinery is traveling on public roads. The increased traffic on many rural roads has made transportation of farm equipment more difficult. Public awareness should also include a strong emphasis on the law that vehicles must slow down to the speed of the farm equipment before passing. Increased public awareness, such as NJFB-produced posters placed in all NJMVC facilities, is needed to help inform drivers of the dangers of illegally passing farm equipment. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture produced a very informative video promoting safe driving when encountering farm equipment on the road. This video has been promoted on social media and this type of information promoting safe driving should continue. NJFB recommends the incorporation of this video in all driver education programs.

Farm Bureau should explore opportunities to educate state and local police about these same motor vehicle regulations affecting farm businesses.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) rules grant states the discretionary authority to exempt individuals who operate a farm vehicle, as outlined in the rule, from CDL licensing. The FMCSA rule states that the waiver is limited to the driver's home state unless there is a reciprocity agreement with adjoining states. New Jersey exempts farmers operating farm vehicles from the CDL. Most states have a similar exemption for their farmers, but very few reciprocity agreements exist between the states. New Jersey has been successful in signing reciprocity agreements with Pennsylvania and Delaware confirming that both states acknowledge the CDL exemption for Farmers. While the NJ Department of Agriculture has asked New Jersey Motor Vehicle Services to request the necessary reciprocity agreements from the other states within 150 miles of our state's lines (CT, NY, RI, VT, NH, MD VA and WV), no other reciprocity agreements have yet been signed. New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the NJDA to continue working with the Motor Vehicle Service to expedite the adoption of these reciprocity agreements.

New Jersey supports a change in regulation to allow holders of international driver's licenses to operate vehicles with a gross vehicle weight up to 25,999 pounds, as opposed to the current limit of 7,700 pounds.

### **WATER QUALITY REGULATION/WATERSHED PLANNING ISSUES** (2023)

New Jersey Farm Bureau seeks a science-based, practical approach to water quality regulations and watershed planning.

Taking action to improve water quality on their farms has become increasingly difficult and expensive for NJ farmers. There is only technical assistance from NRCS available when the farm owner is participating in a Farm Bill program. The soil and water conservation money administered through the Farmland Preservation Program is available on a limited basis and only farms enrolled in a preservation program.

#### Stream buffers and freshwater wetlands

In the spring of 2020, 600 miles of rivers and streams were upgraded to Category One waterways, increasing protections to include a 300-foot buffer on all designated waterways. This was done through an amendment to the Surface Water Quality Standards that codified these new C1 streams and was published in the New Jersey Register on April 6, 2020. In August 2020, Farm Bureau joined an appeal as an amicus party to challenge the DEP's April 2020 adoption of C1 stream upgrades. The rule prohibits development within 300-foot buffers on either side of the stream, some of which affects agricultural lands. NJFB submitted written comments in 2019 expecting the newly protected waterways to grandfather existing agricultural practices that occur within the new buffer zones resulting from this expansion of delineated waterways. Current DEP rules for C1 streams already ensure the continuation of existing farm practices without interference of the rules and we anticipate this to apply likewise to any new buffer zones within current farmland areas.

#### Non-point Source Pollution, TMDL's

In response to the EPA requiring all states to show progress in controlling pollution from all nonpoint sources including agricultural operations, New Jersey has been developing specific pollutant loading limits (Total Maximum Daily Loads - TMDL's) for nutrients, pathogens, sediment, mercury, and metals, temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, and pesticides on all stream segments or water bodies to meet New Jersey's Surface Water Quality Standards (SWQS). The Barnegat Bay and the Raritan River Basin have been made the subject of detailed TMDLs that identify and quantify existing pollutants. Agriculture, the largest and most easily identifiable land use in the Basin, is supposed to aid in the cleanup by reducing stormwater flows that cause soil erosion (sediment pollution) and its use of phosphorus fertilizer by 70 percent over the next 10 years. Farm Bureau and the Department of Agriculture expressed doubt that this could be done because the amount of crop production in that watershed has shrunk over the past years.

Farm Bureau will continue to monitor the TMDL process so that agriculture does not bear an unfair burden in correcting impairments in state waters.

The agricultural industry is often cited for runoff pollution without any consideration for the suburban/homeowner lawn fertilizer sources. Farm Bureau will work with RCE to ensure that the BMPs help address the issue and allow agriculture to work on its own issues with appropriate soil/water conservation practices.

## Stormwater management

NJ agriculture's major contribution to nonpoint source water pollution is said to be soil sediment carried by stormwater runoff. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Stormwater Management rules (N.J.A.C. 7:8) establish minimum design and performance standards for development by managing water quality, quantity, and groundwater recharge impacts from stormwater runoff. These rules have created more stringent stormwater management standards for land developments in the state, including agricultural construction projects subjected to the same rules and standards as commercial and other land developers. There are concerns about the application of this rule requirement for farm construction projects, especially for minor ones for which streamlined, less expensive and time-consuming kinds of regulation should be possible.

Therefore, Farm Bureau strongly encourages the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to continue to work with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in coordinating the establishment of standards and permitting for farm construction projects that would depend upon the scale and nature of the project. Depending on the conditions of the rule, a permit-by-rule provision in the stormwater management rule shall allow for a specific regulated stormwater management practice to be undertaken without written approval from the NJDEP.- Additionally, Farm Bureau will support the use of a Farm Conservation Plan in addressing the management of stormwater runoff for water quality, quantity, and groundwater recharge.

In 2018 the legislature passed bills to authorize municipalities, counties, and certain authorities to establish stormwater utilities. NJFB made sure that there was an exemption from fees and other charges for land actively devoted to agricultural or horticultural use that is valued, assessed, and taxed pursuant to the "Farmland Assessment Act of 1964".

### Farm Bureau should:

- Work to coordinate federal and state programs dealing with non-point source pollution and stormwater runoff with a focus on farmland owners in areas with TMDL programs in place.
- Work to ensure that funding and technical assistance are available to help NJ farmers comply with any new regulatory requirements.
- Support a funding mechanism to assist farmers in adhering to regulatory requirements for drinking water wells and septic systems on all farms regardless of their preservation status.
- Be vigilant in following national issues on mandated water quality standards and nutrient management such as the case of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL and the Florida numerical nutrient criteria, which may serve as a national model for water quality and watershed management. Issues such as these have the potential to impact how water quality standards and TMDLs are addressed in any state in the future.
- Encourage the agriculture community to take advantage of cost-share funding to address storm water and non-point source runoff from farms where needed.

## NJ PACT

Governor Murphy's Executive Order 100 directed NJDEP to identify specific rules, guidance documents and other regulatory mechanisms to revise by integrating climate change considerations. NJ PACT was created to address this targeted regulatory reform that will modernize the land use rules in New Jersey. This has the potential to include changes to DEP's Coastal Zone Management Rules, Freshwater Wetlands Rules, Flood Hazard Control Act Rules, and any other regulations that address flooding and chronic inundation. The Inland Flood

Protection rule has been adopted, effective July 17, 2023. This rule raises fluvial (non-tidal) design flood elevations by two feet; requires use of future projected precipitation when calculating design flood elevation; ensures that permits and authorizations under the FHACA rules meet minimum NFIP standards and relevant sections of the UCC; require stormwater BMPs to be designed to manage runoff for both today's storms and future storms; and change the way stormwater calculations are projected.

#### Animal Feeding Operations/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (AFO/CAFO)

The NJDEP establishes permitting requirements and effluent limitations for concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) in NJ through the New Jersey Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems rule (NJPDES). NJ's CAFO rules are the strictest in the nation while there are few farm operations defined as CAFO's in NJ. Farm Bureau will continue to monitor both state and national rules, court cases, and other actions that impact all animal feeding operations.

#### NJPDES and farms

The NJPDES Program protects New Jersey's ground and surface water quality by ensuring the proper treatment and discharge of wastewater (and its residuals) and stormwater from various types of facilities and activities. To accomplish this, permits are issued limiting the mass and/or concentration of pollutants which may be discharged into groundwater, streams, rivers, and the ocean. The types of regulated facilities can range from very small users such as campgrounds, schools, and shopping centers to larger industrial and municipal wastewater dischargers. A business or property gets pulled into the NJPDES system when their septic system capacity exceeds 5 residential units of 2,000 gallons of wastewater.

This has become a problem for both preserved and non-preserved farms that have added additional septic capacity either because of labor housing needs, existing septic systems and additional septic systems for farm markets, or food processing. The rules apply to a single landowner or business and encompass all their holdings. Once the unit capacity is reached, the NJPDES permit process begins. This is an expensive engineering and environmental impact process.

NJDA worked with the NJDEP to create a general permit for up to an additional 2000 gallons of water for commercial purposes on farms. The Master General Permit has an effective date of January 1, 2022, and an expiration date of December 31, 2026.

NJDA then worked with the NJDEP to create a general permit for greater than 2000 gallons of sanitary wastewater discharges from farm labor housing (GFLH). The effective date of the draft GFLH was January 18, 2023 and the final GFLH has an effective date of April 28, 2023.

NJFB will continue to monitor its implementation and search for funding sources to help farms upgrade their septic systems and meet the onerous monitoring and reporting requirements associated with these permits. Farm Bureau supports simplification of such.

#### **NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION (NJAES) AND THE COMMITMENT TO PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE (2023)**

The New Jersey agricultural community is faced with a multitude of challenges that threaten its viability and sustainability. These include increased land use regulation, rising production costs, right to farm issues, water quality concerns, wildlife damage, and rising taxes. Unexploited market opportunities and limited access to innovations that would enhance prosperity, stewardship

potential and compatibility with other land uses also severely impact sustainability and viability. Given the impacts and public benefits of the agricultural and food system complex, not only in rural areas but also in the state's urban and suburban communities, these constraints impinge upon assuring food security, nutrition and health, water quality and supply, environmental sustainability, economic development and quality of life in the Garden State. It is for these reasons that the Governor and the Legislature must increase support for NJAES as it plays a vital role in helping farmers innovate and viably and sustainably produce food and fiber for our communities and our world.

NJFB and the ag community are deeply concerned about further attrition of expertise and experience as many of our most valued agricultural agents and specialists become eligible for retirement in the next few years. In the past, a significant number of retirements without hiring replacements have negatively impacted the delivery of critical agricultural programs across the state. NJFB shall urge the NJAES leadership to initiate the search process once a retirement is announced, thus expediting the process to ensure a smooth transition.

There are applied research areas which were covered by specialists in the past and are not covered now; yet are sorely needed by production agriculture. Though some progress has been made, there continue to be shifts in personnel where a highly effective Extension Specialist has retired, and a replacement has not been recruited to address industry needs. All of this has been done during a time of budget cuts. Farm Bureau believes support for production agriculture has suffered cuts disproportionate to other sectors of the Land Grant System.

NJFB must continue to urge the leadership at NJAES to maintain a balance between tenure track agricultural agents that deliver an educational program to the agricultural community with sufficient specialists to meet the applied research needs of the agricultural community. Research happens in areas where grant money can be found, rather than originating from production agriculture needs. Funding sources need to be available for research for production needs in a timely fashion. Funding for applied agricultural research should be supplied more through formula funding from USDA and less through competitive grant funding.

NJFB shall continue its efforts to educate the Governor and the legislature about the funding structure at NJAES. NJAES is disproportionately impacted by budget cuts because unlike Rutgers University, NJAES does not receive tuition revenues and therefore cannot make up for lost budget dollars with tuition increases.

Farm Bureau is encouraged by the appropriation of a supplemental \$3.0 million in the state operating budget for general NJAES needs, as well as the \$95,000 in additional funds for the Equine Science Center. It looks forward to learning about the allocation of these funds in support of production agriculture's needs and to a continuation of these supplements in upcoming state budgets. In the 2024 state budget, another \$2.5 million was added by the governor and legislature - a welcome action.

We strongly urge the State Board of Agriculture, NJAES Board of Managers, and County Boards of Ag to join Farm Bureau's efforts to work with the Governor, the Legislature, and the County Boards of Commissioners to further increase the base budget of the NJAES and provide a higher level of stable state funding for NJAES research and extension.

NJFB supports the NJAES administration policy that most of this additional funding will be devoted to production agriculture interests in the form of infrastructure improvements (research farm facilities, equipment, etc.). Building upon these recent and much-needed State re-investments in NJAES, NJFB continues to support the Vision 2025 and will advocate for the launching of the next phase of the program, NJAES Catalyze NJ. This program builds on the accomplishments of Vision 2025 through 1) development and growth of high impact research, education and community outreach programs that are responsive, innovative, impactful and inclusive; and 2) continuing modernization of NJAES infrastructure across the statewide network of laboratories, farms, field stations and centers. Farm Bureau also encourages NJAES administrators to heed specific Board of Managers' recommendations on the use of these funds for priority programs needed by the agricultural community (e.g., wildlife management, IPM, etc.).

Financial support from county Commissioners is an indispensable source of funding for Cooperative Extension, which farmers truly appreciate.

### **NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION BOARD OF MANAGERS** (2023)

The Board of Managers serves as a two-way communications link for conveying information between the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) and the agricultural community and other constituency groups through the County Boards of Agriculture. Representatives from each County Board of Agriculture ensure grassroots input from the agricultural community to the NJAES to help shepherd our state's land grant institution. The board also serves as the advocate for the experiment station and provides advice to the Executive Dean and Executive Director of the experiment station on issues that concern the programs of the experiment station including Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE). The Board of Managers consists of a representative from each county board of agriculture, the president of the university, the director of NJAES and the NJ state secretary of agriculture as ex-officio members and a six-member statewide advisory committee.

In order for the Board of Managers to best represent the broad constituency of NJAES, members should be encouraged to reach out to stakeholder groups that may not be aware of the advisory role held by the Board of Managers to NJAES. In addition to agriculture, these stakeholder groups include fisheries, urban and community outreach, youth development, food, nutrition and health, and related areas of economic and workforce development. Likewise, the leadership at NJAES needs to communicate to these stakeholder groups through its faculty and staff that there is a Board of Managers representative in each county that they can reach out to if there is a concern or comment about NJAES.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the Board of Managers in this advisory role and urges the County Board of Agriculture representatives to fully partake in the responsibilities of the Board of Managers, to maintain the benefits for agriculture from this longstanding relationship. The Board of Managers requests each county appoint a non-voting alternate representative to attend Board of Managers' meetings, serve on committees and relay information in the absence of the county's designated representative.

NJFB urges the Board of Managers at their annual meeting with the University President and Board of Governors to give an annual report and to have discussions regarding the prior year's progress and future needs of production agriculture. Farm Bureau looks forward to the updated dialogue with the Rutgers administration to continue the current, as well as 4-H Youth

Development, Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS), and other NJAES mission-aligned programs and priorities spirit of cooperation for NJAES. This dialogue should also serve as a reminder about the importance of continuing to prioritize production agriculture research and extension work as a critical component of the university's overarching mission.

NJFB urges the Board of Managers to continue to review the NJAES Budget and be able to report to the county boards regarding the state of the NJAES budget. Additionally, the Board of Managers continues to petition to grow the state appropriation to NJAES (base budget) to replace previous cuts and to keep up with the rate of inflation. Increased base budget funds are essential to rebuild lost capacity in several agricultural program areas staff positions, an effort that cannot be initiated with "one-time" special purpose funds.

There is a need for additional certified food, agriculture, natural resource (FANR) teachers (formerly known as agricultural educators or agriculture teachers) due to retirements and an increase in the number of programs. Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, as the land grant college of New Jersey, has traditionally prepared licensed FANR teachers. We support and further encourage the recent effort made by the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences to improve and market the 5-year agricultural science education program that currently exists. Farm Bureau also supports the development of the agricultural education option in the undergraduate major in Agriculture and Food Systems, including the development of courses focusing specifically on agricultural education, and efforts made by SEBS to utilize the Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education to recruit high quality undergraduates interested in agricultural careers.

Farm Bureau congratulates the Board of Managers for its work during the past year in advocating for the supplemental funding to NJAES by the Legislature and Murphy administration, the educational outreach program to urban legislators, and surfacing potential small livestock farm operators. This is in addition to the Board's critical function of advising the dean on all NJAES matters. Farm Bureau and county boards of agriculture will continue to rely on the board's insights on county agricultural agents, 4-H and other personnel needs in the wake of retirements. Farm Bureau encourages the board to maintain its direct link to the Rutgers Board of Governors as prescribed by statute.

The farm community continues to enjoy a productive and cooperative relationship with NJAES behind the lead of the Board of Managers. Farm Bureau appreciates the support from Drs. Laura Lawson, Brian Schilling, Peggy Brennan and Wendy Cohick in guiding the land grant mission at Rutgers University amid a changing academic and research environment in higher education. Progress has been made in recent hiring decisions as one example of the growing cooperative between the Rutgers administration and NJAES-Rutgers Cooperative Extension. The Board of Managers should continue to advocate the hiring of new staff before retirements and other options, to ensure continuity of programs. Farm Bureau will lead a determined effort with the Board of Managers to gain increases in the NJAES baseline state budget. This further support can be used to build upon the success of recent years in the outreach/research/teaching objective of this valued institution.

We urge the Board of Managers to conduct a needs assessment of the agriculture industry regularly with no more than a three-year cycle. During the past year, the board did accomplish a thorough needs assessment report that was released in September of this year. Farm Bureau

applauds this work and recognizes the important contributions by the county boards of agriculture to it.

### **FOOD SAFETY** (2023)

Food safety concerns remain an important issue to agricultural producers as more attention was given by the media to issues like salmonella poisoning and *e. coli* bacteria. A northeast state like New Jersey with a strong emphasis on fresh market produce and direct marketing to the general public of locally produced food cannot afford to be complacent on this issue. A rapid response to media inquiries by both New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) and Farm Bureau must occur whenever a food safety issue arises.

Food safety is a dynamic process with new research and information continually becoming available. This requires the industry to be updated throughout the year. Rutgers Cooperative Extension and NJDA work closely to provide the latest information to the industry through written material, workshops, websites, etc. Farm Bureau supports these efforts and encourages the continued funding of these efforts.

In addition to the Food Safety Task Force, The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, along with the United States Department of Agriculture, offers a voluntary farm auditing program that verifies that produce has been grown, harvested, packed and shipped in a safe and sanitary manner. New Jersey Farm Bureau encourages growers to participate in this voluntary program.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should promote recognition and acceptance of uniform standards for third party audits. Multiple audits are demanded by varying retailers and produce buyers, significantly increasing the cost of the farm's food safety program while produce farms are experiencing level, or in some cases, decreased prices for produce. Research has shown no demonstrable advantage of one audit over another. Some of these audits have veered from auditing the safety aspects of growing and handling produce to social aspects of employee benefits, etc. Legislation may be required and warranted to rein in run-away costs of multiple food safety audits and to preserve the produce industry in New Jersey and the United States.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall seek to educate the various entities (ie: chain stores, brokers, shippers, etc.) requiring food safety audits to accept the "Harmonized Audits" that have been developed through a national dialog between the private and public sectors. Where possible, costs of third-party audits should be totally or partially reimbursed to growers.

In July 2022, the FDA issued a supplemental notice of proposed rulemaking (SNPRM) to the proposed agricultural water rule to extend the compliance dates for the proposed pre-harvest agricultural water provisions. The SNPRM proposes to establish the following compliance dates for the pre-harvest agricultural water requirements for covered produce other than sprouts:

- 2 years and 9 months after the effective date of a final rule for very small businesses.
- 1 year and 9 months after the effective date of a final rule for small businesses; and
- 9 months after the effective date of a final rule for all other businesses.

The SNPRM also clarifies that they intend to continue enforcement discretion for the harvest and post-harvest agricultural water requirements of the Produce Safety regulation until the following dates:

- January 26, 2025, for very small businesses;
- January 26, 2024, for small businesses; and



- January 26, 2023, for all other businesses.

The FDA plans to take an “educate before and while we regulate” posture as they begin implementing the harvest and post-harvest requirements. For the first year of compliance, the FDA intends to work closely with state and industry partners to advance training, technical assistance, educational visits, and on-farm readiness reviews to prepare both growers and state regulators for implementing these provisions prior to initiating routine inspections verifying compliance. The NJFB will continue to support Rutgers and NJDA with their education program for farms covered by this rule.

### Food Traceability

The FDA published the final rule for Food Traceability and became effective on January 20, 2023, and compliance will be required on January 20, 2026. The rule imposes additional traceability recordkeeping requirements for certain high-risk foods. This rulemaking is required by section 204 of FSMA and is an additional action in FDA's ongoing FSMA implementation. At the core of this proposal is a requirement for those who manufacture, process, pack or hold foods on the Food Traceability List (FTL) to establish and maintain records containing Key Data Elements (KDEs) associated with different Critical Tracking Events (CTEs)

The proposed rule also would require that:

- records be maintained as either original paper records, electronic records, or true copies; they all must be legible and stored to prevent deterioration or loss.
- traceability records be provided to FDA as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours after a request is made.
- an electronic, sortable spreadsheet containing relevant traceability information be provided to FDA within 24 hours of a request, when necessary, to assist FDA during an outbreak, recall, or other threat to public health.

There are some exemptions (full or partial). Full exemptions include small retail food establishments, small farms (less than \$25,000 in sales), farms selling food directly to consumers, certain food produced and packaged on a farm, food that receives certain types of processing and transporters of food. Partial exemptions would apply to certain commingled raw agricultural commodities (not including fruits and vegetables subject to the produce safety regulations), fishing vessels, retail food establishments that receive a listed food directly from a farm and farm to school and farm to institutions programs.

The NJFB should help promote the educational seminars hosted across the state by Rutgers Extension program to make sure growers are informed and trained to comply with the FSMA. This past growing season the Rutgers On-Farm Food Safety Team and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture completed numerous On Farm Readiness Reviews (OFRR) to help growers determine if they are ready for a Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Rule Inspection. New Jersey agriculture will be ahead of the curve with the recent OFRR's conducted by NJDA and the Rutgers On-farm Food Safety team.

As the FSMA is implemented growers are concerned with possible varying interpretations of the impending rules and how compliance is measured. New Jersey agriculture will be ahead of the curve with the recent preliminary audits conducted by NJDA. As FSMA audits begin the NJDA should encourage uniform interpretations of the rules by inspectors and monitor the progress.

The NJFB supports an appropriation to Rutgers for \$100,000 to study and comprehensive study on the use of high-pressure processing for shellfish. HPP has several applications in the seafood industry. Application of HPP eliminates common seafood pathogens, such as Vibrio and Listeria spp., and slows the growth of spoilage microorganisms. Use of cold water as a pressure medium induces minimal changes in sensory and nutritional properties and helps in the development of clean label seafood products. This technology is also useful to shuck oysters, lobsters, crabs, mussels, clams, and scallops to increase recovery of the edible meat. There are also opportunities to research the use of HPP on produce for pathogens as well.

There is a heightened concern within the agriculture industry with the recent criminal charges filed against a Colorado farm for a food contamination outbreak. NJFB believes that growers who are certified with a food safety audit should be held harmless from criminal and civil charges.

New Jersey Farm Bureau will continue to represent agriculture as an industry advisor to the Office of Counter Terrorism. Farm Bureau will also work with our partners at Rutgers New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station, the Food Policy Institute, the New Jersey Food Council as well as lead staff at the New Jersey Department of Agriculture on issues related to food safety, biosecurity. NJFB must also work to keep our members informed of policy and practice changes as they relate to food and food security issues.

### **BIOSECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT** (2023)

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall request the USDA increase biosecurity measures at all points of entry into the United States and the State of New Jersey, to guard against outbreaks of diseases such as African swine fever, foot and mouth, and avian influenza as well as possible threats of bioterrorism. Farm Bureau will also request federal funding to assist USDA in these activities.

Under the leadership of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture in consultation with leaders in the different sectors of New Jersey agriculture, industry guidelines and procedures outlining the response and action to be taken by the agricultural industry in an emergency were developed by the Department of Agriculture and include livestock industries, livestock auctions and slaughterhouses, pet stores and shelters, zoo and animal exhibitions, veterinarian hospitals, plant industries, crops including the wholesaling of fruits and vegetables, and feed and fertilizer, a review and update the emergency response plans to fit a new all hazard approach to emergency management is needed. It is important for individual operations to develop their own all hazard action plan in the event of an emergency.

Biosecurity is the responsibility of every farm operation to not only protect crops and animals from emerging pests and diseases but to also protect the workforce and customers from the same risks. Plans for farms should focus on protecting the site and protecting the people entering and leaving a farm, as well as contingency planning in the event of an outbreak or disturbance be it manmade or naturally occurring.

As part of the national emergency management response established in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security agriculture is considered an essential industry, important for food security, New Jersey uses the same system. The pandemic response established a system for the continuation of the diverse sectors of NJ agriculture. Critical to the successful operation of these businesses was the implementation of recommended practices and guidance from the NJ Department of Health by the agricultural community.

The COVID pandemic has made farms plan for not only how to operate in an emergency, but what to do to protect their family, their employees and their customers while providing essential products for the state's food system.

Farm biosecurity and emergency management planning extends to crop storage and handling on the farm. The FBI cautions farmers storing products on the farm to ensure the harvest is safe from outside contamination. Farmers should ensure their products are stored securely as food contamination is the largest threat to food security in this country.

### **EQUINE INDUSTRY** (2023)

The equine industry includes breeding, training, horse keeping, sports competition, arena showing, horse racing, equine assisted therapy for children and adults, recreation, and public and private owned equestrian facilities. Notable New Jersey is home to breeders of internationally recognized performance horses especially in the growing category of Sport Horse competition. Research and education are important components to the success and future of the equine industry. The New Jersey Farm Bureau should continue to support growth and innovations in the New Jersey equine industry.

#### Racing

The continued annual commitment of \$20 million by the State of New Jersey to supplement purses and breeding incentive programs for Jersey Bred and Sire Stakes horses in New Jersey has been successful. The legislation supplies the racing and breeding programs with \$20 million a year for five years (now in its fifth year), split equally between Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, and the payments could be extended if the industry meets benchmarks of increased breeding, training, and other equine activities demonstrating a turnaround of the industry in the state.

In 2021, the total live wagering handle at New Jersey's three racetracks was \$27,217,612. This represents a 77.71% increase from the total live wagering handle in 2020, which was \$15,315,508. In 2021, the total intrastate simulcasting handle was \$8,128,071, representing a 7.26% increase from the 2020 intrastate wagering handle of \$7,578,030. In 2021, the total interstate simulcasting handle was \$171,296,356, representing a 47.67% increase from the 2020 interstate wagering handle of \$115,999,754. In 2021, the total off-track and account wagering handle was \$390,915,918, representing a 1.03% increase over the 2020 total off-track and account wagering handle of \$386,949,337.

These numbers demonstrate the turnaround horsemen were looking for from the commitment by the State. In addition, because of the state incentives, the number of Standardbred stallions standing in New Jersey has remained steady and number of mares bred increased from 442 and foals registered from 272 in 2019 to 729 mares bred and 488 foals registered in 2022: an increase of 69 percent and 80 percent, respectively. In addition, a new pacing stallion Tattoo Artist, which earned more than \$2.55 million in their lifetime, will stand at Deo Volente Farms in 2024.

New Jersey Sire Stakes program purses also increased from \$2.9 million in 2019 to \$4.1 million in 2023, an increase of 38 percent. Owners of New Jersey bred horses reaped the benefits with purse increases for the NJSS and the addition of the New Jersey Maturity series during this time.

In the Thoroughbred industry steady increases in mares, and foals born in the state have reversed after years of steady decline. There were four registered stallions standing in New Jersey in 2023 but three new stallions will stand in New Jersey in 2024. One of the new stallions, Max Player,

was a multiple Grade 1 winner that earned over \$1.5 million. New Jersey has not had a grade 1 winner stand here in decades. The only reason the stallions are returning to stand stud in New Jersey is because of the increased purses from the purse subsidy investment by the State.

The State must continue to further strengthen the racehorse industry and horse breeding and New Jersey bred breeding programs, Jersey owned, and Jersey preferred races should be written regularly onto race cards.

#### Sales Tax

Since 2004 as part of the revisions of the sales tax code, horse stall rental has been considered a sales taxable item. As horses are defined as livestock by the Department of Agriculture including through the standards for the Humane Treatment of Livestock, N.J.A.C. 2:8 New Jersey Farm Bureau should continue working to pass legislation to clarify that horse stalls and related horse keeping expenses should not be subject to New Jersey Sales tax.

#### Horse Land Preservation

Since 2009 there has been a sharp decline in the number of horse farms preserved and the acreage of horse farms preserved. In 2009 horse farms made up 11% of the farms preserved and 8% of the total acres. From 2010-2014 only 4.9% of the farms preserved were horse farms making up only 3.9% of the land preserved in that period. New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with the SADC to help determine why there was a sudden drop off in horse farm preservation and to study ways to improve those numbers. Farm Bureau should also track the impacts of the soil disturbance rule and its impact on horse farm preservation.

#### Trails

With growth in the recreational use of horses there is a growing need for places to ride, both facility and open trails. New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with open space advocates and Rails to Trails program to support the establishment of a state-wide horse trail system. New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with interested stakeholders and comment on proposed changes in the States Wildlife Management Area fee schedule for trail permits.

#### Federal Legislation

The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA) of 2020 was signed into law in December of 2020 and the first part was enacted on July 1, 2022, with regulations being implemented for thoroughbreds. The Authority is overseen by the Federal Trade Commission.

The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority (HISA) launched and began successfully implementing both its Racetrack Safety Program (July 1, 2022) and its Anti-Doping and Medication Control (ADMC) Program (May 22, 2023), establishing, for the first time, a national, uniform set of integrity and safety rules in the sport. There is concern that the standardbreds will be brought under HISA with little or no harness racing representation or consideration for that industry's concerns. Farm Bureau should monitor this closely.

In 2023 the Rutgers Equine Science Center hosted the first New Jersey Equine Industry Summit in 20 years. The purpose was to take the pulse on the challenges the horse industry faces and to come up with solutions to ensure its sustainability. Farm Bureau should support the Center in its efforts to help increase the viability of the New Jersey equine industry.

Farm Bureau should work with the equine industry to:

- Educate owners about responsible breeding, considering health and quality of foals and plans for long term use and outlets for horses bred.
- Support permanent identification, especially for horses traveling off farm to track horse health and history.
- Educate the public about realistic plans for excess and unwanted horses.
- Support non-chemical euthanasia.
- Encourage the American Farm Bureau to raise awareness along with national equine breed groups of these issues.
- Support the Equine Science Center along with the New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station at Rutgers including budget and legislative funding requests to continue the cutting-edge research and education of the equine industry in New Jersey and to sustain the growth of the industry in the Garden State.

### **AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT** (2023)

NJFB shall urge the NJDA to embrace their mandate in the Aquaculture Development Act. “The Department of Agriculture shall be the lead state agency for the development, marketing, promotion, and advocacy of aquaculture in the State. The Department of Environmental Protection shall be the lead State agency with respect to regulation of aquaculture activities in [public fresh and marine] the waters of the State.”

NJFB shall support a change to the New Jersey Aquaculture Act, modifying the composition of the Aquaculture Advisory Council and clarifying the role of the Aquatic Farmers License (AFL). NJFB shall advocate for changing the Aquaculture Act to provide greater industry representation of active aquaculturists on the NJ Aquaculture Advisory Council and further advocating for the elimination of ex-officio seats on the Aquaculture Advisory Council of entities that no longer exist. NJFB shall advocate for a change to the Aquaculture Act revising the term Aquatic Farmers License (AFL) to Aquatic Farmers Registration, as said license (AFL) grants no further privileges or rights upon the farmer greater than those licenses, permits and instruments currently required to obtain the license. Furthermore, NJFB shall advocate all statutory penalties and associated fees and fines be removed from the AFL.

NJFB shall advocate statutorily renovated Aquatic Farmers Registration (AFR) act as a voluntary verification of multiyear permit requirements and conditions of external granting agencies, towards a process of expedited “Aquatic Registered Farmer” applications to annual NJDEP licenses and leases via a MOU with NJDA and NJDEP or by some other means.

NJFB shall advocate for statutorily required updates to the Aquacultural Development Plan be conducted every five years as mandated in the Aquaculture Development Act.

### **INDUSTRIAL HEMP PRODUCTION** (2023)

NJ Farm Bureau supports the production, processing, commercialization, and utilization of industrial hemp. At the federal level, it should be regulated by the USDA rather than the DEA. The 2014 Farm Bill allowed for industrial hemp production and many states are now growing it for market. USDA released its Hemp Production Interim Rule establishing national hemp regulations on October 31, 2019. They became effective immediately with a sixty-day comment period before they are permanently adopted.

USDA published a final rule on January 19, 2021, that provided regulations for the production of hemp in the United States and became effective on March 22, 2021. The final rule builds on the

interim final rule published October 31, 2019, that established the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program. The final rule incorporates modifications based on public comments and lessons learned during the 2020 growing season.

To date, most states have expressed support for decriminalizing the production of industrial hemp. Industrial hemp is not a significant producer of THC, the psycho-active element in marijuana. Industrial hemp was a valuable fiber, oilseed, and biomass crop in the United States prior to the 1938 Marijuana Act that criminalized the production of all types of hemp. Annually, over \$34 million of legal hemp products are imported into the United States from Canada, Belgium, Portugal and other countries.

NJFB will continue to assist in providing fact-based detail to the membership, legislators and the public regarding the benefits of industrial hemp production as a suitable and profitable crop for New Jersey growers.

NJFB will continue to support Rutgers as it further develops its policy for hemp production and marketing.

### **USDA (2023)**

New Jersey Farm Bureau believes the focus of the USDA should be on farmers and production agriculture. While it is understood that nutrition and environmental programs have significant value to our society, we urge the USDA to provide more grants and develop additional programmatic offerings to farmers, to ensure the viability of American production agriculture. NJFB supports legislative efforts that permanently establish and significantly improve the USDA Food Box program such as the Fresh Produce Procurement Reform Act.

### **Farm Services Agency**

Federal financial support for farming in New Jersey comes largely in the form of financial assistance for producers through the Farm Services Agency (FSA). Large amounts of money, in the form of federal disaster assistance, and other federal assistance programs, coming into New Jersey re-emphasize the need for additional staffing in the regional FSA offices. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports an increase in the USDA-FSA budget to accomplish this staff expansion.

The recent changes in trade relations with many countries have led to many new or higher tariffs being imposed on agricultural commodities, leading to lower prices. This has also caused many farmers to store great quantities of products rather than sell at depressed prices. This practice could drive down prices for years to come. The Market Facilitation Program (MFP) recently implemented is not sufficient to effectively assist farmers with the economic effects of retaliatory tariffs. The payments are not high enough, nor does this program cover all affected commodities.

New Jersey Farm Bureau strongly urges the administration to work with our trading partners to repair our trade relations with China and other countries, much like what has been accomplished with Mexico, Canada, Germany and others. The continuation of creating fair trade markets will allow farmers to receive their income from the market rather than support payments.

To expand communication and coordination between New Jersey producers and the FSA state office, Farm Bureau will offer its assistance in organizing increased information about agency programs. This should include the involvement of county boards of agriculture and affected commodity groups.

## Farm Loan Program

### Farm Bureau supports:

- A change in policy that would make equine operations eligible for the loan program.
- A change to allow the use of the direct Farm Ownership funds for refinancing debt. The FSA is currently not allowed to refinance an existing real estate purchase.
- A relaxation of the performance requirement for new (not yet preferred) lenders to participate in the loan guarantee program allowing banks with strong commercial portfolios to enter this program.

The Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) provides financial assistance to owners and operators of agricultural land who wish to establish, produce, and deliver biomass feedstocks. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the continued implementation and development of this program that promotes on-farm fuel production.

## New Jersey State Conservation Enhancement Reserve Program (CREP)

The Conservation Enhancement Reserve Program (CREP) was designed to help farmers voluntarily reduce potential impairment from agricultural water runoff sources to improve water quality along New Jersey streams.

It is important to note that this voluntary and beneficial program could be severely hampered by other regulatory agencies. If NJDEP or other agency creates regulations that mandate easements or buffers, this would eliminate the federal government's ability to pay incentives, because FSA is not permitted, by rule, to enroll land where the producer is required to perform a conservation practice as an obligation to comply with local, State or Federal law.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the following changes to the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP):

- Allow for continuous sign-up coverage. Coverage only takes hold after 30 days, so there is no reason for a coverage deadline.
- Eliminate acreage reporting deadlines. Crops should only need reporting as disasters occur, and by the end of the crop year for APH purposes.
- Add eligible loss conditions to include wildlife damage.
- Remove the requirement for a primary loss condition for secondary loss conditions like insect infestations and plant diseases to be eligible.
- Reduce production evidence requirements to eliminate the need to compare reliable production evidence. This is particularly difficult for New Jersey producers because so many sell retail. This also complicates the approval of APHs that are 150% of the county average and gives the producer no recourse.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the following changes to the Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL) to better serve New Jersey's diverse agricultural industry including:

- Allow for multi-use facilities to include some non-storage component (ie: office space in a storage barn) to a given percentage of the overall facility
- Eliminate late file acreage reporting fee for applicants

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports a change in the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) so that normal mortality could be based on the entire year's combined losses as opposed to each individual loss event.

High tree mortality caused by the Emerald Ash Borer and the Southern Pine Beetle has created a nuisance of dead trees falling on livestock fencing and deer fences on farms. NJFB supports the creation of a funding program for the removal of trees from fence lines and other areas that could cause damage to farm structures. The funding could be a program similar to the program that removes trees from severe weather-related events.

### 2023 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a complex and comprehensive piece of legislation that benefits all citizens, not just farmers. The September 30, 2023 deadline for adoption of a new Farm Bill passed without action, creating funding gaps and uncertainty for many federal farm programs. Congress must work to pass a new farm bill, utilizing a short extension of current law, if necessary.

NJFB priorities include:

- increased support for Specialty Crop block grants for marketing and promotion.
- improved/expanded crop insurance options for diversified specialty crop growers.
- strong support for research funding; Agricultural research provides farmers with new crop varieties and growing techniques, but also includes research on burgeoning topics such as climate resiliency and agrivoltaics.
- continued support for technical assistance for voluntary, working lands conservation programs like EQIP.
- timely passage of a unified farm bill which includes nutrition programs and farm programs together.
- Support for the Research Facilities Act to provide funding for much needed updating and rehabilitation of agricultural research facilities in the Land Grant University system.

New Jersey Farm Bureau opposes proposed legislation that would reduce the overall payment cap on EQIP contracts.

Commodity check-off programs provide valuable promotion activities supported by producer funding. All check-off programs are required to produce a report on total funds collected and how those funds are used. Timely reporting is essential to maintain confidence in these programs. New Jersey Farm Bureau opposes the OFF Act, and any other similar legislation that would dismantle the existing commodity check-off programs.

### Risk Management Agency (RMA)

The 2014 Farm Bill created several changes in crop insurance that producers need to be aware of.

First, to receive premium assistance from the federal government for crop insurance, producers will have to comply with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements that most already have to comply with as a result of participating in FSA and NRCS programs. Conservation compliance requires producers to have a conservation plan if they plant annually tilled crops on highly erodible soil and prohibits producers from planting on or destroying wetlands for crop production. Producers who do not comply with conservation compliance can still purchase crop



insurance, however, they will no longer be eligible to receive the government paid premium subsidy.

Second, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board of Directors approved a new Whole-Farm Revenue Protection policy. Whole-Revenue Protection combines Adjusted Gross Revenue and Adjusted Gross Revenue-Lite with some adjustments to target the following types of farms: (1) highly diversified farms and (2) farms selling 2-5 commodities to wholesale markets. This whole-farm insurance covers all commodities including specialty crops.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with RMA to develop a program for failed plantings in vegetable and flower crops. The NAP program does not work for New Jersey growers with multiple plantings when one or two plantings fail. Because so many New Jersey farms are so diversified, the development of risk management and insurance products that will meet the needs of those farms must be a priority for New Jersey Farm Bureau. New Jersey Farm Bureau should also work with FSA to add additional planting periods for crops where deemed appropriate, as an alternate solution to this issue.

Another key issue facing New Jersey farmers is acreage which is not eligible for prevented planting coverage when the first crop is not recognized e.g., rye harvested for straw as the first crop to be followed by soybeans. It is requested that rye and other small grains harvested solely as straw and green feed (before grain maturity) be classified as a recognized first crop for prevented planting purposes.

#### Other Risk Management

Farm Bureau believes that there ought to be an option created for farmers to self-insure for disaster assistance. According to this concept, federal banking law should be amended to allow a farmer or pool of farmers to set aside their own money in a tax-exempt, liquid status for ready use in the event of an USDA declared natural disaster. These funds should be segregated into separate interest-bearing accounts that may also be put into other financial investments (mutual funds, etc.) but still instantly liquid. Taxes would be paid on the amount of the original deposit at the point of withdrawal. The assistance of AFBF with this proposal is also requested.

#### Natural Resource Conservation Service

Federal payments to New Jersey farmland owners to create wildlife habitat, or to set aside farmland for other conservation purposes, are encouraging them to take many acres out of agricultural production. This land is then lost for farmers renting the land who depend upon those acres to be viable. Because New Jersey farmers already struggle with competition for tillable land, any loss of viable cropland is detrimental to the industry. The pattern of land ownership in New Jersey also differs in that there are many more farms owned by non-farmers to whom a government payment may appeal.

New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the USDA-NRCS and non-profit wildlife groups to be selective in the properties they target for projects. Agricultural and wildlife groups should work together to find ways to keep the best agricultural lands in agricultural production and use more marginal lands for wildlife habitat. Additionally, when properties are managed in such a way to enhance habitat for certain species, like ground nesting birds, it sometimes has the incidental effect of also creating deer habitat and refuges. This is a growing concern for New Jersey farmers.

NRCS has recently started using new models and methodology to determine soil losses on cropland. Compliance with these new standards has been especially difficult for vegetable growers on highly erodible lands. This creates difficulties for crop insurance qualification and FSA programs eligibility. Compliance is further complicated by a lack of vegetable growing cultural practices that can be incorporated into a soil loss standard. Vegetable growers are essentially being forced out of USDA program participation. This is unacceptable in New Jersey where vegetable production is the second largest commodity group. NJFB will work with the NRCS State Conservationist to modify soil loss calculation methodologies to reflect vegetable growing cultural practices that are available to farmers today that have been proven to be commercially viable.

In 2017, NRCS staff held 'Local Work Group' meetings in four different locations in the state. The purpose is to gather more input from those affected by NRCS programming. NRCS plans to continue holding these meetings. NJFB strongly encourages producers to participate in this process. NJFB also urges NRCS to plan their outreach meetings and activities at times that are reasonably convenient for farm producers to participate.

#### National Agriculture Statistics Service

Farm Bureau calls upon the New Jersey Congressional delegation to maintain adequate funding levels in the USDA budget for NASS spending that is so vital to the many programs of the USDA, NJDA and NJAES, in support of commercial agriculture. Since this information is so vital, Farm Bureau encourages its membership and all farmers to timely respond to all NASS survey's and Census requests.

#### Rural Development

The need to emphasize rural development issues such as emergency services, high-speed Internet access, cellular telephone network coverage, improved healthcare services, enhanced education and improved infrastructure is growing in importance to New Jersey's farm families and communities. NJFB should urge the Board of Public Utilities to push Verizon and other carriers to provide high speed internet and cellular network coverage in the Pinelands and other rural areas of New Jersey.

New Jersey Farm Bureau also supports the important work of USDA Rural Development to improve the quality of life and increase economic opportunity in rural America. We encourage the long-term funding of the grant, loan and loan guarantee programs administered by USDA Rural Development.

#### New Jersey Farm Bureau supports:

- Legislation encouraging rural economic development, particularly to foster agriculture and value-added opportunities.
- Rural Economic and Community Development programs and urge that these continue to be administered through USDA.
- Additional USDA Rural Development funding, targeting a greater portion of funds towards stimulating commerce in rural areas and increased technical and marketing assistance to provide value added opportunities for agricultural producers.
- Establishment of and funding for a state rural development council.

### **CLIMATE RESPONSE AND ADAPTATION** (2023)

Hundred-year climate trends in New Jersey are showing greater frequency of short-term droughts, greater frequency of heat waves, warmer summers overall, less frequent cold spell and a shorter duration of a chilling period. If the climate continues to warm, precipitation in New Jersey is expected to come more and more from heavier storms rather than more gentle gradual precipitation events. (Information from Rutgers Climate Institute's publication "Climate Change and Agriculture in New Jersey, January 2016)

These trends are having the following effects on New Jersey agriculture:

- Heat stress on crops affecting pollination, yield, disease, and sunscald.
- Heat stress on agricultural workers, affecting productivity.
- Heat stress on livestock, reducing productivity.
- Increased need for irrigation
- Need to evaluate alternative varieties of crops and breeds of livestock that are tolerant to new conditions.
- Soil erosion issues from dramatic rainfall events
- Changing species ranges of commercially important fisheries populations

Farm Bureau will continue to participate in state and federal events, policymaking and coalitions that address the effects of climate change on agriculture. NJFB is a member of the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance (NJCCA), it's Steering Committee, and its Natural and Working Lands subcommittee. The NJCCA is a statewide network of diverse organizations that share the goal of advancing science-informed climate change strategies at the state and local levels in New Jersey.

Farm Bureau should promote the research and dissemination of the research results for:

- Crop and livestock breeding that is focused on climate resilience.
- Soil management techniques that create drought tolerance and erosion resistance
- Capital improvements, such as landscape level water management, high tunnel construction, and irrigation systems that will add to farmers' ability to withstand erratic weather.
- Carbon credit redemption payment programs to farmers for new and existing conservation practices that trap carbon. NJFB shall explore standardization of metrics that could be used in a carbon credit program.

NJFB supports a stewardship program through the SADC that would provide grants for the necessary technology and equipment for climate-smart, precision agriculture.

New Jersey rejoined the RGGI (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative) in 2018. The State has since set up a grant program to spend a portion of the RGGI proceeds on natural climate solutions including promoting blue carbon in coastal areas and enhancing forests and urban forests. Agricultural land was excluded from the first round of grants. NJFB will continue to support agricultural projects as natural climate solutions for future rounds of RGGI funding.

Farm Bureau should participate in efforts on a national level to address potential solutions to climate change, as it is unlikely that autonomous efforts by farmers will curb the risk that climate change poses to the profitability of their operations. Farmers are large users of electricity and petroleum and therefore face big impacts from mitigation efforts if the government is not careful to minimize negative impacts to the industry.

In 2022, the USDA announced \$3.1 billion in funding for its Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity. Through this new program, USDA is financing partnerships to support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities via a set of pilot projects lasting one to five years. To date, 141 projects across the nation have been selected to participate. NJFB will support its growers and researchers interested in this partnership opportunity for future rounds of funding.

The Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (FACA) was formed in February 2020 by four groups that now co-chair the alliance: American Farm Bureau Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, and National Farmers Union. The alliance has since expanded to include FMI – The Food Industry Association, National Alliance of Forest Owners, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and The Nature Conservancy.

Together, the group developed more than 40 recommendations based on three principles: agricultural and forestry climate policies must be built upon voluntary, incentive-based programs, and market-driven opportunities; they must promote resilience and adaptation in rural communities; and they must be science-based. These recommendations share an overarching goal to do no harm. Climate policies will impact farmers, forest owners, ranchers, rural and limited-resources communities, wildlife, and natural resources and must be thoughtfully crafted to account for any potential inequities, consequences and tradeoffs.

## **RENEWABLE ENERGY** (2023)

### Ethanol

Farm Bureau shall encourage the state's congressional delegation to support the continuation of the federal Renewable Fuel Standard and resist the effort to eliminate it by the oil industry. More than 5 billion of the 14 billion bushels of corn produced in the US annually now are used in the production of ethanol fuel. The goal of the renewable Fuel Standard was to have 36 billion gallons into the supply by 2022.

### Biodiesel

Federal Incentives and new clean air requirements are improving the prospects for biodiesel. NJFB should continue to monitor the feasibility of biodiesel and soybean crush opportunities to help create additional marketing outlets for local soybeans.

### Biomass Crops

New technology and market conditions for electric power generation to serve New Jersey's energy needs may soon create an opportunity for farm-grown energy crops. Farm Bureau should work with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to enable biomass sources to be co-fired with other fuels as a class one renewable energy source and encourage other federal and state legislative efforts to further incentivize biomass energy production on farms.

NJFB shall work with DEP to streamline the air permitting process for stoves used to burn biomass energy as a heating source. The permitting fees and delays associated with obtaining these permits can add significant costs to the construction and operation of a biomass energy system and, under the current model, serve as a disincentive for on-farm biomass development.

### Solar and Wind Energy

Farm Bureau should seek amendments to the legislation on renewable energy on farms to ensure when a project is being done on a preserved farm and the farm's buildings are being used that the full roof surface could be used rather than just the portion needed to meet the farm's energy needs. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall continue to assess the economic feasibility and appropriateness of agrivoltaics with agriculture as the primary use on preserved farms. This expansion of solar could bring extra income to a preserved farm situation with no additional impacts to the land use.

There was also a law passed for the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to create rules for Dual Use also known as agrivoltaics where the farm produces both agricultural and horticultural crops as well as solar energy. We are currently waiting for the BPU to publish the rules for the new programs. New Jersey Farm Bureau commented on the draft of the industrial scale solar regulations supporting the efforts of the BPU to responsibly balance across the state the development of large-scale solar projects by using both the legislative 2.5% cap and the county average cap of 5%. The draft rules have not been sent out for final publication in the register.

New Jersey Farm Bureau along with the American Farmland Trust and Rutgers Ag Voltaic workgroup have had several meetings and formed a consensus for guiding the BPU in its rule making for dual use solar. The program outlined in legislation should be flexible enough to get answers on what works and does not work on working farmland using a variety of crops to provide answers and direct legislation for a permanent program.

- The program should also look at how incentives can be used to help farms change practices, acquire the appropriate equipment to farm in the new environment and help ensure energy payments enhance farm viability.
- Farm Bureau would also like to see the dual use program match up with the community solar programs so consumers can see that their local produced energy comes from the same farms in their community.
- The program as a pilot should not overly limit projects through open lands ratios or single design systems but allow for a diversity of crops and design layouts.

Farm Bureau should work with the BPU or seek legislation clarifying that when a farm project is net metering its energy use for a solar project, that the farm operation can use the combined readings of all meters on a farm to establish the farm energy use for the project and not require a different system for each meter on the farm.

Ag-modified wetlands often serve as a buffer for active agriculture and could also be a suitable place for solar or wind energy installations. NJFB shall encourage the DEP to look into the potential for this concept.

#### Other Renewable Energy Sources

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports and encourages the development and use of all renewable energy sources. Farm Bureau believes that these technologies are inherently beneficial to the state and should be supported where applicable. Farm Bureau shall seek the enactment of legislative and/or regulatory initiatives that provide incentives for the use of renewable energy sources. Farm Bureau also supports the increased use of renewable energy by all state government agencies.

#### **ENERGY USE ON FARMS** (2022)

The increase in energy prices brings more attention to the ongoing issue with the installation of demand meters. Demand meters attached to seasonal equipment such as irrigation pumps have resulted in significant charges to growers who have upgraded their equipment. Farm Bureau should support the reinstatement of the farm exemption for demand meters to clarify that all farms, new or existing, are exempt from the need to install a demand meter.

There are reports of utilities imposing significant fees on rural users seeking to go from two-phase to three-phase and or seeking to upgrade their services. To correct this problem, NJFB should urge the BPU to limit utilities from imposing these onerous fees on rural energy users and create a program that provides farmers an incentive to assist growers in the cost to install three-phase electric service.

In encouraging solar development on working farms even if it is to just provide energy to the home farm, Farm Bureau should seek legislation clarifying that when a farm project is net metering its energy use for a solar project, the farm operation can use the combined readings of all meters on a farm to establish the farm energy use for the project and not require a different system for each meter on the farm.

#### Energy Audits

There are several incentive programs available to farmers to help defray the costs associated with having an on-farm energy audit done. However, since funding is only available up to a certain amount, audits are often scaled down to fall within cost constraints and are therefore not always exhaustive. NJFB should work to pursue additional resources for farmers seeking more complete energy audits and should work with NJAES, a process that started with the on-farm energy use seminars, to further this policy goal.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) On-Farm Energy Initiative helps farmers and ranchers make voluntary improvements that can boost energy efficiency on the farm. Financial assistance is available to inventory and analyze farm systems that use energy and identify opportunities to improve efficiency through the development of an Agricultural Energy Management Plan. Growers report delays in completing these audits based on the limited number of technical service providers. NJFB should communicate with NRCS the need for more NRCS-certified Technical Service Providers to perform energy audits on farms across the state.

#### **LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY SUPPORT** (2023)

New Jersey's livestock industry is valued at nearly \$260 million annually. This includes equine, beef cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, lamb and goats and domestic livestock and rabbits. Too often, the industry is viewed for its component parts and not for its collective impact on New Jersey's agricultural economy. This narrow, compartmentalized view hinders access to research and vital support services essential for the livestock industry's success.

Currently, the state's livestock industry lacks a unified voice that is representative of the entire industry. A unified group representing all aspects of livestock production could play a key role by offering support and guidance on livestock issues. This could be an expansion of the Agricultural Animal Alliance (AAA) that was meeting through the animal science department at Rutgers and should consult regularly with the state's Department of Agriculture and Farm Bureau.

The Board of Mangers has undertaken a survey of livestock owners and operations in the state to better coordinate education and outreach efforts to the diverse livestock industry. Farm Bureau supported this effort and encouraged our members to participate in the survey.

An issue impacting the livestock industry is the limited access to slaughterhouse facilities. For many small-scale livestock producers, the custom-cut retail market is essential for sustained viability. Small-scale livestock producers are forced to travel greater distances – oftentimes out-of-state – to have their animals processed for retail sale.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with the livestock industry and supporters to locate a slaughter/processing facility that local producers can use to bring their animals to retail sales. This includes exploring the opportunities for state funding through the budget or the Economic Development Authority (EDA) and partners at the county or regional plan level. The New Jersey Highlands Council granted a \$150,000 planning incentive grant to Oxford Township Warren County to study the location of a facility on a redevelopment site.

Large Animal Veterinarian services:

Many livestock producers are finding it more difficult to get emergency Veterinarian care as there is a shortage of large animal vets in the industry and entering the industry. Though this is an emerging national issue, it is already reaching a critical impact stage here in NJ. The new Veterinary School at Rowan University won't begin programs until 2025 and it will be years before graduates come from the program with no guarantee of large animal practitioners. New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with the NJ Veterinarian Medical Association, the State Veterinarian, and State Board of Agriculture, Rutgers NJAES, Rowan University, and livestock industry representatives on steps that can be taken now to provide critically needed veterinary care immediately.

Another key to the success of New Jersey's livestock industry is education. This includes education for producers and consumers, who may not understand regulations and regulatory requirements. To take advantage of New Jersey's robust retail marketplace for livestock products, producers must continue to offer high quality products and redouble their focus on marketing. With both comes consumer awareness on the relative quality of locally produced livestock products. This education component includes essential extension research, marketing support and a unified voice to carry-forward the industry's message.

NJFB is uniquely positioned to assume a leadership role using publicity to build public support for this sector of the state's agriculture industry. Additionally, any marketing component should also include a branding program for New Jersey livestock products, like the "Jersey Fresh" program for fresh produce. This branding initiative should include quality grading standards developed by the statewide committee representing New Jersey's livestock industry.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should:

- Establish needs growth and potential of statewide livestock industry.
- Increase producer awareness of available USDA and other agency testing programs to diminish diseases such as Avian Flu.
- Monitor and mitigate prohibitive environmental regulations.
- Evaluate current staff and encourage the hiring of specialists in the livestock field.

- Establish a statewide committee, like the AAA representing all aspects of livestock production and work with this group to identify key industry needs going forward. NJFB should continue to support this committee once it has been established.
- Support livestock and slaughter facilities that offer essential services for livestock producers including custom-cutting and processing for retail sale.
- Work with County Vocational schools and County Colleges on training programs for butchers and meat cutters to ensure a well-trained workforce for the industry.
- Work with NJAES researchers and the statewide livestock committee to identify and support current and emergent education and marketing opportunities to enhance New Jersey's livestock industry.
- Generating public support and media publicity for the industry
- Support the establishment of a branding program for New Jersey livestock products that includes a quality grading standard to uphold the integrity of the label. This program, intended as a new marketing tool for New Jersey livestock products, should be established in consultation with the newly formed statewide livestock committee.
- Work with the NJ Veterinary Medical Association, the State Veterinarian, and State Board of Agriculture, Rutgers NJAES, Rowan University, and livestock industry representatives on addressing the large animal Veterinarian shortage and possible solutions that close the gap in services and bring forward any necessary legislation to implement those solutions.

### **ANIMAL CARE (2023)**

The State Veterinarian, housed within the NJDA, has drafted minimum standards for the care of farm animals, as required by state law. These were developed with the input of veterinarians and other livestock experts.

The adopted rule is the first of its kind in the nation to comprehensively address standards for livestock care as it relates it to animal cruelty. After challenges to the rules by animal rights groups the New Jersey Supreme Court upheld the authority and the expertise of the Department to promulgate the standards further stating, "Regardless of one's personal view of the overall regulatory scheme or of domestic livestock in general, the regulations are consistent with the meaning of the term "humane."

The Humane standards were readopted in 2017 with very little amendments or changes. They are scheduled for re-adoption in 2024 and are currently being amended to address the confinement of calves raised for veal and breeding sows in pork production. Farm Bureau will monitor the amendment and adoption process and encourage our members to make comments on the proposals.

It is very important for New Jersey agriculture to have strong and working humane standards for livestock producers that are based upon science and that separate agricultural management practices from true animal abuse. It is also important that those standards be referred to and followed by county prosecutors, animal control officers and law enforcement in consultation with Certified Livestock Investigators.

New Jersey Farm Bureau will:

- Continue to work with the Department of Agriculture and educate animal owners of the humane standards and how the rules apply to their farms and keep updated the guidebook produced with the department.



- Work with the Emergency Management Animal Working group and other animal rescue groups to ensure there is a support system for livestock operations in emergencies and during investigations to ensure humane treatment and care of livestock animals.
- Seek protection from unauthorized entry of farms by persons seeking farm management practice documentation without first gaining permission from the farm operator. This recommendation should be forwarded to the NJDA-Division of Animal Health, which has responsibility for the regulations pertaining to the care/treatment of farm animals and the enforcement thereof.
- Support and encourage the NJDA to update the humane standards to align with American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and industry best management practices.

The federal government through the USDA is working on a National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The program includes a Premise Identification (PI) component, and after much push back from the livestock groups the NAIS rules now focus on animals that move off premise and across state lines.

New Jersey Farm Bureau also supports the USDA Scrapie Eradication Program for sheep and goats and supports the USDA plan to phase in the NAIS tagging system to replace the current “scrapies” tag program in order to avoid duplication and undue expenses to those producers.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the USDA concepts (Program Aid No. 1797 and 1800) and does not want the NAIS or PI programs to become a burden on any domestic animal producers. Farm Bureau also supports the avoidance of multiple identification programs, processes, or requirements. Farm Bureau will oppose the imposition of fees to producers for implementation of this program.

### **FDA FEED DIRECTIVE (2023)**

The first phase of the FDA feed directive was implemented in 2017, removing all water-soluble antibiotics from the OTC market. It was to reduce the antibiotics in our waterways and lessen antibiotic resistance.

As an effort to further reduce potential over-use and resistance, the second phase of the adopted regulations, was implemented in June of 2023. This entailed the FDA removing over-the-counter availability for those additional antibiotics that are of importance to human health, unless prescribed by a veterinarian.

With limited numbers of livestock veterinarians, cost not only of care, but the cost drugs becoming limited in production is a great concern for farms large and small. However, while there are still legitimate concerns about timely care and limited numbers of livestock veterinarians, the FDA has held firm that the potential for creating antibiotic resistance in humans as well as livestock is too great to continue using these products without a veterinary prescription.

After consultation with representatives from NJDA, Rutgers and livestock veterinary medicine, it was determined that the best course of action going forward was to educate livestock owners about the FDA requirements and encourage them to develop a working relationship with a veterinarian, which includes a written document called a Veterinary-Client-Patient-Relationship. An article explaining the rule is available to Farm Bureau members on the NJFB.org website.

### **BUILDING CODES (2023)**

## Fire Code

The New Jersey Division of Fire Safety, a division of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (NJDCA), launched a state-wide enforcement initiative on farms in NJ. Within the Division of Fire Safety, the Bureau of Fire Code Enforcement is responsible for enforcing the State's Uniform Fire Code. The bureau was prompted to investigate farm buildings for any violations of the uniform fire code or building code depending on the age of the building. Initially, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture was consulted about the on-farm inspection directive.

There is a specific regulation that would have a significant impact on most farms regarding the placement of fuel tanks on farms. The existing code does not allow for fuel tanks to be within 50 feet of any building. Since most fuel tanks are next to ag buildings providing easy access to electric service and have shown to be the safest location to prevent collisions when maneuvering large equipment on farms. The NJFB attended a fire code advisory meeting to recommend a regulatory change for fuel tanks. The council accepted the recommendation, but the process is still progressing through the administrative process for the regulatory change.

Growers with questions about the fire code regulations with respect to farm labor housing should review the letter the NJDA provided. The letter also includes instructions on how to request a variation for alternative fire sprinklers that require less water reserve. Some agricultural employers will need to retrofit existing labor houses to meet code requirements. This regulation has placed an economic disadvantage on New Jersey growers. NJFB supports continued efforts with NJDA & the Department of Community Affairs to explore alternative standards for seasonal farm labor housing including amending the requirement for fire suppression in single story farm labor housing and merging fire codes on farm labor housing with Department of Labor regulations and furthering a consistency with every other state's farm labor fire codes. NJFB supports grant funding to help offset the expense of compliance.

## Building Code

There needs to be clearer guidance for single use structures as to whether a permit is needed and if the structure should be taxed. The use of large hoop metal pipe storage facilities have been more common on farms and easily dismantlable with no foundation. These structures should not need permits for construction to use as storage for agricultural products or equipment.

## **RIGHT TO FARM** (2023)

Next to the Farmland Assessment Act, the Right to Farm Act is the most important state policy to encourage and maintain agriculture in New Jersey. The amendments of 1998 strengthened the Act considerably, and subsequent legal judgments have upheld the power afforded to the County Agriculture Development Boards (CADBs) to adjudicate conflicts involving farm operations. The SADC and New Jersey Farm Bureau continue to encourage each CADB to write letters to all municipal attorneys explaining the legal decisions supporting the CADB's role in Right to Farm conflict resolution. The New Jersey Farm Bureau should act to request a concrete determination from the Attorney General that could be sent to any local judge that ignores the statutory requirement that Right to Farm conflicts must be taken to the CADBs first.

The State Board of Agriculture convened a Right to Farm subcommittee to discuss ways in which the administration of the Right to Farm Law in New Jersey can be strengthened, streamlined, and modernized to deal with the evolving landscape Garden State farmers find themselves facing. The State Board is currently reviewing surveys, meeting with the SADC staff, and exploring the opportunity for a RTF ombudsman in NJDA. NJFB supports the efforts of this committee.

### Funding for CADB's

Even with the updates to the Right to Farm Act, many farmers are caught in the crosshairs of nuisance complaints. Those complaints cost the farmer and all municipal property taxpayers' time and money. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall seek amendments to the Right to Farm Act that would require a posting of a bond by those who file a complaint to cover all landowner and farmer's defense costs if farming activities are found by the CADB to be protected under the Right to Farm Act. Such bonds should also cover all costs incurred by township and county professionals who might need more technical expertise to deal with such issues than what are available on the CADB's or county planning staffs.

### CADB Volunteers

The primary responsibility for support and implementation of the Right to Farm Act belongs with those who have knowledge of New Jersey agriculture, the CADBs and SADC. The authority held by CADBs creates a great opportunity for the agricultural community, but also a great responsibility. More than ever, the CADBs need knowledgeable commercial farmers to lend their time and expertise. Ensuring an ample supply of volunteers for the CADBs is a critical first step in making the Right to Farm program work effectively. There is an increasing need for training of those volunteers in conflict resolution, hearing procedures and other aspects of the process to make sure they are qualified to carry out their duties is the second step. New Jersey Farm Bureau calls upon the legislature to allocate funding to the SADC for continued and expanded CADB training and educational activities.

Farm Bureau must strongly encourage participation on these boards and give the appropriate recognition to those who choose to serve.

New Jersey Farm Bureau will continue to push for alternate farmer members on the CADBs, to ensure the agricultural community still has a voice in the absence of its regular farmer members.

If CADB members are found to have a conflict of interest on an issue, NJFB supports allowing the board with consultation with the board attorney present to decide of the conflict and referring the case to a different CADB, so a timely hearing (within 90 days) and decision can be made on an application deemed complete.

### Notice to Neighbors

Right to Farm experience in other states shows that regular notice to all landowners that agriculture is a publicly endorsed land use helps a great deal in educating newcomers to the rights of farmers. A model ordinance about notice or a clause added to the local Right to Farm ordinance could encourage more towns to head off conflicts before they become confrontational. The SADC has a model Right to Farm ordinance that municipalities may use. While the SADC cannot require that the model ordinance be used, NJFB urges the SADC to promote and strongly encourage its use by local municipalities to help create more uniform Right to Farm protection on the local level. Further, NJFB shall encourage the SADC to develop more educational materials to help municipalities gain a better understanding of the Right to Farm Act and the process through which complaints are handled. The SADC's informational booklets, "The Right to Farm Act in New Jersey" and "New Jersey Agricultural Mediation Program Handbook" both are valuable tools for farmers, their neighbors, and municipalities.

### AMP's

Farm Bureau shall actively seek to participate in any SADC working groups for future AMP development.

Farm Bureau encourages the SADC to put a high priority on adding, through regulation if needed, agricultural labor housing to its list of protected practices, and an accompanying AMP should be developed. Housing for agricultural labor is essential to many farming operations and the construction of labor facilities must be protected under the Right to Farm.

The Right to Farm Act was amended in 2021 to extend RTF eligibility to year-round, full-time agricultural, equine laborers. The eligibility is for the housing of “full-time, year-round equine-related farm employees in the same building or facility as the horses.” The law explicitly excludes eligibility for the housing of migrant or seasonal employees/workers. The law directs the SADC to develop an AMP for equine laborer housing but does not set a deadline. NJFB supports the quick adoption of an AMP for equine labor housing by the SADC and also supports legislation allowing the same protections for other types of ag labor housing.

NJFB also supports the creation of a new AMP for alcohol-based agritourism and one for shellfish aquaculture.

Farm Bureau shall urge the SADC to use the AMP re-adoption process (every seven years) to re-examine the NJAES recommendation guides that are referenced in the fruit and vegetable AMP's. In some cases, NJAES has published updated recommendation guides that should be given consideration by the SADC as replacements for what may be outdated reference documents within the AMP's.

Farm Bureau urges the SADC to work as quickly as possible to adopt the remaining renewable energy AMP's and guidelines for preserved farms. The SADC has made some progress by adopting the AMP for solar energy generation and the rule to allow for solar energy generation on preserved farms; however, farmers wishing to install wind generating facilities on any farm are still waiting for the ability to do so and are losing valuable tax incentive opportunities in the meantime.

Farm Bureau endorses an amendment to the RFT rules, including the AMP for On Farm Marketing Facilities, Activities and Events, to establish guidelines for the temporary use of off-site public road parking during the peak season and for specific events crucial to the continued operation and success of a farm, and to permit the CADB to approve the use of off-site public road parking as part of a SSAMP approval where a farm demonstrates the need for off-site public road parking, the dates and times when such parking is needed, and adequate protections are put in place such that the off-site parking does not pose a threat to the health and safety of the general public.

Activities not addressed by the On-Farm Direct Marketing AMP

Weddings and other life celebratory events may be an important tool in marketing the agricultural output of a farm and therefore, some level of them should be able to take place and be protected under the Right to Farm Act if they are being used to market the agricultural products of the farm. However, there is also the possibility that New Jersey farms, preserved and unpreserved, could be turned into wedding facilities where the main objective is not related to the agricultural output of the farm and the activities could reach a threshold where they should require municipal approval.

Through site-specific cases, the SADC has taken the position that weddings and other life celebratory events on farmland do not qualify for Right to Farm protection. Farm Bureau disagrees in some cases and believes that weddings and other life celebratory events may be considered protected under the Right to Farm Act if there is a relationship to marketing the agricultural output of the farm.

A law to allow a specific number of special occasion events (SOE) on preserved farms was enacted in the spring of 2023. The first season of hosting these events is concluding, and Rutgers NJAES has been charged with monitoring the success of the program, with input from the SADC. NJFB encourages this evaluation to maximize SOE opportunities and ensure compliance with local towns and the DOE and will monitor the process.

In 2014, the SADC adopted amendments to the Right to Farm procedural rules. Included in the amendments was a Model Site-Specific AMP Review Checklist developed by the SADC that CADB's may use to assist in the review of Site-Specific AMP requests. The Model Checklist contains a wide variety of review possibilities so that if a CADB adopts the checklist, it may then be tailored to the specific SSAMP request based upon the complexity of the request. Historically, there was some misunderstanding among CADB's about the purpose of the checklist and whether it was a new requirement placed upon them by the SADC. SADC has clarified the purpose of this checklist with the CADB's, and this is no longer an issue.

#### Conflict Resolution

NJFB supports a consistent conflict resolution process across the state and encourages open communications between the SADC and CADB's.

NJFB urges the SADC to respond quickly and strongly when conflicts arise as a result of a local municipality's lack of understanding of the Right to Farm Act and process. This action and involvement is critical when a township is proposing an ordinance that is clearly in conflict with Right to Farm. When such proposals are brought to the attention of a CADB and the SADC the boards should take action to address the municipal action before it becomes adopted and conflicts with the act or adopted AMPs.

NJFB believes that CADB decisions should stand without prejudice toward or action against the farm operator, while an appeal to the state level is pending as the conflict resolution process can take an extended period at great cost to the farmer.

NJFB shall seek clarification from the SADC on whether the CADB's can question and re-examine the standards that are set forth within an SADC adopted AMP during a Right to Farm conflict resolution.

#### Agricultural Advisory Committees

The formation of municipal Agricultural Advisory Committees (AAC) is a requirement for any town that participated in and accepted monies through planning incentive grant (PIG). This requirement ensures that towns receiving state farmland preservation monies solicit and incorporate local farmer input on all agricultural issues. There are increasing instances of municipalities that received funds not utilizing the AACs as they promulgate new ordinances and policies that impact agriculture.

For this reason, the delegates of the NJFB call upon the SADC to promulgate guidance and rules to municipalities that received PIG monies which will require them to utilize and consult with AACs whenever any policies or ordinances are proposed that impact agriculture within the town.

#### Communication and Education

Farm Bureau shall actively distribute information about the Right to Farm to individual farmers via direct mail and fax broadcast to members listing this issue as a “topic of interest” on their membership application. New Jersey Farm Bureau should publish regular updates on proposed AMP’s, prominent cases that are pending and new innovations in the scope of this program. The county boards of agriculture should be updated on a regular basis.

New Jersey Farm Bureau recommends that the New Jersey Department of Agriculture booklet “Fact Sheet for Commercial Farm Buildings” be updated to reflect the Act’s role in farm building construction.

### **TAXATION ISSUES** (2023)

#### Local Property Taxes

Because education in the State of New Jersey is funded mainly through local property tax, the financial burden of education is unfairly placed primarily on property owners. This has become a growing financial hardship for farmland owners.

This method of school funding has also created a social climate that is hostile toward any new growth or development. Many municipalities are making land use and planning decisions based not on what is best for the environment or the community, but rather, to slow or even stop development, in an effort to hold down school taxes. Many of these land use decisions, like down zoning, drastically diminish a farmland owner’s equity.

To help protect the property rights and financial well-being of farmland owners, New Jersey Farm Bureau strongly supports a change in the method by which New Jersey schools are funded. We urge the Governor and Legislature to immediately address this issue.

An area of concern has grown with State institutions, particularly colleges, that have expanded and bought residential units for staff to use as a residence as part of their employment compensation. The concern is that these increasing tax-exempt residential buildings are consuming services as any other residence in the community but not contributing to the tax base. The NJFB supports the reexamination of tax-exempt status based on “exclusive use” be revised to allow municipalities to assess taxes fairly to all residents in the community.

#### Mansion Tax

New Jersey imposes an additional fee of one percent of the sales price for homes with sales prices of \$1 million or more, i.e., the “mansion tax.” The mansion tax also applies to certain commercial properties as well. The mansion tax is imposed on several different types of property including farms, provided that the farm includes a building or structure intended or suitable for residential use, such as a residential farmhouse. This extra tax only exacerbates the existing challenge of farmland affordability. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports a change in this rule that would exempt all farmland assessed lands, including agricultural improvements, from the calculated property value that is used to determine if a property is subject to the mansion tax.

#### State Inheritance and Estate Taxes

New Jersey is one of only seven states that impose an Inheritance Tax. The New Jersey inheritance tax ranges from 11%-16% depending on the class of beneficiary. New Jersey Farm Bureau continues to support the elimination of the New Jersey Inheritance Tax, or at minimum, an increased exemption amount for non-exempt inheritors.

#### State Income Taxes

Farm Bureau should work toward allowing New Jersey farmers to average three years income for purposes of state income taxes.

#### Federal Taxes

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the permanent elimination of the federal estate tax and the federal capital gains tax.

New Jersey's land values are among the highest in the nation, and a large percentage of a farmers' assets are in the form of land, equipment, and structures, that are largely illiquid. The death taxes represent a regressive tax on assets that were already taxed at least once, and these taxes represent a disincentive to farmers to invest in their businesses to remain competitive in a market where margins are slim at best. The death tax can also make intergenerational transfer of farms difficult or impossible. This could also have an impact on preserved farms, forcing owners to liquidate to pay the tax.

New Jersey Farm Bureau calls upon the United States Congress to exempt all farms from the federal estate or death tax, and furthermore call on the New Jersey legislature to do the same.

NJFB recognizes that this is a complex issue, and that any changes may require careful negotiation. Until a complete exemption from state and federal estate/inheritance taxes can be achieved for farms, New Jersey Farm Bureau urges its members to take all appropriate estate planning measures.

Farm Bureau supports eliminating the capital gains tax. Until this is possible, the tax rate should be reduced, and assets should be indexed for inflation. In addition, there should be an exclusion for agricultural land that remains in production, for transfers of farm business assets between family members, for farmland preservation easements and development rights, and for land taken by eminent domain. At the very least, capital gains taxes should not be collected at death, and the unlimited step-up in basis of inherited assets should continue.

Currently, farmers who donate food through "gleaning" programs are not eligible for the tax deduction. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall support a modification to the current federal tax deduction for food donations, so that farmers donating their products could qualify.

#### Motor Fuels Tax

New Jersey Farm Bureau should investigate a possible expansion of the current exemptions from the Motor Fuels Tax to include the transport of agricultural, livestock and seafood products transported on public roads within the state of New Jersey.

#### **WIC AND SFMN PROGRAMS** (2023)

Since 1994, The Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Program, has provided Jersey Fresh fruits and vegetables to a segment of New Jersey's nutritionally at-risk population

who wouldn't normally purchase farm fresh produce. In 2002 a pilot program was started to address the fresh food needs of our senior citizens and to that end the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) was started with great success for New Jersey's direct farm marketers. Both programs have put federal food program dollars in farmer's hands but unfortunately, they have not had as successful a rate of return.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports exploring the development of greater access for WIC and SFMNP participants including making electronic reading devices available to more local area growers. Clarifying requirements for participating farmers as well as alleviating some of the training hours to encourage more farmer involvement is supported by NJFB.

In 2019, NJ Department of Health was approved by USDA to authorize farmers markets to accept WIC/SFMNP rather than only individual farmers who go through the training. This was meant to allow more farmers to participate in the program without having to invest in it but was mostly unsuccessful due to market understaffing.

In 2023 a Fact Sheet was developed by the NJDA modifying eligibility for growers with less than five acres to participate in WIC, FMNP and SFMNP. The change allows growers on less than five acres to participate if they are located in one of the NJ Economic Development Authority (EDA) designated food desert communities. NJFB supports this change.

Every year, these programs are losing farmer participants and federal funds are being returned instead of being utilized. Farm Bureau shall continue to monitor what is going on with the program so that this decline in funding doesn't continue, allowing the program to be rebuilt with transparency.

Farm Bureau should work with the NJDA and NJDOH to identify and implement new strategies for enhancing redemption of SFMNP and WIC vouchers at community and retail farm markets throughout the state.

State managed resources/lists of farms and markets that accept WIC, SFMNP and SNAP need to be updated on an annual basis to remain current and useful to those wishing to use their vouchers.

In 2023, the DOH moved to a QR code internet-based system for the redemption of WIC, S/FMNP. NJFB will continue to monitor the roll out.

NJFB encourages the State to investigate vendors/technology for simple, modern machines to streamline processing benefits and make it as easy as possible for farmers to accept all forms of payment.

In addition, farmer input should be included in any proposed changes or discussions.

### **NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BUDGET (2023)**

Farm Bureau supports full funding to the NJ Department of Agriculture and strongly opposes any further reduction of the Department's budget.

New Jersey's agricultural industry is growing and expanding each year. For this growth to continue, the industry requires certain basic services and programs from the Department of



Agriculture. New Jersey Farm Bureau recognizes the financial situation of the state; however, the Department of Agriculture should not be forced to make further cuts if they mean cutting vital services. With a hiring freeze in place and the retirement of key individuals, core functions of the Department are at risk.

In recent years, additional funds were put in the department's budget for industrial hemp, food security, deer fencing, and Jersey Fresh program. Farm Bureau should continue to support this and additional funding for the department's critical programs in the upcoming budget and work with the governor, the legislature, and the State Board of Agriculture to ensure there is the necessary funding. Due to increased workloads, NJFB supports increases in the budget for the Beneficial Insect Lab and the Division of Animal Health.

NJFB will request additional State budget appropriations for:

- Jersey Fresh Marketing- of seafood/aquaculture products \$100,000.
- Additional funding for Jersey Fresh to cover new programs such as Jersey Native, Jersey Grown and Jersey Bred.
- Continued funding for deer fencing for non-preserved farms.
- Additional staff resources for the different divisions at a minimum of \$150,000 per hire for:
  - Agriculture & Natural Resources,
  - Plant Industry,
  - Animal Health,
  - Marketing and Development
  - Fisheries and Aquaculture.

### **FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCE EDUCATION & FFA (2023)**

Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education prepares people for careers and professional leadership in production, processing, marketing, and distribution of agricultural products, and for related careers in plant and animal technology (including aquatic life), economics, education, mechanics and engineering, natural resources and environmental technology, food science, biotechnology, politics, sociology, and international relations and trade.

Quality Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education programs consist of classroom/laboratory instruction by a certified teacher of agriculture; work-based learning through supervised agricultural experience programs; and leadership and career development through FFA.

New Jersey Farm Bureau is concerned about successfully meeting growing domestic and global demands for food and fiber and seeks to identify the future managers, producers, scientists, leaders, and others who will ensure the future security and productivity of agriculture. We recognize the need for higher academic achievement among students, especially in math and science. We also recognize requirements for increased accountability, standards, rigor, and relevance throughout the quality education systems.

To achieve this, New Jersey Farm Bureau endorses the implementation of rigorous and relevant secondary Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education programs in schools with approved agriculture programs, as well as in schools wanting to establish approved agriculture programs. New Jersey Farm Bureau recognizes the consistent use and positive impact of the national Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE) program throughout New Jersey. School districts, especially those with CASE, are establishing articulation agreements with 2- and

4-year postsecondary institutions to offer college credit for rigorous agriculture courses at the secondary levels. Therefore, agriculture students are receiving college credit for high school agriculture courses saving the time and money for content learned at the secondary level.

Recruitment of more students focused on agricultural sciences and Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Education will be necessary to meet employment demands in the future. Marketing New Jersey's high-tech agriculture programs to students (and their parents) interested in pursuing professional agricultural careers is a priority and is necessary if we are to serve global needs for food and fiber.

The National Council for Agricultural Education and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) recognizes the national shortage of agriculture teachers. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the New Jersey State Teach Agriculture Results (STAR) program where a team of 12 people representing education, agriculture, FFA, Rutgers and Delaware Valley University to promote careers as agriculture teachers. New Jersey may lose up to 11 veteran agriculture teachers in the next few years. The STAR program implemented a recruitment campaign to build the supply of young people to replace those retiring. In addition, there is a continued need for both the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and Graduate School of Education to strengthen the agricultural education program, including a qualified agricultural education professor, in order to meet the future needs of certified teachers of agriculture and the current shortage. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports legislative efforts to establish a student loan forgiveness program for agricultural education teachers.

### **COMMUNICATION** (2023)

The public overwhelmingly supports and wants to preserve New Jersey agriculture. We must not allow untruthful or distorted perceptions to cloud or weaken that public support. Farm Bureau, county boards of agriculture, commodity organizations and allied entities like CADB's and units of local government should speak out in support of the adopted policies for the industry. Public relations on behalf of agriculture must be a main priority of New Jersey Farm Bureau.

Farm Bureau shall continue to implement a proactive, planned approach to communicating agriculture's key messages. NJFB has developed an ongoing relationship with reporters in the print and broadcast media that serve New Jersey, many of whom now seek the Farm Bureau's input when reporting on issues and stories that pertain to agriculture.

In addition, Farm Bureau staff and members shall all take an active role in daily scanning of newspapers for agriculturally related items and sharing those clips with the entire staff to ensure that current media coverage is being fully monitored and responded to in a timely manner when appropriate.

In addition to communicating our policy issues, New Jersey Farm Bureau must also promote the agricultural industry and the organization of Farm Bureau to the non-agricultural community. Agriculture needs to continue to build alliances and support outside the farm community to ensure that emerging issues are identified and addressed early by a strong coalition of support. Improving the overall agricultural literacy of the non-farming public must be a priority for New Jersey Farm Bureau. This can occur in a variety of ways including distribution of printed materials, a presence on the internet/social media, and through in-person contact at events like county fairs.

NJFB shall work with the county boards and other agricultural organizations to develop a network of well-informed farmers with strong communication skills to disseminate the industry's key messages. NJFB should specifically target graduates of the New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program and members of the NJFB Young Farmers and Ag Professionals to participate in this network, to capitalize on the training, they've received.

In addition to communicating with the media and public, NJFB needs to keep legislators aware of how policy decisions may affect farmers.

To effectively communicate with legislators, New Jersey Farm Bureau shall:

- identify key issues of importance to agriculture and relay that information to Farm Bureau members.
- assist its members by providing information about who New Jersey's legislators are and how they can be reached most effectively.
- encourage all members to take advantage of AFBF's online advocacy tools to communicate with Congress; and
- Identify those key members with the most knowledge of Farm Bureau policies and strongest communication skills and nominate them to be part of the Farm Bureau Grassroots Outreach (GO) Team.
- Recruit additional members to New Jersey Farm Bureau's new Advocacy Action Team, and expand the use of this online tool, to become more effective agricultural advocates on state legislative issues.

### **NEW JERSEY AG IN THE CLASSROOM** (2023)

The New Jersey Ag in the Classroom program is now managed through New Jersey Farm Bureau's Women's Leadership Committee. This program provides teaching resources, grants, and other teacher education programs to improve agricultural literacy by increasing the frequency and level of agricultural education in New Jersey schools.

In Spring of 2024 the NJ Ag in the Classroom Program will engage in a new effort, creating educational "ag crates" for use in elementary schools, to teach about climate change in a factual and grade-appropriate way. These "ag crates" will contain all the items a teacher will need to teach about a specific topic - coordinated lesson plans, books, and hands-on activities.

New Jersey Farm Bureau will continue its support of the NJ Ag in the Classroom program.

### **HIGHLANDS** (2023)

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act became law in 2004 and the first regional masterplan was adopted in 2008, and since then there have been two plan conformance and review processes to update the plan. The Highlands Regional Master Plan is a regional approach to protect the water and natural resources of the Highland's Region, to plan for growth and development in the region and encourage appropriate sustainable economic development.

New Jersey Farm Bureau has followed and participated in the planning process. It has encouraged the Highlands Council to adopt policies to protect landowner property rights and values, encouraged agriculture as an industry to be supported in the region, and sought balance in policies to encourage appropriate development and economic growth while protecting the important water resources in the region. Using programmatic funds issued through the budget

process the highlands council established a sustainable agriculture grant program geared toward production systems as well as regional marketing of agricultural products in the highlands. The Council have also used their planning incentive grant funding to look at redevelopment projects that could benefit food processing in the region.

Going forward New Jersey Farm Bureau will focus on three main areas: 1. land preservation and equity, ensuring that money is available to compensate landowners fairly for the preservation and restriction of their lands; 2. Agriculture viability and sustainability, looking for ways the council can invest in the agriculture industry in the region; 3. Housing and development, to ensure there is appropriate development that can include the housing needs of the agriculture workforce and the other industries in the region. 4. Have equal representation from all counties in the Highlands region

#### Land Preservation/Equity:

- Working to fund the HDC Bank annually so that it always has money to buy HDC credits since without mandatory Receiving Areas there is no market other than the Bank to buy credits. Ensure that the opening credit value is recalculated to be closer to the true property values being lost.
- Work with the legislature on new initiative to fund the TDR bank in the highlands, including a permanent dedication of a portion of the CBT or annual appropriations in the budget
- Urging the HLC to support any and all farmland preservation funding from the Legislature,
- Encourage the completion of the “Municipal Average” study as an alternative to the current appraisal processes for land preservation.

#### Agriculture viability and sustainability:

- Ensure that the existing rules for agriculture development are followed and that towns coming in for plan conformance have strong right to farm policies in place.
- Supporting timely implementation of the new land conservation programs and clarification of how they will apply to forested properties. Support the use of USDA forest stewardship programs and funding to encourage active land management on private lands.
- Work with the Council and staff on forest management incentives for the region to improve public and private forestry in the region.
- Encourage partnerships between County Economic Development authorities, the Highlands Council and the State’s Economic Development Authority on Projects that can enhance agriculture production and processing in the region.
- Support the Highlands Council's sustainable agriculture grant program.
- Support the functions of the newly formed agriculture advisory committee.

#### Housing and Development:

- Monitoring the activities of the Highlands Credit Bank and urge more progress in development of a viable TDR program, including the establishment of mandatory receiving areas that would provide a real market for Highlands Development Credits,
- Supporting the HLC in making planning expertise and funding available to towns where there is potential for development of a Receiving Zone, including the communities outside the Region but in Highlands counties where research shows capacity for the necessary increase in density of development.
- Study the housing needs of the agricultural workforce in the region for both year-round and seasonal work forces and encourage policies to allow for workforce housing in the region.

- Plan as a region for other types of development including warehouses and solar to reduce pressure on the agricultural land base and impacts to the agriculture viability in the region.

### **EMINENT DOMAIN** (2022)

Eminent domain gives governments the power to “take” private property for “public use” or “public purposes” while providing “just compensation” to the landowner. States have statutes and rules that set up a process to be followed that is supposed to be fair for all parties: the landowner, the government entity, and the public that theoretically receives the ultimate benefit of the action.

New Jersey has its Eminent Domain Act of 1971 and the Local Redevelopment and Housing Act that set up a prescribed set of conditions for using the condemnation power and a legal process that must be followed.

The New Jersey Agricultural Development and Retention Act recognizes the possibility of using eminent domain to take farmland by setting up a process within the Act (NJSA 2:4C - 19) through which CADBs can “determine the effect of the use of this power upon the preservation and enhancement of agriculture in the Agricultural Development Area, the municipally approved program, and upon overall State agricultural preservation and development policies.” Government’s contemplating using eminent domain to acquire farmland in an Agricultural Development Area are required to notify the CADBs, or in counties with no CADB, the SADC. These boards review the reasons offered and can hold a public hearing before deciding whether there will be adverse effects on the Agricultural Development Area. In using this process, there have been instances when a CADB or the SADC determined that there would be no effects harmful enough for them to oppose the action.

Farm Bureau shall:

- Oppose the use of eminent domain to take farmland out of agriculture for open space acquisition or merely to obtain increased tax revenue for an agricultural property.
- Be a resource for farmers, municipal officials, the state’s planning entities, Highlands and Pinelands Councils, and state regulators on the process and impacts to farmers and farmland owners when Eminent Domain occurs.
- Work with the Legislature to amend the New Jersey eminent domain statutes to strengthen measures to protect active farmland from indiscriminate and ill-advised use of this powerful tool.
- Support proposed legislation restricting the use of redevelopment incentives when agricultural lands are targeted as part of a redevelopment plan. We understand there are times when agricultural land needs to be developed but it should not be targeted with incentives to do so.

### **RELIEF FROM EXCESSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS** (2023)

Ever since 1972 and the passage of the federal Clean Water Act the Legislature has repeatedly assigned to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection ever increasing power and authority to regulate a broad range of activities related to the use of our land, water, plant, animal, and other natural resources, often without precise detailed and quantifiable standards. This has resulted in the agency adopting regulations to not only implement the federal rules but adopting state regulations that in most cases exceed the federal standards, resulting in NJ being more restrictive(protective) than the federal government.

Currently The DEP is looking to update the flood protections standards, this will be a multi rule update starting with the inland flood rules, then the coastal area rules. The approach is a new one for the agency by looking at predictive future rainfall modeling rather than relying on past rainfall data that has been collected and the models they have been using for these types of rules.

NJ Farm Bureau must:

- Strongly affirm its support for DEP efforts to make the regulatory burden more appropriate for agricultural operations by allowing simpler, less expensive ways to get approval. This is essential to enable NJ farmers to increase their implementation of BMPs and access to USDA Farm Bill environmental protection programs to the same extent as farmers in other states.
- Encourage DEP to address on farm natural resource concerns through development and implementation of a farm conservation plan along with practices from the national USDA-NRCS Field Technical Guide (FOTG).
- Make clear the unique needs of agriculture and the impacts of new flood rules on agricultural operations and seek alternative methods and standards for reviewing agricultural development projects in order to support the state policy of a viable agriculture industry.
- Partner with like-minded organizations to support any movement by DEP to make necessary environmental regulation more practical and appropriate.
- Farm Bureau should encourage the DEP to develop protocols for cases of repetitive complaints about a farm from the public on the same issues. DEP should first investigate permits, licenses, or programs that are already in place on the farm, before going out to the farm property to investigate. Furthermore, when the complaint filer's issue has been investigated and DEP finds that the farmer is in compliance with required rules, permits, licenses, etc. the DEP should testify to the complainer that the issue has been investigated (date, time) and addressed and that the farmer/farm is in compliance.
- Communicate this directive to the Governor, the Commissioner of the DEP, the Legislature, and farm conservation agencies.

We all can agree that environmental protection is important. Through good conservation and management practices agriculture can improve the environment. The public recognizes this, and the DEP should also recognize this in their development of rules and regulations. Environmental protection regulations must also be tempered with consideration for the impacts they have on our economy and society and their ability to absorb the ever-increasing restrictions on our natural resources.

### **U.S. CLEAN WATER ACT (2023)**

#### **Waters of the United States (WOTUS)**

In January 2023, the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finalized a new WOTUS rulemaking that replaced the 2020 Navigable Waters Protection Rule. In their new rule, the agencies doubled down on the unworkable "significant nexus test" and created more risk and uncertainty for farmers and other landowners.

AFBF and others sued the EPA and the Corps over the 2023 WOTUS Rule. District Court rulings have prevented the 2023 Rule from going into effect in 27 states. The litigation is still ongoing, but a May 2023 Supreme Court decision in Sackett v. EPA forced EPA and the Corps to revise their 2023 Rule.

After the Supreme Court ruling in Sackett, EPA and the Corps chose to revise only a slice of the rule that was rejected by the Court. The agencies eliminated the “significant nexus” test that all nine Supreme Court Justices rejected—but ignored other concerns raised by the Justices, 27 states, and farmers across the country about the rule’s failure to respect private property rights and the Clean Water Act.

The updated rule leaves in place much of the overreach that Farm Bureau and many others have been opposing, including the agencies’ vague “relatively permanent” standard. For this reason, AFBF will persist in its legal challenge to the rule to protect farmers from the threat of penalties and prosecution for simply farming their land.

#### NPDES Permits

The Clean Water Act (CWA) controls water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants in and around waters of the United States through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has never required NPDES permits for the application of pesticides for agricultural crop protection, mosquito control, invasive aquatic weed control, forest canopy insect control, or other registered uses of pesticides when properly applied following FIFRA-approved label directions; and

In January 2009, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit decision, in the matter of National Cotton Council of America et al. v. United States Environmental Protection Agency, vacated an EPA Final Rule which exempted pesticides applied in accordance with the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) from the federal Clean Water Act’s permitting requirements; and

The Court granted EPA a two-year stay of its decision, during which time EPA is developing general permits for four aquatic pesticide uses in the four states without CWA authority, and states which have assumed CWA authority may use these examples as models in adopting general permits for their states.

Several attempts by Congress to remedy this situation by clarifying FIFRA’s sole primacy in regulating pesticide use failed to achieve final passage, including an attempt by the House to have this corrective language included as part of the new 5-year Farm Bill. This new permitting requirement is now in place.

This change will require NJPDES permits for pesticide applications made to or near the “Waters of the State,” meaning the ocean and its estuaries, all springs, streams and bodies of surface or ground water and wetlands, whether natural or artificial, within the boundaries of the State of New Jersey or subject to its jurisdiction, and this would place additional burdens on applicators, impact crops in fields, pastures and forestlands adjacent to farm ponds or bogs, ditches, streams or rivers, and interfere with the timely application of pesticides.

NJFB, working closely with NJDA, was able to effectively communicate with NJDEP about the potential impacts of this new permitting requirement should it be applied broadly (i.e. interpreted to include agricultural modified wetlands). These discussions have yielded favorable interim interpretations for farm operators, clarifying that this new permitting requirement does not apply

to pesticide applications made “to” or “near” agricultural modified wetlands areas. Still, NJFB should:

- Continue to Work with American Farm Bureau Federation to support the passage of the federal legislation to clarify that this new permitting requirement does not apply to agricultural applicators, in the Senate and urge our Senators to support this measure. Even though the deadline for permit coverage has now expired, this issue can still be resolved legislatively.
- Work with DEP to maintain a general permit for agricultural applications that is not burdensome to applicators, that provides adequate protection against 3<sup>rd</sup> party lawsuits and is issued to allow farmers to make pesticide applications in a timely fashion.
- Ensure that sufficient federal resources are made available to offset the costs associated with getting permit coverage so that these costs are not shifted to state agencies and hardworking farm families.

## **TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR) AND NONCONTIGUOUS CLUSTERING**

(2022)

The planning concept Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) continues to be an option for municipalities who want to manage growth yet provide equity for their landowners. Four TDR programs have been developed in New Jersey in the past, one of which is still in the process of buying credits for development, the Pinelands Development Credit program.

In March of 2004, the Governor signed the first statewide TDR legislation. The final statute has safeguards built in to protect landowner equity when establishing a TDR program on a municipal or regional level. A successful TDR program is one where all parties buy in and there are actual transfers made that result in the appropriate development. As an equity protection tool, TDR has had very limited success in NJ, proving to be a more difficult planning tool to use than many planners expected.

As part of the 2004 legislation the Task Force succeeded in convincing the Legislature to make changes to both the MLUL and the TDR Act to enable use of noncontiguous clustering as a smaller scale way to achieve transfer of development potential from properties that could support it from those where preservation is desirable. This may be a much more practical tool than full-scale TDR.

Non-contiguous clustering means that if a municipality enables this tool in its ordinances, a landowner or two landowners could agree among themselves to transfer all the development potential from one property to another while preserving the remaining land. There would be no formal exchange of credits, only an agreed upon price.

Farm Bureau members must ensure that if TDR is being considered in their town, the equity-protection principles must apply.

Farm Bureau shall:

- Explore the possibilities of statewide transfers of Pinelands and Highlands Development Credits.
- Having the state harness the high-density development demand in growth areas like the Jersey City waterfront with areas of specific state restrictions like Pinelands and Highlands.



- Support using constitutionally dedicated CBT money to fund the sale of Highlands and Pinelands credits using farmland preservation money when it is a farmland easement and green acres money if it is an environmental conservation easement.

Farm Bureau shall seek the completion of its suggestions for legislation to create financial incentives for the redemption of TDR credits in the Highlands and Pinelands programs. Its planning consultant's recommendations are now pending with the Office of Legislative Services and being put into legislative language.

### **LAND USE REGULATION (2023)**

Agricultural and forested lands continue to be the largest areas of remaining undeveloped land in the state that pay taxes while providing food and fiber products to New Jersey's economy. To ensure that landowners have the freedom and flexibility to use, acquire, and preserve the land, New Jersey Farm Bureau has been active in promoting the need for balanced land use regulation. This balance includes protecting farmland and open spaces, environmental integrity, agricultural economic viability, and landowner equity.

New Jersey municipalities have the power under the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) to plan and regulate the type and extent of land uses on private property in the name of public health, safety, and welfare. Many municipalities are using their zoning power for much more, including farmland and open space preservation, preservation of rural character, water quality improvement, and limiting population and growth. Since their master plans must be updated at least every 10 years, this gives them the opportunity to add or change tools to accomplish these goals. If zoning changes are made because of this reconsideration process, the MLUL requirement that all affected property owners be personally notified does not apply.

Farmlandowners should be alert at key points during the master plan re-examination, master plan amendments, township committee passage of land use or police power ordinances such as those required by municipal stormwater management plans, and any municipal planning activities moving toward State Plan implementation or Highlands Plan Conformance.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should:

- Continue to urge its members to stay alert to land use planning changes in their municipality possibly coming with new wastewater management plans and the new State Strategic Plan and make sure they are in favor of the potential effects on their properties.
- Encourage the farm community to seek positions on local land use boards, environmental commissions, and other municipal and regional decision-making bodies in order to have input on land use and zoning issues that impact agriculture.
- Encourage all members to participate in or monitor the actions of any municipal Agricultural Advisory Committee or to work to have the municipality create one to advise both the township committee and the planning board about land use planning and other regulation that affects agriculture. Help find funding for the Agricultural Advisory Committee to review their master plans and ordinances to assess whether existing documents do support the agricultural industry.
- Under the Murphy administration, Farm Bureau members and county boards are advised to be alert for the resumption of strong growth management initiatives by the state that may change local land use plans and ordinances.
- Reemerging as a threat to farmland is solar development. With the passage of the successor SREC program, it is possible that NJ will lose up to 5% of ADA prime and

statewide significant soils. SADC has been tasked with keeping track of the acreage removed from agriculture.

- Warehouse development is also an emerging threat to farmland. Due to the pandemic and increase in online purchased goods, NJ is the prime location for warehouse facilities with its active ports. In 2022 the State Planning Commission (SPC), Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA), issued guidance for municipalities titled "Distribution Warehousing and Goods Movement Guidelines." The guidance states that, "In New Jersey's more rural and less developed areas where open space and farmland preservation efforts have been focused, large warehouse projects are encroaching deeper into remaining unprotected agricultural and forested areas. With only a finite amount of available land near major ports, highway interchanges, and accessible freight rail lines, warehouse development is occurring in outlying locations that have limited infrastructure and capacity to support them, particularly along local roads and related infrastructure that was not designed to handle heavy truck traffic. As large tracts of forested habitat and productive farmland are replaced with intensive warehouse uses, communities may be changed forever. Should such trends in accelerating greenfield development continue unabated, and without adequate State Planning Commission Warehouse Siting Guidance land use parameters to appropriately locate, scale, and design projects, the negative impacts to New Jersey's agricultural and natural land base, and associated communities, have the potential to be dramatic." NJFB supports protecting farmland with good soils; there needs to be a mechanism put in place to preserve farms in a timely manner that are under imminent threat of development.

Carefully designed growth management includes larger lots along with agricultural development clustering to protect land, a better way to enhance the viability of agriculture than smaller lots and a hands-off approach to development. Every study of what's needed for agricultural viability nationwide has contained strategies for directing inevitable growth into smaller, more marginal land areas so the best land can be protected for farming.

The New Jersey State Plan is going through the process of being updated over the next year for the first time since it was enacted in 2001. NJFB will work to ensure that adequate updates are made to all the sections that touch on agriculture, from infrastructure to environmental protection and natural resource restoration, to open space preservation strategies, climate change and resiliency to economic and workforce development.

### **BEEKEEPING INDUSTRY** (2023)

The commercial production of bees and their use in the pollination of crops is a vital component of New Jersey agriculture. This aspect of farming is not well known to non-farmers. Beekeeping needs to be supported and maintained in New Jersey.

To ensure a safe and plentiful supply of bees for New Jersey farmers, Farm Bureau supports the existing powers in the NJDA Division of Plant Industry, which are sometimes used to stop the movement of bees in response to disease and insect problems. To ensure the health of the bee population in New Jersey, funding for the Bee Inspection Program within the NJDA Division of Plant Industry should be increased to allow for the hiring of a second, full-time inspector.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the on-going beekeeping education program being provided by the New Jersey Beekeepers Association that trains and establishes new beekeepers in the state. NJFB advocates for establishing a partnership with the New Jersey Beekeepers

Association and the Department of Agriculture to create and expand intermediate and advanced education programs for beekeepers.

With the significant increase in beekeepers and total hives in New Jersey in the last five years, NJFB encourages Rutgers to hire a honeybee specialist. This would fill a critical role and benefit several commodity groups, especially blueberries. As the number of New Jersey beekeepers approaches 3,500 with nearly 20,000 colonies, the timing is perfect for hiring a honeybee specialist.

It is important that New Jersey Farm Bureau work with the Beekeepers Association and to assist them in finding ways to help the industry grow by;

- supporting the right to farm regulations for beekeeping and the NJDA regulations for beekeeping.
- making beekeepers aware of the cottage food regulations and the exemption for raw honey

### **OFFSHORE ENERGY** (2022)

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has designated lease areas, with some located offshore of New Jersey. Further leasing is underway for sand and gravel extraction, offshore aquaculture, and other uses. These processes could be significantly improved, especially regarding effectively engaging fishing communities and considering the needs of the commercial fishing industry.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the development of a regionally based, collaborative research and monitoring program to share accurate scientific information addressing the potential impacts of offshore development on fisheries. This should include identifying the monitoring, research and funding needs, as prioritized by the fishing industry. This program should also include the development of channels for collaboration on all phases of offshore development (planning, assessment, construction, operations, and mitigation of fisheries impacts).

NJFB also supports broad monitoring for research relevant to offshore energy and other Outer Continental Shelf leasing that intersect with existing scientific efforts in regional-scale ecosystem monitoring, stock assessment and fisheries management.

NJFB should make an application to the Department of the Interior/BOEM for a grant to fund the outreach by NJFB to its fishing members for application for mitigation of the impacts from the Industrial Offshore Wind Energy Industries development.

Based upon the tremendous uncertainty of offshore energy production, NJFB supports additional research and studies on the impacts of offshore energy development to the environment and commercial fishing industry on the following topics:

- Proprietary information on environmental impacts owned by offshore wind developers is not being shared with legislators and investors.
- There is a BPU/Rutgers study that shows a sum job loss in NJ with the development of stationary offshore wind development sites.
- There are significant gaps in research on marine mammal corraling into shipping lanes by stationary wind turbines.
- There are no approved technology standards on counting offshore avian bird strikes by wind turbines at sea.

- There are no studies currently done on the electromagnetic field disturbance on the horseshoe crab migrations vital to NJ's ecosystems.
- Stationary offshore wind development will close over a thousand square miles of fishing grounds, increasing the need for imported seafood and specifically causing the NJ quahog clamming industry to lose 40% of their productive shellfish fishing ground.
- First responders will be needed for oil spills, worker rescues, injured worker transport, water rescues, etc.
- There will be a need for massive recycling programs and open landfill space, as wind turbines have a limited life span.
- Floating hydrological electric generation can be developed using an eighth of the footprint, will comply with the Jones Act.

### **WINE INDUSTRY SUPPORT** (2023)

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the fast-growing wine grape and wine production industry within New Jersey agriculture. It is a dynamic business with a strong potential for future growth among those entrepreneurs who have invested in these enterprises.

In support of the wine industry New Jersey Farm Bureau shall:

- innovative ways to do long term land lease arrangements for grape production.
- Support the use of marketing activities that include weddings and other life events at wineries and protecting them under right to farm along with the ability to use these marketing techniques on both preserved and non-preserved farms when meeting the criteria of "promoting and using the agricultural output of the farm."

In 2014, a pilot program was legislated to permit and review special occasion events on preserved wineries. That program led to special occasion event legislation that became law in 2023 and permits preserved farms including preserved wineries to host events with applications filed through the CADB's.

### **MARKETING - JERSEY FRESH/LOCALLY GROWN** (2023)

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh promotion program has been a uniquely successful and nationally recognized effort to maintain the public's awareness of the availability and quality of New Jersey's agricultural products. As the program is expanded with other branding names such as Jersey Grown, Jersey Bred, Jersey Seafood, and Jersey Firewood, it is important that proper funding be in place to further the state's marketing and promotional support. NJFB supports expanding the definition of Jersey Bred to include all poultry and livestock. NJFB supports the development of a Jersey Native designation.

New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the governor and state legislature to restore full funding to the Jersey Fresh promotion program so it can maintain and increase the successful promotion of the Garden State's agricultural, aquaculture, livestock, livestock products, meat products and horticultural products. New Jersey Farm Bureau would be supportive of reasonable increased producer fees to support the Jersey Fresh marketing program. Farm Bureau will work with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to actively seek out other funding sources for the Jersey Fresh marketing program. All these products should be eligible for Jersey Fresh promotion regardless of where they are processed.

Farm Bureau applauds the innovative use of social media by the program. Additionally, there should be a greater enrollment by produce farmers with Jersey Fresh Certification, and Farm Bureau will promote same among its membership.

The new “locally grown” distinction on labeling can prevent repacking abuse if needed but importantly conveys to the consumer the authenticity with assured benefit in marketing local New Jersey grown produce. Farm Bureau supports the marketing and accurate promotion of all fresh produce as a gain for consumer health and economic outlook for New Jersey farmers. The use of state tax credits should be explored as a means of boosting participation by both retailers and commodity producers alike. Also, an effort should be made to harmonize the state definition of locally grown with the USDA rules regarding WIC and nutrition assistance programs.

The honey commodity should be added to the list of commodities used by the NJDA to enforce its “locally grown” authority.

### **MOUNT LAUREL DOCTRINE (COAH) AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING (2023)**

COAH was established following the 1975 and 1983 Mount Laurel decisions to ensure that every community in the state addressed the need, and it developed the rules and standards by which municipalities plan for and build affordable housing. There is consensus that many more affordable housing units are still needed. With the failure of third round rules, the state courts have stepped in to address municipal compliance with affordable housing obligation. It remains to be seen how towns’ fourth-round obligations will be addressed when that round commences in 2025.

Creation of affordable or workforce housing in even rural communities (when appropriately sited, and at a scale appropriate to those communities) can benefit NJ agriculture by making more reasonably priced housing available for family members, farm employees, and local government employees such as schoolteachers, police, and firemen. It also may present opportunities for growth in which land equity tools such as noncontiguous clustering could be used while providing affordable housing for those who qualify.

NJFB should work on:

- Finding ways to have ag labor housing count towards a town’s COAH obligation.
- Remove COAH fee assessments for agriculture related structures.
- Provide for exemptions from fees for construction of farm family homes, that would meet the definitions of affordable housing.
- Prime soils and soils of state-wide importance and the public investment in preserving those soils can best be protected through comprehensive planning efforts including state-wide, county, and local farmland preservation plans and wastewater management plans. These plans must be followed when siting affordable housing, including inclusionary developments mandated through builders’ remedies.

### **ON-FARM BREWING AND CRAFT DISTILLERY (2023)**

On-farm brewing licenses could provide an additional marketing opportunity to New Jersey farms and their farm products. New Jersey Farm Bureau has supported bills that would establish a farm brewery license that would permit farm breweries to produce malt alcoholic beverages for retail sale to consumers. In 2012 the governor signed legislation making changes to the brewery license that simplified and reduced the process by which a small micro-brewery would operate accomplishing much of what the “farm brewery” license does.

In August 2013 a new law that would permit craft distilleries went into effect. The bill creates a craft distillery license based on the following parameters: that the license holder manufacture less than 20,000 gallons annually; in order for the product to be labeled as a NJ-based product, at least 51% of the raw material used must either be grown in-state or purchased from providers located in-state; the producer can sell to licensed wholesalers and retailers and can additionally offer tours and, provided that an individual participates in a tour, sell product for consumption on-site and for consumption off-site in a quantity of not more than 5-liters per tour participant and can also offer up to three free on-site samples (1/2 ounce serving) per visitor.

Farm Bureau should:

- Support legislative efforts for simpler rules and reduced fees consistent with the farm winery law and rules, for other agriculturally based value-added alcohol products such as mead and ciders.
- Support efforts by the NJDA to establish standards for Jersey ingredients being used in distilling and brewing as to promote Jersey Fresh or made with Jersey Fresh ingredients. These rules can serve as incentives to use NJ agricultural products in the growing brewing, distilling marketplace.
- Work with the brewers' guild and others on legislation to allow for reasonable expansion of customer amenities at Breweries and distilleries to accommodate special occasion type events as well as food service.
- Participate in a discussion to recognize on-farm brewing (micro-brewing) and distilling as an approved agricultural practice under specific criteria.

Farm based brewing distilling like wine making have an agriculture tourism connection and expanding farm-based brewing and distilling to promote use of "Jersey Fresh" products should be encouraged.

Governor Murphy has proposed revamping New Jersey's alcoholic beverage licensing laws to expand the availability and make them more affordable, while protecting the value of existing licenses. New Jersey Farm Bureau should participate in this process to ensure there are beneficial outcomes for the state's farm-based wineries, breweries, distilleries, cideries and meaderies.

## **UTILITY LINE MAINTENANCE & EFFECTS OF UTILITY LINE DEVELOPMENT/EXTENSION** (2022)

The New Jersey Energy Master Plan puts emphasis on better use of current facilities and energy resources leading to improvements in delivery of power and energy sources. Expansion of major electric and gas lines through the northern part of NJ including the Highlands are considered critical to bringing more wind power and gas supplies from newly developed sources in PA to the consumers of New Jersey and the Northeast. This would help to raise the percentage of power produced by alternate fuels to the 2020 and 2050 goals.

AFBF warns that farmland owners must take more care in agreeing to the terms of long-term leases or option agreements, related to pipelines and fracking activities. Some of the questions a landowner must ask include:

- How will the "fair market value" of the easement or acquisition be calculated?
- Will owners of land needed to expand the utility/transmission line right of way receive a one-time payment or a yearly royalty like those who allow wind turbines or cell towers on their land?

- Who assumes liability for the construction and operation and who pays for the liability insurance? Is it included in a yearly payment?
- Does this land use reduce the value and usefulness of the property, such as impairing access, reducing the functionality of existing land and buildings? Compensation would be due for this impact.
- Will the company restore the land to its prior condition and agricultural use if and when the utility use ceases?

Based on the previous questions among others, In the coming year, NJ Farm Bureau will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture, SADC, Farm Credit East and RCE to help landowners protect their rights and what impacts they should try to receive compensation on.

Utility lines located on farmland can create a serious nuisance for farming options if they are not properly maintained. Large stanchions supporting overhead wires, if left unattended, can become a breeding area for noxious weeds, insects and diseases to the plant material on the surrounding farm acreage. Some utility companies have been reluctant to routinely clean these areas and in effect leave that work to local farmers at their expense. NJFB should encourage the BPU in addition to seeking legislative change requiring the proper maintenance of these areas, including the control of vegetation. New Jersey Farm Bureau will monitor this situation and advocate proper maintenance wherever it is appropriate. Similarly, gas and petroleum pipeline rights of way should also be maintained.

The NJFB should encourage the BPU to require update old equipment including poles which would limit repairs and outages. These updates such as having new utility poles compared to old, rotted poles could limit power outages and damage when severe weather events occur in the future. Utility companies should also maintain the height of utility lines that cross public roads in a way that prevents them from being caught or damaged by farm equipment and vehicles.

### **NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (NJALDP) (2023)**

New Jersey Farm Bureau has been a supporting sponsor of the NJALDP program since its inception. The NJALDP program has over the years seen much success in fostering the leadership skills of participants in the program and has created many new leaders in agriculture. The program has opened many doors and created opportunities for collaboration amongst participants and alumni which would not otherwise have been possible. In recent years, the program has undergone several drastic changes, including moving the management of the program, and also hiring an agricultural liaison to ensure the program meets the needs of the agricultural community.

Recently, the program resumed with a new class, working in conjunction once again with a program coordinator from Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Science. New Jersey Farm Bureau will continue to support this program and assist when needed in its effort to enhance and benefit the agricultural community.

The NJALDP and its leadership training purpose contribute directly to building those skills among young farm and ag-related professionals. Farm Bureau extends its strong support for the program and encourages young agriculturalists in New Jersey to participate in future classes.

### **CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (2023)**

NJFB supports Soil Conservation Districts and recognizes them as partners in the good stewardship of our lands.

There is an opportunity for the Districts and the State Soil Conservation Committee to develop a higher profile with the current administration by offering to be part of streamlined government through better coordination between the two entities. Better coordination can bring the ability to generate additional support income by expanding the services they provide to local and state government. New Jersey Farm Bureau should support an expanded role for the Districts as well as encourage the county boards to be more active with the local Districts and in the nomination process of members for the District Boards.

Climate change as a policy issue for our state and federal governments has rapidly ascended to a top priority, especially for the Biden and Murphy administrations. Mitigation plans are being debated actively. Agriculture and its large presence in the outdoor environment have been viewed as a potentially significant partner in off-setting greenhouse gas emissions, and to a lesser extent as a contributor to GHG.

A major strategy for climate mitigation is being developed by the USDA in the Biden administration behind the leadership of Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack. It is called “climate smart farm practices” and is akin to the system of soil conservation practices and recommendations employed by the state soil conservation districts. This strategy has emerged and has become a new grants program for farmers as land managers. So far, it is envisioned to be a voluntary, incentive-based program for a wide application among farmers. NJFB recommends and calls attention to the potential favorable prospects and adaptation of it by the state via soil conservation districts.

It is time for the farming industry to take action on implementing a carbon credit/climate smart farm practice strategy for New Jersey agriculture. It shall help facilitate that action among all interested farm agencies including the state Soil Conservation Committee and the USDA-NRCS office in New Jersey.

The controversy in the farm community this past year regarding the SADC-soil protection rule was based on the core flaw of allowing the agency to impermissibly regulate preserved farms. Soil protection on preserved farms is a matter of common sense and the SADC draft SPS proposal is a huge overreach.

New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the SADC to withdraw the current proposal, because it is unworkable and cannot be fixed. The proposal is in direct contradiction to the prime mission of the SADC which states, “to lead in the preservation of New Jersey’s farmland, and to maintain the viability of agriculture in the state.”

In place of the current proposal, new soil protection guidelines should be developed in consultation with NJFB, NJDA, State Soil Conservation Committee, SADC, NRCS and Rutgers Cooperative Extension as well as preserved farm owners.

## **GOVERNANCE BY INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM, EMERGENCY RULES AND EXECUTIVE ORDERS** (2023)

New Jersey held a referendum on the 2013 State ballot to raise the minimum Wage in NJ. This process to raise the minimum wage circumvented the standard legislative process. Not only was



NJFB opposed to the increase of the minimum wage via the NJ constitution, NJFB opposes the use of initiative and referendum type governance to impose new mandates and burdens on farm operators and farm businesses.

Farm Bureau also opposes the government abuse of emergency rulemaking to address updates in regulations that should go through the regular rulemaking process. We also oppose the use of Executive Orders to accomplish state policies and procedures that should be legislated and then implemented through the regular rulemaking process. Examples include the NJDEP clean car rule proposal and the BPU electrification incentive programs that become mandates on consumers.

Farm Bureau encourages all state agencies to reach out to the impacted community when developing new regulations before drafts are sent to the register for publication and adoption.

### **FARMING ON PUBLIC LANDS** (2023)

#### **State-Owned Land**

For future auctions of publicly held (state-, county- or municipally owned) farmland parcels, New Jersey Farm Bureau supports introductory per-acre bid rates of zero dollars. This approach will allow the private marketplace to dictate at auction an appropriate per-acre value for these farmland parcels. NJFB opposes the use of USDA Farm Service Agency rental rates as minimum bid amounts for farm leases. These rates are intended be an incentive payment, and are not reflective of true rental values, leading to minimum bid levels being set artificially high. In addition, Farm Bureau supports a competitive open bidding process that ensures equal access for all interested farm operators to these publicly owned farmland parcels.

Drones can be very useful tools for farmers, allowing them to look for early signs of pest or wildlife damage, among other purposes. New Jersey Farm Bureau urges the DEP to amend their current ban on the use of drones on state-owned land, to allow lease-holding farmers to use them for research and production purposes.

Farmers need to be able to make their own decisions about farming methods, based on their experience and what will work best for their overall farming operation. Therefore, New Jersey Farm Bureau opposes any expansion of the DEP Division of F&W organic pilot program on state-owned farmland.

The Commissioner of DEP and the Secretary of Agriculture agreed to work together on land preservation with Green Acres focusing on urban areas and park land, while directing agricultural lands to the SADC for preservation. This arrangement needs to be continued and endorsed by the current administration considering the limited funding for preservation.

For future purchases of active farmland, New Jersey Farm Bureau should seek to have the Farmland Preservation Program be given the opportunity to purchase the land or easements first, before Green Acres offers the land to management elsewhere.

Farm Bureau urges any government agency that receives any federal farm program funds to ensure that the maximum amount of funds available go to all qualifying New Jersey farmers. Long term leases of farmland are critical for the future viability of New Jersey agriculture. Many farmers prefer to lease because the land is too costly to buy. New and beginning farmers need land to work and a long enough lease to make investments in plant materials (such as grapevines) or

certain farming methods (such as organic or low-input farming), cost effective. NJFB recommends the term for leases of currently fallow ground to be a 10-year duration, to give farmers sufficient time to invest in and prepare the land properly for agriculture.

Farm Bureau shall seek a dialogue with the DEP about the overall issue of farmland leases in partnership with the NJDA. These state assets can be a source of additional revenue to the state and financial viability for the farmers. An updated and efficient lease system is a goal to be shared with the farm community.

Farm Bureau shall:

- Not only work to have more state government land farmed, but also include any other public-owned lands.
- Insist that all land set aside through TDR or cluster development should be farmed or leased long term to someone who will actively farm it.
- Work with the appropriate State agencies to make them aware of the importance of agriculture and to urge them to make state-owned lands that are farmable available to local farmers without excessive regulation or interference with crop decisions.
- Insist on renewable leases to cover at least 5 years and longer when feasible. Very long term, inheritable or transferable leases should be used in New Jersey as they are in other states where appropriate.
- Work with the appropriate agencies to allow tenant farmers the ability to control wildlife on the farms that they lease, including the use of depredation permits, noise makers and other control measures.
- Oppose minimum bid prices for farmland that are artificially inflated, forcing farmers to either give up land previously farmed, or farm at a financial loss.
- Gather stakeholder input about the issue of government leasing policies for publicly owned lands. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the formation of a task force, comprised of both farm and public entity representatives, to work together to find solutions to farmers' concerns.

### **U.S. SOD PROMOTION PROGRAM** (2023)

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the Turf Producers International (the trade association for turf grass farmers) application to USDA for the creation of the U.S. Sod Checkoff program. As part of the nearly \$500 million greenhouse nursery and sod industry in NJ, having a checkoff program dedicated to research and promotional activities could further expand the industry in NJ.

On October 16, 2023, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service published for public comment, two items: the proposed rules for a U.S. Sod Checkoff Program and the procedures for how to conduct an industry-wide referendum on this issue. New Jersey Farm Bureau should review these two proposals, and in consultation with the New Jersey sod industry, submit comments on both, prior to the December 15, 2023, deadline.

### **WAREHOUSES AND REDEVELOPMENT PLANS ON FARMLAND** (2023)

A current well-publicized trend in New Jersey land use activity is the development of large warehouse facilities to serve the commercial retail industry. The demise of "brick-and-mortar" shopping and outlets as well as the need for high tech-oriented light industrial space fuels the demand for this new development. Frequently, many sites being selected for locating these warehouses are active farmlands.

Legislative proposals are now pending that call for added site plan review and inter-municipal consultation prior to approval of these development plans. Like the consideration of large solar panel development projects on farmland, some projects should be avoided to protect the ag viability of existing farms and the agricultural industry. Other situations may have less adverse consequences to farming, but should nonetheless be evaluated for its impact on local farming. In the event lands deserve regulatory protection, those landowners should be automatically qualified for equity compensation under the state or local farmland preservation program. Rules administered by the SADC including appraisal policies should be amended to reflect this new circumstance.

The Murphy administration and regional planning advocates have been at odds regarding the level of oversight to be provided to local planning boards in the review of warehouse development proposals and redevelopment proposals. The state has offered advisory guidelines through its Office of Planning Advocacy as an assist to the regional impact review process. Professional planners and environmentalists seek a stronger role for state level interests in the review process to ensure that good planning objectives are met.

Farm Bureau urges the SADC to review and revise its appraisal procedures so there can be a conservation alternative in certain circumstances when a critical farmland parcel may be more valuable to regional farming interests than it is for development as a large-scale warehouse project or redevelopment. Additional review and valuation should be considered where there may be an adverse conversion of previously mapped prime soils or soils of state-wide importance. Farmers and agriculture advisory committees are encouraged to take part in local planning board procedures whenever major farm industry interests are at stake.

Farm Bureau supports the full exercise of state and local planning authorities to better oversee the issuance of permits for new warehouse development. This includes the use of farmland preservation funding and potential new appraisal formulas.

### **CYBERCRIME IN AGRIBUSINESS** (2023)

Farm Bureau should be wary of the possibility for national security risks associated with the purchase of local farmland by foreign parties. It shall be vigilant as to the possible link of such purchases to the potential onset of cybercrime in agriculture as noted above. Federal authorities are already investigating the adequacy of current monitoring programs, in which the American Farm Bureau has been participating. The troubling tensions in the Middle East could also create new security risks through cybercrime through future terrorist activity.

Family farms are not excluded from the threat of Internet hacking and cybercrime activity affecting their daily business. The FBI has contacted the American Farm Bureau and requested that it communicate a warning to all its farmer members regarding this risk to their business. Ransomware attacks, for example, can cause financial loss and negatively affect the food supply chain. Ransomware is the fraudulent entry and subsequent extortion attempt into the software programs of a business used to conduct normal financial and communications activity over the Internet. Cybercriminal threat actors exploit network vulnerabilities to modify data and encrypt systems in business sectors that are increasingly reliant on smart technologies, industrial control systems, and Internet —based automation systems. Food and agriculture businesses can suffer a significant financial loss resulting from ransom payments, loss of productivity and remediation costs, as well as a loss of proprietary information and personally identifiable information.

Farm Bureau members are urged to become better educated about cybercrime risks. Recommended mitigation steps that can be taken immediately include regular backup of data, password protection back up, Network segmentation, use of strong passwords and their regular updating and others. The FBI welcomes contacts from local businesses who may be concerned about their exposure to cybercrime. Local FBI field offices are readily accessible; go to [www.stopransomware.gov](http://www.stopransomware.gov) for additional resources.

NJFB is developing a modest level of in-house expertise on cybercrime prevention in small business through its information technology staff person. Farm Bureau members are welcome to make contact and use this as a resource to become more familiar with the topic and the need to take some preventive measures.

### **FILL DIRT ON FARMS** (2023)

What was once a common practice for farms in accepting fill dirt, soil and sometimes recycled material is now a matter of state regulation. Enactment of the “Dirty Dirt Law” (P.L. 2019, C. 397) imposes soil and fill recycling registration requirements among certain haulers of this material. (Truck hauling capacities of more than 15 cubic yards). In addition, some municipalities have now adopted ordinances binding on property owners requiring permits prior to accepting soil/fill material on their land. These permits include the need for soil quality testing that ensures the absence of toxic material in the fill. Farmers are cautioned to be aware of and stay compliant with these new rules before accepting fill dirt on their farms.

The development and enforcement of the DEP regulations and requirements on fill dirt are moving quickly, perhaps faster than the landowner community is aware of. One unfortunate enforcement case in northern New Jersey even raised unnecessary concerns about soil contamination in the topsoil of active farmland. The unfortunate case several years ago in Sussex County where a small mountain of fill dirt was created before environmental enforcement arrived has heightened concerns among local officials. Farmers are advised to be extra careful in the event of seeking fill dirt on their farms.

Farm Bureau urges the state Deputy Attorney General representing the NJDA to intervene and mediate on behalf of the soil conservation districts if/when the SCD’s are pressed into illegal “dirty dirt” enforcement actions. Too often the local SCD is left to enforce the state’s fill laws on their own with inadequate staff or legal resources. The state DAG assigned to the NJDA could assist. Farms should be wary of offers to freely deposit road cleanings, off-site compost, public construction soil and dredge silt. All too often, these materials are often contaminated with hydrocarbons, septic effluent and so forth.

### **TRESPASS/VANDALISM** (2023)

Farming in the suburban/rural fringe areas of New Jersey continues to experience regular nuisance events from trespassing and vandalism. This pressure on agricultural operations is a preventable source of increased costs of production and is an unnecessary hassle for those farmers. The increased interest in the “Rails to Trails” program as well as the development of other new walking and horseback riding trails nearby or through active farmland is likely to increase the incidents of trespassing, littering, and vandalism, making this issue of even greater importance. These problems can otherwise negatively affect some of the advantages of being in direct proximity to large retail market opportunities.

Due to damage from off-road vehicles in State Parks from people abusing the existing road network and going off road, there is a concern about the state shutting down access roads to the public which in turn could lead to more off-road drivers looking at farm and farm roads to drive on. NJFB should monitor this situation and revisit the need to have these vehicles registered and licensed in the state.

Because those who recklessly drive onto farm fields are not aware of on-site conditions, they sometimes get stuck in wet soil or simply abandon the vehicle on the farmland property. In such an event, the vehicle ought to be kept on the premises by the local police until the landowner has been notified, has the opportunity to assess any damage to the property and also has determined who is responsible for reimbursement of the damage. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall seek whatever rule change is appropriate to have this procedure adopted throughout the state. We urge that balloonists and all-terrain vehicles be included in the same laws as motor vehicles concerning trespass.

State legislation to increase penalties for trespassing and vandalism on agricultural lands was adopted in 2018. This legislation also simplifies the process for obtaining restitution for damages. Farm Bureau staff have updated a fact sheet to reflect these changes. The legislature is also considering additional legislation to increase penalties for vandalism.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports more public education, and education of police and public officials in the form of brochures, billboard campaigns and/or booklets, regarding the consequences of trespassing and the theft and/or damage to crops. This would help promote a greater awareness in the public about the value of these crops to farmers and hence their importance in preserving a local source of food and scenic beauty.

NJFB opposes the concept of mandatory container deposit legislation because of the regulatory and financial burden it could cause for retail farm operations. NJFB encourages stricter enforcement of littering laws.

### **TRADE PRACTICES/PRODUCE PRICES** (2023)

Chronic low prices received by New Jersey wholesale market produce farmers have raised suspicions about U.S. trade practice with Mexico and Canada. It is felt that domestic East Coast vegetable prices are suppressed when cheap imports unfairly come into the U.S. at the behest of buyers regardless of local crop availability. Tomato growers in Florida have sought relief by filing a Sec. 201 inquiry with the International Trade Commission (ITC) in Washington.

While this inquiry has yet to yield a satisfactory resolution to these complaints, trade issues in U.S. and NJ agriculture remain a valid concern. This is the time for this issue of produce imports, the restrictions by Canada on U.S. dairy exports, tariff retaliation on U.S. soybean exports or the failure by the U.S. to gain effective ag trade agreements with countries that hold vital overseas markets to be corrected. NJFB with help from the NJDA and NJAES should maintain its vigilance in monitoring suspect produce imports and ag trade issues at large.

NJFB supports the termination of the Tomato Suspension Agreement with Mexico and has so notified the U.S. Secretary of Commerce Raimondo in this regard. Favorable ITC rulings for domestic growers provide documented evidence that trade remediation steps need to be taken. This issue is part of NJFB's overall concern for farm viability in New Jersey agriculture.

## **BIO-ENGINEERED FOODS** (2022)

American agricultural technology has provided the leadership in the adoption of these processes into the food production system. Farmers are significant stakeholders in that system.

Bio-engineered foods are now under assault from criticism directed at the consumer health effects, environmental impacts and ethics of using this technology. Opposition is strongest in Europe and is now expanding to both developed and developing countries around the world. Critics have seized upon the public relations tool of stigmatizing the food supply among consumers through the news media, which in turn has caused some major food processors and food retailers to run scared. Farmers face the risk of market disruption and interruption of trade opportunities, and those disruptions are increasing as countries try to use GMO bans as a trade barrier tool.

Several counties in other states have passed regulations banning the planting and use of GMO crops. It is important that sound science be used in establishing such regulations and that they be done as part of a national policy and not on a state or regional level.

Farmers are vulnerable to economic harm if the debate over bio-engineered products is won by those who have hidden agendas. Europeans seeking advantage in blocking food imports and anti-technology alarmists will overwhelm the political, regulatory and consumer markets with scare tactics unless their commentaries are confronted. At the same time, farmer interests are better served if they remain distinct from corporate entities that own the technology. It is still unclear whether the benefits of bioengineering in agriculture accrue to farmers if the fundamental relationship between the producer and the input companies results in more economic concentration. Not only might farmers lose freedom of choice among suppliers and buyers, but their role over time might evolve into being more of a manager and less as an independent business owner.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall become proactive in the debate over bio-engineered foods. Grain producers for example are faced with a dramatic loss of market potentially without the intervention of credible voices in the debate. Emphasis needs to be placed on the safety of these modified foods and their importance in the world's economy and future food supply. Scientific research and findings support the safety of these foods. Farmers need to ensure, however, that they not relinquish their place in the food production system even as they assuage consumer apprehension over the commercial use of this technology.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall also support a greater effort of educating the public regarding the sound science of bio-engineered foods.

NJFB opposes state legislation that would require that every GMO food product that is offered for sale in the state to contain a label indicating that the product contains GMOs. The practice of labeling foods as "bio-engineered" or "made with bioengineered products" will serve no public service, and without public education could potentially frighten consumers away from safe, high-quality products.

NJFB continues to support voluntary labeling of bio-engineered food products as an alternative to mandatory labeling proposals.

On January 1, 2022, the bioengineered labeling law took effect, and this was the last day that state GMO labeling could be put into commerce. The standard requires food manufacturers, importers, and certain retailers to ensure bioengineered foods are appropriately disclosed. Regulated entities have several disclosure options: text, symbol, electronic or digital link. A court decision to challenge the rule left the rule intact except for the text message option. Additional options such as a phone number or web address are available to small food manufacturers or for small and very small packages.

### **WATER SUPPLY** (2023)

Farmers are again advised to be very careful in keeping up with their DEP Bureau of Water Allocation certification renewals. Growers allowing certifications to lapse could lose their water rights. With serious competition for access to New Jersey's water supply, the agricultural industry may not regain the approvals for an increase in irrigation water use, once considered routine for agricultural diversions in some areas of the state. This is especially important as the division of water supply is scrutinizing any new allocation request or any unused allotment at time of renewal. Farm Bureau strongly urges compliance with the current water allocation program. The permit process has been streamlined to make it as efficient as possible. NJFB should also continue to advocate for the role that RCE agents play interacting with the DEP in the water allocation and permitting process.

The permitting and allocation process needs to be improved to not require growers to install an agricultural well before making an application for an agricultural water use certification for wells. This seems counterproductive to issue a drilling permit and have the well drilled when the farmer may not be allowed to use the amount of water intended for crop production. This often results in the farmers drilling a large well and not being able to use it at full capacity whereas the farmer could have saved money drilling a smaller well.

The Delaware River Basin commission (DRBC), who once tried to require certification with their agency, is currently exempting farmers from their application process. NJFB should oppose any future requirement for certification or fees through the DRBC or any other agency. The certification process should be administered through the state bureau of water supply without fees.

The NJ Water Supply Authority has also been found to charge excessive fees for any new or additional water usage for farms that are in basins under their purview. New Jersey Farm Bureau opposes any fees and duplicative paperwork that would be imposed outside of the NJDEP purview. The NJFB should work with the NJDA to ensure consolidation of the additional applications from water authorities with the DEP applications and eliminate the fees being imposed.

There have been municipalities in the state that have created ordinances regarding water supply. The municipalities have set standards requiring water withdrawal applicants to adhere to these municipal mandated guidelines. New Jersey Farm Bureau believes this is outside the jurisdiction of the municipality and demands the DEP to assert their exclusive authority for water use in the state. Local municipalities have no regulatory authority to require additional research for approvals.

As a result of completed and continuing studies evaluating the availability of water in various aquifers and watersheds, farmers have experienced a reduction of water amounts allocated.

Farmers in New Jersey cannot survive without an adequate water supply. Obtaining approval for water use on all farms is without doubt a major issue for the success of production and profitability. Farm Bureau should support the approval for agricultural water use by New Jersey DEP as the highest priority to ensure farm viability on all farmlands. New Jersey Farm Bureau recognizes the need to implement water conservation practices to secure this vital resource. In response to the effort to conserve water, NJFB should evaluate the possibility of preserving water reductions that are accepted by farms, to be placed in a bank for future or neighboring agricultural usage. NJFB should also encourage the requirement of municipalities in proximity to the Tri-county pipeline in South Jersey to source public water needs from American Water pipeline that extends from Burlington County into Gloucester County.

The New Jersey water supply plan defines current water usage and trends in water usage from 1990 to 2015. The report documents agricultural water use has decreased from a high of 67,860,000 gallons per year in 1995 to 30,658,000 gallons per year in 2015. The report highlights agriculture uses about 30% of its allocated amount. The report highlights agriculture conservation practices impacting water usage but also reports the awareness of the need for more accurate water reporting. The DEP identifies the need to work with the NJDA, SADC, Rutgers to plan for future water supply needs and improve reporting data.

The NJDEP, to address the concerns regarding water usage reporting the NJDA, NRCS and Rutgers Cooperative Extension were successful in acquiring farms willing to meter their water usage for the study. At issue is the need to more accurately align the amount of irrigation water needs requested by a farm operator in the water allocation program, versus the actual amount used now that is reported on a by the farmer. Any discrepancy of a significant amount can jeopardize water supply planning by the state. A grant has been awarded for the study, so there are no costs to farmer participants for this work in the 2020 growing season. The data collection is complete as of September 30, 2022, and the report will be completed in a few months. The NJFB will observe the results of this study for any potential future implications from the study since NJFB does not support mandatory water meter requirement.

Some progress has been made by Farm Bureau and others in having nursery water use during drought emergencies standardized with other agricultural exemptions in those circumstances. The State Assembly passed a resolution urging the Governor and DEP to treat nurseries and garden centers the same as agricultural food crops when imposing mandatory water use restrictions. New Jersey Farm Bureau also supplied a letter to the DEP water supply administrator encouraging a rule change to permanently fix this problem.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall continue its work with the DEP on the permanent rules regarding emergency water use to ensure that these restrictions are not used in the event of another drought. It is not appropriate that a single segment of industry in this state should be restricted in the use of water. The nursery industry deserves the same access to water resources as all the other industries in the state. The nursery-landscape-garden center industry is committed to implementing voluntary water conservation measures during drought periods and complying with mandatory restrictions that are in effect for all branches of commerce. Once permanent drought rules are established, they should be widely publicized, so the public, as well as the agricultural industry will know what water uses are and are not permitted.

## **INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM) FUNDING (2023)**



Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension (RCE) has delivered Integrated Pest Management (IPM) trapping and scouting services and educational programs to farmers statewide for over 35 years.

The IPM programs have helped farmers to improve pest management for crops in many ways. Precisely timed pesticide applications are made when economic thresholds are reached rather than spraying on a regular schedule, improving control of the target pest and saving farmers unnecessary spray applications, time, and money. Control recommendations through the RCE IPM program have allowed farmers to choose more environmentally friendly control measures, such as mating disruption tactics, insecticides that are pest specific and that do not harm beneficial insects, trap crops, and other sound options for pest control. Additionally, IPM programs have assisted with reduction of pest resistance to certain pesticides, minimize pesticide use, minimize production cost, prevent wrongful use of pesticides, protect New Jersey food supply from foreign insects and disease, protect farm workers and children from pesticide exposure, improve environmental quality, reduce non-point source pollution, maintain export markets for New Jersey produce, and improve food quality through farmers being educated on alternatives to traditional pesticide use, as well as the proper use of low risk pesticides and fertilizers. This highly integrated program uses information gathered throughout the state once a week, or for some crops twice weekly, during the growing season, as well as from neighboring states. It brings the latest insect and disease forecasts and recommendations to growers who wish to participate in the RCE IPM programs and to all growers through the RCE Plant and Pest Advisory weekly newsletters and RCE website.

Budget cuts to the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) have jeopardized the future of the RCE IPM programs and services to farmers. New Jersey Farm Bureau recognizes the tremendous benefits IPM brings to agricultural production and the environment. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the continuation of this program with its current delivery and needed staff to accomplish this and expansion of RCE administered IPM programs to the farmers of New Jersey. The Rutgers IPM program is in the process of conducting a search to replace the fruit IPM coordinator for the state. It is important that this position is replaced in a timely manner before the next growing season since this is an important service to many growers. With the recent retirement of the senior program coordinator for vegetable IPM there will be a need to replace this position to maintain a vegetable IPM program. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall work cooperatively with RCE, agricultural producers and the state legislature to develop a permanent funding source for this valuable program.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall continue to develop a public relations campaign to garner public support for continuing this program.

### **HUNGER INITIATIVE/GLEANING** (2023)

State budget support for the purchase of locally grown food products received a major boost in FY'2023 appropriations. Under the existing line item associated with the NJDA budget called the Hunger Initiative, funds have been available for more than five years as grants for food bank organizations across the state. That funding had progressed to \$7-8 million in FY'2021, and then was greatly expanded last year by recommendations of the Governor and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin. Some \$85 million is now available as the annual 2023 line item, a portion of which has been designated for purchases of locally grown produce.

Farm Bureau commends this initiative as a significant win-win benefit for both local farm producers as well as the state's food bank associations. Nutritious produce is always in demand by the soup kitchen and food pantry delivery points with food deficit households. The breakthrough connections between major food banks and local produce sources facilitated by Farm Bureau and others were a major achievement for the farm community in 2022, with greater relationship development in 2023. Further steps can be taken in addressing household food deficits by farmers through expanded retail produce sales in "food desert" areas of urban New Jersey and expansion of community farm markets near those locations. Farm Bureau supports these initiatives in solidarity with urban policy leaders, school gardening and Rutgers Extension food education initiatives.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau will continue to support gleaning to provide nutrition to families in need and minimize food waste. Gleaning is the process of collecting excess food from farms, gardens, farmers' markets, grocers, restaurants, state and county fairs, and other sources to provide for those in need. Gleaning reduces the unnecessary wasting of quality food, and gives low-income populations access to fresh, nutritious foods that are sometimes not available in their communities. Farmers and individuals can get involved in gleaning by connecting with various non-profit organizations, such as the New Jersey Agricultural Society's Farmers Against Hunger program, which sponsors gleanings across the state.

The State of New Jersey recognized the importance of gleaning for the first time in 2016 by declaring the last week of September as "NJ State Gleaning Week", and officially recognizing Wednesday of that week as "Farmers Against Hunger Day". New Jersey held its first Gleaning Summit during this premier week, bringing together legislators, farmers, emergency feeding organizations and gleaning groups. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the efforts of the New Jersey Agricultural Society to promote awareness about gleaning and continues to encourage farmers with excess produce to join the Farmers Against Hunger Program.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the current liability protection given to farmers through New Jersey law: Notwithstanding the provisions of any law to the contrary, an owner, lessee or occupant of agricultural or horticultural land shall not have a legal duty to protect a person who is invited onto the land for the purposes of picking or taking agricultural or horticultural products from the natural risks or hazards that are inherent characteristics of agricultural or horticultural land, and shall not be liable if such a person invited onto the land is injured because of any natural risks or hazards that are inherent characteristics of agricultural or horticultural land. (L.1997,c.378,s.2. 2A:42A-10. Farmers immunity for invitees-pickers)

NJFB continues to support bills to provide financial incentives through tax deductions for donations as well as clarifying liability in the food donation liability law for donations and gleaning.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY (2023)**

Farm Bureau will continue and expand its use of the New Jersey Farm Bureau website as a communication tool within the organization. Wherever possible Farm Bureau should encourage the adoption of Internet use and e-mail communication by its members. This can include workshops on this information technology if needed. Brochures and self-help advisory documents on topics like motor vehicle regulations, sales tax rules, farmland assessment, and other issues shall be developed and/or updated as necessary and made available to Farm Bureau members. In addition to online and printed information, Farm Bureau shall also continue to present seminars or workshops on timely subjects as needed throughout the state.

## Farm Bureau Membership Recruitment and Retention

The implementation of membership recruitment activities must be a priority for Farm Bureau. In 2023 NJFB President Carter created an ad hoc membership committee to specifically address recruitment and retention issues. Once the committee shares their ideas and suggestions, Farm Bureau staff shall work with county leaders to implement the committee's recommendations. NJFB will assist county leaders in this recruitment and retention effort by sharing membership renewal information with them regularly and by supplying them with applications and benefit brochures as needed. Wherever practical, Farm Bureau should partner with ag-related businesses and groups to communicate about the benefits of Farm Bureau membership.

## **AG CONVENTION/STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE APPOINTMENTS** (2022)

Each year the State Agricultural Convention meets to develop resolutions and policy directives for the NJDA. During the convention delegates have two important nominating functions. To nominate two members to the 8-member State Board of Agriculture where each member serves for 4 years and to nominate a farmer representative to the Fish and Game Council, one each from three regions in the state to also serve for 4 years.

Once the convention makes the nominations, they are sent to the Governor's office for review, nominees are encouraged to file applications and any financial reports as soon as possible so the Governor can make a timely nomination. People appointed by the convention to these posts must also have the support of their home county Senator(s) before confirmation hearings can be held. Candidates are encouraged to begin the process and outreach to their senator(s) as soon as possible.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should help speed the process whenever possible by writing support letters to the Governor's appointments office and by assisting nominees in their outreach to Senators. Farm Bureau has also been active in requesting hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee for the nominees and should continue those efforts once the nominations have been made. The same effort should also be made for farmer appointments to other boards and commissions that call for farmer representation.

Current statutes permit the State Board to temporarily fill a vacancy on the state board through nomination by the governor and advice and consent from the Senate. This appointment remains until the next state agricultural convention where the person can be nominated to fill the unexpired term, or another farmer may be selected.

However, for a sudden vacancy in the Fish and Game Council there is no statutory procedure for selecting a replacement other than the State Agricultural convention.

New Jersey Farm Bureau working with the State Board of Agriculture should review options for having an alternate mechanism for temporary appointment of farmer members to the Fish and Game Council if a vacancy should occur after the convention has met. There needs to be legislation introduced to permit a temporary appointment to address this issue. NJ Farm Bureau should work for the introduction and passage of appropriate legislation to accomplish this.

New Jersey Farm Bureau also urges the State Board of Agriculture to work diligently to always keep the farmer appointments to the SADC current.

At the end of the 2017 legislative session a bill was passed to create an alternate farmer and public member for the SADC. For the Farmer member recommendations of a past State Board or SADC member are sent to the governor for their consideration of the nominee and must be approved by the Senate.

### **DAIRY** (2023)

NJFB believes there is an unparalleled value in having a locally produced supply of all food and agricultural products. Dairy farms not only provide a local and fresh source of milk and other dairy products, such as yogurt, cheese, butter, and ice cream, but they also provide large tracts of tax-paying, privately maintained open space. Unfortunately, the cost of production for these farms is often not offset by the money farmers receive from the various milk cooperatives and/or processors. In addition, New Jersey has only 36 commercial dairy herds remaining as of 2022. As we lose these dairies, we lose irreplaceable pillars of the dairy infrastructure. To keep these vital farm properties open and actively devoted to the dairy industry, NJFB must work with the dairy community, the Department of Agriculture and Rutgers Cooperative Extension and small business development groups to find innovative ways to assist dairy producers, and to ensure that more consumer dollars go back to dairy producers.

Farm Bureau, through its dairy farmers, shall:

- Encourage dairy operators to take advantage of programs available to them for testing herds for Johne's. There are programs available through the Division of Animal Health and Extension to help diagnose and control this disease.
- Work with NRCS and the State Conservationist to ensure that all dairy producers are aware of the conservation programs and assistance available to them.
- Work with state legislators to develop and enact legislation that allows for the sale of raw milk in New Jersey.
- Work with the State Department of Health and interested consumer groups to develop regulations and standards to allow the sale of raw milk and raw milk products within the State of New Jersey.
- Support value-added business endeavors that allow dairy producers to process their own milk to create locally produced dairy products that can be sold on-farm or through local businesses to promote local agriculture.
- Work with the State Department of Health and other related groups to develop or clarify reasonable regulations and standards to ensure on-farm milk/milk product processing is an easy, achievable opportunity.
- Promote the sale of on-farm pasteurized milk and milk products within the State of New Jersey.
- Identify current and potential farm markets and other agricultural enterprises that would be interested in the inclusion of a local source of dairy products to complement their current source of fresh market products that are currently sold.
- Identify and develop sources of funding through small business, rural enterprise development, or similar state sources of funding to promote business continuity and ensure a core base of dairy production in New Jersey.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports federal legislation to raise tariffs on milk protein concentrate (MPC) to levels high enough that imported protein will not displace domestic use of non-fat dry milk in U.S. food manufacturing. We ask that the USDA and FDA enforce their standards on manufactured dairy products.

### **ATTORNEY FEE SHIFTING** (2023)

NJFB supports the adoption of legislation that would provide for the assessment of attorneys' fees and costs against a complainant who commences an administrative or legal action against the owner or operator of a commercial farm that is dismissed by motion or otherwise determined to have been brought without substantial merit.

NJFB supports current legislative proposals which would allow commercial farmers to be awarded reasonable costs and attorney fees for defending against bad faith complaints brought under the RTF Act.

### **BROADBAND INTERNET/TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN RURAL AREAS OF NEW JERSEY** (2023)

Over the course of 2014 and 2015, Verizon, the major phone and internet service provider for NJ, has sought and received agreements with the BPU which, in sum, removes the requirement on Verizon to expand broadband internet service to any other areas of the state as well as the requirements that they maintain existing telecommunications infrastructure (ie. Copper telephone wire) across the state.

The NJFB will continue to voice the following issues in rural areas of NJ, where most farms are located:

- Verizon considers 4G-based wireless service as broadband access, so if a home or business is in an area served by 4G wireless, then no fiber optic wire is required. Even though the Internet can be accessed with wireless devices, the bandwidth is not sufficient to conduct business or to enable students to do their homework.
- The Verizon Wireless service coverage map at their website has been known to show better coverage than exists. Many areas of the state have non-existent or spotty, unreliable service.
- Unlike wired broadband access (e.g., Verizon FIOS), wireless access is subject to data cap pricing making it a much more expensive solution.
- The definition of broadband put forth in this settlement is seriously outdated and does not meet the current federal standard. Any attempt to define broadband should recognize that the speed benchmark will continue to increase as consumer demand grows.
- DSL is not a long-term solution as it does not have adequate bandwidth to meet business requirements. When copper lines are not maintained, it is an even less plausible option.
- For businesses in areas of telecommunications deficiency, it is increasingly difficult to compete on any level: locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.
- Farm businesses cannot relocate land, which means the broadband infrastructure and wireless access must come to the agricultural areas.
- Communities successful in the preservation of farmland and open space are being penalized. Because these communities will never have the population densities to cost-justify telecommunications infrastructure build out, there should be some "quid pro quo" consideration when deploying current technologies. Otherwise, the state inadvertently compromises the public's investment in farmland preservation by not ensuring that farm businesses remain viable over the long term.

Due to its criticality in sustaining society, agriculture must have the telecommunications infrastructure necessary to compete in today's economy and to keep pace with an ever-growing world population. The NJFB will join forces with the American Farm Bureau to elevate these

issues to the federal level by sharing the New Jersey experience with the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee (BDAC) of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that:

- Rural areas of New Jersey are included in broadband federal funding map(s); and
- Meaningful broadband benchmarks are established and re-established as technology advances.

New Jersey is set to receive \$263.6 million to expand broadband access in the state as part of a \$42 billion round of federal funding. The allocation is part of the “Internet for All” initiative via the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The funds come through the Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). This round of BEAD funding comes on the heels of the Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program, which awarded Cumberland and Salem counties a \$24 million grant toward the construction of 220 route miles of fiber throughout the two counties — especially along paths that are underserved by current providers.

### **THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT** (2023)

The Landscape Project mapping of alleged habitat for threatened, endangered or “rare” animal species continues to be the most powerful land use mapping tool with the potential to make vast acreages of New Jersey land difficult if not impossible to use. When used this mapping can reduce development potential on farmland and could make it difficult to build necessary farm structures that might enhance farm viability.

On the federal level, Court decisions have forced the US Fish and Wildlife Service to perform an economic impact assessment before declaring an area as habitat. New Jersey Fish and Wildlife should have to do the same before green lining thousands of undeveloped acres in New Jersey. NJFB must work to require that there be science based physical evidence in addition to habitat potential before any regulatory action may be taken regarding restricting land use by NJ DEP and other land use regulatory bodies.

Farm Bureau shall:

- Urge the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife to report on a regular basis sightings of new animal species with the potential to be regulated in NJ and a report on their possible habitat and food choices.
- Continue to question the basis for the Landscape Project mapping, the lack of public review through the formal rulemaking process, and guard against further restrictions on the ability to farm profitably.
- Advocate for a change to the Landscape Project procedures to require a detailed, specific economic impact assessment for all properties affected by this regulation. A thorough analysis of the real Agricultural Impact must be required as well.
- Encourage the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to participate fully with the DEP in the development and implementation of reasonable landscape project regulations that enable viable agriculture instead of prohibiting it.
- Inform landowners and farmers so they can get access to DEP data mining and GIS mapping of these habitat areas and the impact on their property.

### **PRODUCT DISPARAGEMENT** (2022)

Growers of fruits and vegetables in recent years have suffered a loss of sales in the marketplace from unsubstantiated attacks challenging the safety of these food products. The issue of residues

from agricultural chemicals, like the ALAR scare on apples, is frequently a target of these misguided campaigns. The absence of scientific fact and the deliberate appeal to fear in an unsuspecting consuming public are used to disparage the safety and quality of fresh farm products. The fact that these products are marketed on a generic basis rather than through a brand name contributes to the problem.

Producers of generic products have no specific protection against libel and cannot recover damages from those who engage in produce disparagement.

Several states have adopted legislation to give growers some legal protection from this problem. The New Jersey Farm Bureau directors should evaluate this situation and seek appropriate remedial action to protect its produce industry and any commodity group having the same problem.

Farm Bureau shall be active in mitigating any undeserved negative publicity toward local produce in the wake of federal warnings resulting from contamination outbreaks. The past FDA public notice to avoid consumption of all romaine lettuce had a significant impact on the sale of Jersey product. The NJFB and NJDA need to work with FDA on future outbreaks to prevent disparagement of a whole industry. The food safety task force of the NJDA have developed plans to stem any misdirected warnings to consumers about the safe wholesome condition of New Jersey produce.

### **STATE PURCHASE OF NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS (2023)**

State government institutions purchase millions of dollars' worth of fresh produce each year for prison inmates, school children and the residents of special needs facilities. Despite the ready availability of high-quality farm commodities and value-added products from New Jersey farms at competitive prices, there is presently no state policy or mandate for these institutions to purchase in-state products. In August 2011 the Governor signed the bills creating the opportunity for state agencies to look at New Jersey agricultural products first. NJ Farm Bureau will follow the rulemaking process as guidelines for implementation are developed.

Since 2002 the NJDA and the Department of Corrections have been continuing a program that allows for the Corrections Department to buy New Jersey produce directly from local growers.

Since procedures were streamlined to help promote the purchase of Jersey Fresh produce by state agencies the New Jersey Farm Bureau should continue to support such programs and continue to explore new avenues to have state agencies purchase Jersey Fresh produce.

New Jersey Farm Bureau has worked with New Jersey Farm to School Network and Division of Food and Nutrition in the NJDA to promote the value of Jersey Fresh produce to be included in NJ school meal programs. One success is the "Jersey Fresh Farm to School Week" that occurs the last week of September and will highlight and promote the value and importance of New Jersey agriculture and fresh foods produced in New Jersey, and the value and importance of fresh farm foods for children, their general health, and their success in school.

Farm Bureau should continue to support efforts to expand purchase programs beyond schools and corrections and look at opportunities to work with other institutions and organizations that can promote the use and purchase of local food and agriculture products.

The past two budget cycles \$85 million was added to the state budget and passed through the NJ Department of Agriculture to help food banks and emergency feeding organizations purchase necessary food items for those in need. NJ Farm Bureau worked with the food banks and the state's farm cooperatives to establish relationships for the purchase of farm fresh NJ produce when in season. In addition, NJFB should include New Jersey farm produced, value-added products in all discussions and actions taken where appropriate.

### **AMERICAN FARM BUREAU (2022)**

New Jersey Farm Bureau encourages American Farm Bureau to maintain a budget that will meet the needs of this national organization.

### **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION (2023)**

To aid in the implementation for all the adopted New Jersey Farm Bureau policies, the NJFB president, with advice from the first vice president and executive director, shall develop a list of actions for farm bureau to undertake, as contained in this policy document. The NJFB Board of Directors then shall, before the end of the calendar year, approve of and prioritize said "action list." NJFB staff will then use this priority listing as a blueprint for actions in the coming year. This process shall be based upon the "Top Ten Policies" list approved by the delegates at the conclusion of the annual meeting.

### **WETLANDS (2023)**

#### Exemption for Ongoing Farming Activities

Legislation has been approved (2015) amending the freshwater wetlands protection act to provide that a cranberry bog or blueberry field that is maintained within the prior five years in accordance with the standards set out in the amendment shall be considered an established, ongoing farming operation, and shall not be deemed abandoned. The lack of a commercial harvest or production of a crop on or from the bog or field shall not be a determining factor as to whether agricultural use has been abandoned. Farmers should continue maintenance activities and active management of these areas to avoid having them declared abandoned.

NJFB continues to seek clarity in NJDEP policy on the interpretation of "normal farming activities" which are exempt from the Freshwater Wetlands rule. NJFB will continue to work with NJDA and NJDEP in obtaining clarification.

Farmers with appurtenant woodland may find themselves on the wrong side of the DEP's rules. Currently, only farms with Woodland Management Plans can harvest forest products in wetlands and transition areas. Farm Bureau should work through the DEP rules to secure an exemption for owners of appurtenant woodland to allow the harvesting of forest products, in wetland and transition areas without a woodland management plan, as long as the BMP manual for forestry and wetlands is followed.

#### Wetlands Mitigation Projects on Farmland

Over the past several years, concerns have been raised by the agricultural community including Warren County about the potential impact of certain wetlands mitigation projects approved by DEP on the hydrology and drainage capabilities of surrounding farmland. New Jersey Farm Bureau should work with the Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Agriculture on policies and procedures for DEP and private/public entities with mitigation obligations to incorporate when considering mitigation projects that could affect surrounding farmland. Such considerations should include, but are not limited to, an evaluation of any drainage or other water



flow impacts that may result on adjacent farmland when a property is converted to wetlands for mitigation purposes and whether additional limitations or requirements should be considered for mitigation project proposals in the Highlands, Pinelands, Bayshore and Agriculture Development Areas that contain soils of local or statewide importance or are designated prime agricultural soils. Also, public health issues should be of serious concern.

Farm Bureau should:

- aggressively address the issue of loss of productive farmland, degradation of adjoining farmland, creation of wetland buffers which affect adjoining farms, agricultural pest habitat created, loss of land value to adjoining lands and public health issues caused by mosquito breeding habitat created in mitigation.
- Look for any expansion of mapped wetlands in the new Inland Flood Protection Rule that could create problems for working farmland.

### **COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKETS** (2023)

Farmers' Market is a public market for the primary purpose of connecting and mutually benefiting New Jersey farmers, communities and shoppers while promoting and selling products grown and raised by participating farmers. The purpose of a community farmers market is to enhance direct marketing opportunities for farmers, to connect farmers and local consumers, and to maintain the viability of rural communities through farm-based economic development. Farmers' markets throughout the state need to be professional and well run to serve the interests of the farmer and the community to ensure their long-term success. Products sold should be produced within New Jersey when available. Brokers should be strictly prohibited.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should support the efforts of the farm community in recognizing the need to develop guidelines or regulations to keep community farmers markets Jersey markets.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should urge the NJDA to work with the State Department of Health to institute uniform policies for community farmers markets across the state. Farmers selling at markets in different towns often face varying regulations based upon the whim of the local health department officials. Local health department officials must be better educated on how to deal with farmers market entities.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should seek to promote NJFB membership opportunities to patrons and supporters of community farmers markets.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should explore new mechanisms to enhance the influence of farmer-participants at community farm markets in the overall decision-making about market management. This might include encouraging boards of directors for community farm markets to maintain a seat on the board for a participating farmer, or a pre-season meeting hosted by the market manager and other key staff where participating farmers can make recommendations about market management protocols for the upcoming season.

### **SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE** (2022)

Agriculture, the third largest industry in New Jersey, impacts the food supply, the economy, the landscape and general health and well-being of New Jersey and its citizens.

Currently, the New Jersey State Senate does not have a Senate Agriculture Committee. Bills dealing with agricultural issues are typically assigned to existing Senate Committees. In the

Assembly, the Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee routinely considers legislation impacting the agricultural sector and is made up of legislators with high concentrations of agriculture in their districts or those who otherwise have a keen interest in and an understanding of agricultural issues. A stand-alone Senate Agriculture Committee would offer a similar venue for agricultural issues to be considered. With this in mind, NJFB should work with Senate leadership to pursue the establishment of a stand-alone Senate Agriculture Committee composed of Senators with an interest in agricultural issues.

Because Committee chairpersons are often hesitant to reduce the scope of the subject areas that their respective committees consider, the establishment of a standalone Senate Agriculture Committee could be met with some resistance. NJFB should work to ensure that unless and until a Senate Agriculture Committee is created, the existing committees to which agriculture-related bills are referred take up these bills regularly and in a timely manner.

### **PROBLEM SOLVING SERVICES** (2022)

One of the core services provided by Farm Bureau for its members is informal constituent assistance when help is needed. Many farmers call or write letters to the Farmhouse with questions, requests for information or ideas about how to handle problem situations. Some of these questions involve compliance status with government regulations. Others are in regard to miscellaneous aspects of farm operations and management. Farm Bureau shall respond to these farmer calls promptly and properly noted. This interaction is an excellent way to surface information about the need to create, modify or eliminate current regulations through formal contact with government agencies or the legislature.

There is a benefit to coordinating this effort with similar work being done by the Department of Agriculture and Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Information fact sheets and other "how to" and "do's and don'ts" guidelines can be stored and retrieved on the Farm Bureau communication tools. Farm Bureau shall, during the upcoming year, attempt to strengthen these services through such coordination and documentation of this base of knowledge and experience for the membership.

Members are cautioned that the key to gaining flexibility in the interpretation of rule compliance judgment calls is good faith efforts at using recommended management practices. Farm organization influence is diminished by the few who skirt recommended practices and create undesirable impressions with the public about agriculture.

### **PLASTIC BAG BAN** (2023)

In November of 2020, a law was signed banning single use plastic carry out bags in New Jersey. The law became effective May 4, 2022.

The Legislature determined that it was no longer acceptable to permit the unfettered use and disposal of single-use plastics in the State; specifically, single-use plastic carryout bags, polystyrene foam food service products, and single-use plastic straws as these items are among the most significant sources of beach and ocean pollution.

NJFB applauds the action of the Legislature to stem the overuse and disposal of single-use plastics which have become so omnipresent in our environment. We note that the law exempted several uses for plastic carry out bags:

"A carry-out bag shall not include -

(1) a bag used solely to contain or wrap uncooked meat, fish, or poultry.

(2) a bag used solely to package loose items such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, coffee, grains, baked goods, candy, greeting cards, flowers, or small hardware items.”

In the summer of 2022, DEP clarified that plastic “produce” bags such as those on a roll to contain fresh fruits and vegetables were not banned as “carry out bags” but the plastic “tee-shirt” type bags were banned.

At agricultural markets and pick your own farms, these produce bags are not an adequate substitute for the tee-shirt type bag due to the thin construction and small size of the produce bags. Reusable bags are not ideal for this type of product as freshly picked produce is often wet and may have residual soil from the fields.

Farm Bureau’s policy carried forward to the State Agricultural Convention in Feb. ‘23 where a policy resolution was adopted calling for action by the State Board of Agriculture. That board was asked to consult with the DEP and seek a waiver from the plastic bag ban to accommodate these narrow, ag-only exemptions. That consultation was made with the assistance of the NDJA, but no agreement was reached. The NJDA/State Board now believes that alternative measures should be pursued to allow farm retailers to have bags they need without violating the terms of the plastic bag ban.

### **FARMLAND ASSESSMENT** (2023)

Farmland Assessment taxation, passed in 1964, is probably the most important reason that the loss of farmland in New Jersey slowed dramatically from 1970 to date. Approximately 1.2 million acres receive that assessment now, of which more than 500,000 acres is cropland.

Higher taxes and perceived tax abuses continue to be high priority issues with the public. The need to educate them about Farmland Assessment and its positive effects is greater than ever. New Jersey Farm Bureau was active through the year in meeting with legislators on Farmland Assessment issues.

Farm Bureau should continue to:

- monitor the results of the new mandatory training program administered by the state Division of Taxation. This new training program, a continuing education requirement for all assessors in a municipality or county with at least one parcel assessed as farmland, is intended to ensure that all such assessors are educated about the minimum qualification criteria for farmland assessment eligibility and the generally accepted farming practices outlined in the Department of Agriculture's advisory guidelines for farmland tax assessment.
- Send out a periodic update to all members on the latest court decisions or other issues about Farmland Assessment. One such decision maintained that local tax assessors must use F.E.A.C. established values, as opposed to the market value of the crop, or other personal methodology, when determining an assessment for a farm property. Farm operators must appeal by April 1 if they believe the assessment is incorrect.
- Farm Bureau should work with the legislature to prevent any changes to the program that would negatively impact the land dedicated to agriculture or increase taxes already paid by farmers. Any legislative proposals should be carefully reviewed by Farm Bureau staff and other members of the agricultural community.
- Oppose the misapplication of remote imaging technology for the purpose of punitive assessments.

- Oppose the creation of other tax abatement programs that compete with Farmland Assessment by encouraging large property owners to remove their land from agricultural production in favor of a conservation or set-aside program.
- Due to an issue in Warren County and Northwest New Jersey, urge the Division of Taxation to adopt soil classifications determined or to be determined by Soil Conservation Districts based upon updated soil maps. Educate tax assessors on the use of those classifications for valuation purposes.
- There is a new GIS mapping tool that is available to assist landowners in determining their soil types for farmland assessment. The web-based mapping system is available at [njda.njmapper.com](http://njda.njmapper.com). This tool can assist farms to apply for reassessment upon request to their local assessors. NJFB should encourage the education of tax assessors on the use of this new mapping tool for valuation purposes.
- Oppose the use of municipal specific forms for farmland assessment. Every municipality should not be allowed to require additional forms with a requirement to use the state forms only. In addition, tax assessors should be required to notify landowners that have previously filed, of denial by December 31, to ensure time for an appeal.
- Conversely, there have been several situations where property owners have applied for, and received farmland assessment, when they, in fact, do not qualify for farmland assessment. This dilutes the farmland assessment program and creates adverse public perception of farmland assessment and a negative view of the farming community. New Jersey Farm Bureau encourages the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Division of Taxation to emphasize that the minimum of five acres of active devotion to agriculture is the first step to qualifying for farmland assessment. Passive agricultural use does not.

The Farmland Assessment Act was amended in 2009 to allow forest stewardship activities to fulfill the farmland assessment criteria, even without tree harvest. Farm Bureau opposed this legislation. The forest stewardship program was adopted in November 2017.

With the addition of the Forest Stewardship Program and the full implementation of the legislative changes made to the program in 2013 Farm Bureau recommends no further changes be legislated while we monitor the impacts of the implementation of the law and rules.

While New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the development and use of renewable energy, the organization does not support broadening of the definition of agricultural production to include the “harvesting of the sun or wind” for power generation.

#### Farm Building Taxation

The Farm Building Appraisal Manual, a subset of the Real Property Appraisal Manual for New Jersey Assessors addresses economic obsolescence, functional obsolescence, and depreciation, the key concerns in farm building appraisal. Also, a section on permanent greenhouse structures, formerly found in the commercial building chapter of the appraisal manual, has been moved to the farm building section of the manual.

The use of this manual by assessors began in the 2000 tax year. Any farmer filing an appeal due to a farm building overassessment should have a copy of the Real Property Appraisal Manual for use in the appeal. This is available for purchase from the Division of Taxation.

Even with the existence of the Farm Building Appraisal Manual, instances of over-taxation are still being reported. Although copies of the manual are available to the public, it is a complex document, designed to be used and interpreted by assessors, not necessarily the public. New Jersey Farm Bureau contracted a consultant to develop a “primer” to explain the rules of farm building taxation. Farm Bureau should review and seek any necessary updates to the “primer” as building codes and tax policy has changed.

### **SERVICE ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION** (2021)

As per a resolution passed at the 2019 Department of Agriculture Convention, the State Board of Agriculture, Rutgers and NJFB worked with the Seeing Eye Inc. to create posters, cards and a FAQ document regarding service animals at farm venues. Posters and cards were created, and the FAQ has been posted by Rutgers online. NJFB will continue to disseminate these resources.

New Jersey Farm Bureau should consider advising a change to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to require service animals, with the exemption of seeing eye dogs in harness, to have issued photo ID cards, identifying them as service animals. It should be noted that comfort animals are not covered under the ADA. This should include the name and phone number of the animal’s veterinarian on the back. This would help open-to-the-public farms protect their animals/livestock from asymptomatic and symptomatic diseases and psychological distress. Photos could be taken, and ID cards issued through the existing Motor Vehicle Division or other government entities.

### **NURSERY AND PLANT INSPECTIONS** (2023)

Part of New Jersey regulations include that all nursery stock be subject to inspection to confirm it is free of disease and insect pest organisms. Such pests could be damaging to the nursery industry and to NJ communities. It was deemed important that the Department of Agriculture be knowledgeable of all plant material as it is moved around the state and country. With new emerging plant diseases, it is important to have a strong well-funded nursery inspection program. Farm Bureau supports increasing funding for the Department and supports a review of the current fees and inspection program to ensure that all plant growers and sellers participate in the program.

The program review should ensure:

- All plants eligible for sale were to be inspected. A nursery certificate is provided to all nursery stock and displayed for all consumers to view.
- Inspectors notify farms of proposed visits and review areas of inspection to ensure proper fee assessment.
- Regular filing of documents to secure the certification and appropriate fees are part of the process; there should be no exceptions to this regulatory process.
- There is uniform enforcement of the regulations. Overnight “nurseries” spring up just before major holidays, selling trees, plants and plant products competing directly with established nurseries that are playing by the rules and have completed amongst other things: application for a Certificate of Occupancy for the business, parking facility with adequate space and safety, sign permit, business permit, insurance (liability, fire, etc.), State tax designation, Municipal tax on occupied land for commercial use, Agricultural Certificate for plant material, Agricultural Certificate for new plants shipped in, as well as bathroom facilities for employees and customers.
- Farm Bureau, along with the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association and the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association, should seek a formal hearing through the Department of Agriculture to examine the impacts of these temporary businesses,

excluding non-profit organizations, on the nursery industry and the risks to plant health for New Jersey growers from these establishments.

- Ensure shipments from out of state are insect/pest free and reject or halt shipments that can cause outbreaks at operations. This fall many growers are seeing aphids in shipments from Florida and suffering once the product is on their farm.
- The division of plant industry should work on developing bio-security standards for nurseries to aid in the prevention of the spread of insect and plant disease pests.
- The emergence of the Spotted Lantern Fly in New Jersey and the establishment of a quarantine zone to contain the insect is the clearest example of why we need an active and fully funded Plant and Nursery inspection program.

### **COMMERCIAL FISHING** (2021)

Farm Bureau shall strongly oppose any legislation that attempts to ban legitimate, historical fisheries in state waters. It shall be an active player in any coalition of recognized commercial fishing groups formed to oppose such a ban. Farm Bureau will seek and support legislation creating a Right to Fish bill. Such legislation will guarantee equal access to our marine fishery resources for all user groups (commercial, recreational, and charter). NJFB should work to ensure that any legislation establishes a workable process for mitigating "Right to Fish" disputes.

Farm Bureau shall seek funding that reflects the realities of commercial fisheries, and serves as a bridge between the state's agricultural, scientific and commercial fishing communities.

NJFB shall support the Jersey Seafood marketing program of commercial fishing products within the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

#### **NJDEP Fish Consumption Advisories**

The NJDEP regularly releases fish consumption advisories, sometimes more stringent than federal EPA guidelines. These more stringent standards can have a devastating effect on New Jersey's party and charter fishing business and can also have a severe negative impact on the sale of commercially caught species. The recent risk/benefit studies conducted by Harvard University and the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine both concur that the benefits of increased seafood consumption outweigh any potential risks, especially in the commercial chain. New Jersey Farm Bureau strongly urges the NJDEP to use the PCB standard that is being utilized by the EPA.

#### **Government Aid to Commercial Fishing Industry**

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall seek legislation ensuring that government money (i.e. subsidies, low-interest loans, guarantees, etc.) given to aid the commercial fishing industry shall be used for that purpose only. In the event said loans, etc., are not used for that purpose, said money must be repaid immediately. This should be patterned after the existing county level Ocean County revolving loan fund; and should not in any way be available for fishing enterprises owned and operated by large, conglomerate corporations.

#### **Ocean Dumping**

The New Jersey Farm Bureau strongly opposes all ocean-dumping of waste. Commercial fishermen have long suffered from current dumping practices.

#### **Off-Coast Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Facilities and Drilling**

NJFB opposes any and all LNG facilities, either for importation or exportation, that would be sited off of New Jersey's coast.

### Support of Commercial Fisheries

Farm Bureau shall move as vigorously and as quickly as possible to support the commercial fishing industry in every way within their means recognizing this industry is a vital segment of New Jersey's agriculture. Farm Bureau shall seek and actively support the following:

- The repeal of restrictions on the sale of menhaden as a "for bait only" designation.
- Depuration and relay of all shellfisheries (hard clams, soft clams, oysters and mussels) from all restricted and special restricted waters in the state of New Jersey.
- Due to the high and ever-increasing tax rates of commercial waterfront property, commercial docks, landings, and fish processing facilities are being forced to sell to other commercial interests thereby creating an economic hardship on New Jersey's commercial fishermen in that there are fewer facilities to unload, sell, and process their catch. New Jersey Farm Bureau should develop appropriate measures to enhance commercial fishing dock space, with sufficient capital funding in a manner that reflects each port's needs. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall work with shore area legislators to accomplish this.
- Advise New Jersey Farm Bureau to work with the Garden State Seafood Association for opportunities to collaborate on advocacy issues.
- Encourage all marine extension research to be directly related to the needs of the industry. New Jersey Farm Bureau shall also formally review the various advisory councils affecting commercial fishing for relevancy to the needs of the industry.
- The striped bass is a migratory fish that provides a source of income to the fishing communities of the East Coast and delicious table fare to millions. The Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Council is declaring the striped bass a recovered fishery as of 1995, after years of restrictive conservation measures. The historic commercial fishery for striped bass was legislated out of existence with passage of a bill that gave bass "game fish only" status and banned the sale of this fish in New Jersey, thus removing it from restaurant menus.

NJFB requests that the National Marine Fisheries Service holds public hearings with the fishing industry to identify more modern, economical, scientifically responsible forms of biological assessments.

We support the use of sound scientific data to evaluate fisheries.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports proposed federal legislation to change the definition of overfishing.

NJFB continues to work with fellow state Farm Bureaus in Northeast Atlantic coast states to coordinate similar fishing-related issues management to help build greater influence for commercial fishermen.

NJFB shall solicit a change in the State of New Jersey's Menhaden law to allow owners of a Menhaden Purse Seine Fishing Vessel License, operated by an individual who is in possession of a Menhaden Purse Seine Fishing Vessel Operator's License be able to land their fish outside of New Jersey if New Jersey's quota is already met.

### **SEAFOOD GLEANING PROGRAM** (2021)

New Jersey is home to four of the largest commercial fishing ports in the United States. The annual harvest of New Jersey's fishing industry is valued at \$8 billion and is among the top in the nation, supporting 52,000 jobs.

It is estimated that 17 to 22 percent (approximately 2 billion pounds) of the entire U.S. fisheries catch is discarded each year. At any time, more than 1 million residents in New Jersey, including 375,000 children, suffer from food insecurity. That number is 49 million people, including 16 million children, nationwide. Utilizing a portion of that total discarded seafood could make an enormous impact on hunger, by securing a much-needed year-round source of protein for food banks, pantries and soup kitchens.

New Jersey's commercial fishers seek to reduce hunger by participating in a new program called "The United States Seafood Gleaning Program (USSGP)" to utilize discarded and wasted seafood by gleaning. The application and award of grants by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would help expand this program.

The USSGP is partnering with seafood processors and distributors, food banks and other interested parties to develop an innovative and compelling program for the collaboration of fishers, aquaculturists, fish dealers and processors in New Jersey and along the East Coast to create usable fishery products from discards and underutilized species, thus helping to address food insecurity. To further NJFB support of the Seafood Gleaning Program in New Jersey, NJFB will advocate for legislation requiring all New Jersey fisheries management plans require consideration of gleaning on a voluntary basis.

New Jersey Farm Bureau supports the establishment of a US Seafood Gleaning Program, and advocates for the use of grants and donations from all appropriate sources. State funding for gleaning should be expanded to include seafood. NJFB supports the programs below.

For more than two years, AGS has operated a pilot program with Trinity Seafood and Fulfill food bank to glean fresh seafood from three local ports, process it into value-added product, and donate it to individuals in New Jersey's Monmouth and Ocean Counties. In the timeframe between 2019 and 2021, more than 200,000 meals have been delivered to Fulfill Food Bank for their clients.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Greater Atlantic Region Office (GARFO) initiated a Zero Discard Program in January 2022. It is the first federally mandated gleaning effort to be conducted at the dock. Dockside gleaning will provide protein rich meals to thousands of individuals and families who are food insecure. America's Gleaned Seafood (AGS) looks forward to participating as the gleaning partner, and through its efforts will provide NMFS critical data which will improve fishery management plans and support the addition of new fishery management plans. AGS plans to work with processors and food banks in New Jersey and the Northeast to ensure the meals from the gleaned fish can be delivered to those who need it. AGS estimates the program will provide 240,000 to 800,000 meals in 2023. NJFB will advocate for AGS to be the gleaning partner of the Zero Discard Program and will support the growth of AGS such that it can expand as the Zero Discard program expands.



NJFB shall in support of seafood gleaning, advise all gleaned seafood to be compliant with regulations intended for safe human consumption and assure gleaned seafood should not affect the image of “Jersey Seafood,” “Jersey Fresh” or fresh seafood within the state.

### **SALES TAX ISSUES** (2021)

The 2004 revisions to the sales tax code that deemed horse stall rentals as a sales taxable item has created confusion within the training and breeding industry. Because some of the animals are housed for production purposes, many mistakenly thought they were exempt from the need to collect sales tax. Additionally, stall rentals, the sale of claimed horses and the sale of horses are taxable in New Jersey, but not taxable in neighboring states. This tax directly impacts the competitiveness of the racing and training industry here in New Jersey. Farm Bureau should work with the equine industry to create an exemption for these items. The Sales Tax Review Commission approved language in a bill that would end the sales tax on Equine operations, New Jersey Farm Bureau must work to complete the passage of this legislation.

An area of concern has grown within the agricultural industry with the method and interpretation of the New Jersey Division of Taxation as they determine farming enterprise qualifying for sales tax exemption (as referred to on the ST-7 form) and how it impacts state tax issues in areas such as but not limited to purchase of farm vehicles, farm use equipment and necessary farm supplies. Farm Bureau urges the NJDA to work with the Tax Division to adopt an acceptable set of definitions for farming enterprises.

Additionally, a clear definition needs to be developed of what constitutes a “farming enterprise” in New Jersey, to be recognized by all agencies and departments.

The Department of Agriculture has a comprehensive online guide to Farming and Sales Tax with special guides for the nursery and equine industries. Farm Bureau should continue to make the guides available to members and work with the Department of Agriculture and the Division of Taxation when updates are needed.

### **ASPHALT MILLINGS** (2021)

Farmers use reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP) or asphalt millings to improve farm lanes and prevent mud tracking on public roadways from farm equipment. The asphalt millings make farm road improvements affordable for farmers; where purchasing new natural aggregate or using millings as a sub-base to a superficial natural aggregate layer is expensive and creates unnecessary hardship for farmers.

The Farm Bureau will work on getting NJDEP to provide an approval for this use or a Notice in the Response Action Outcome that an LSRP can rely on (similar to what we have for Historic Pesticides). The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has a guidance document available regarding the Reuse of Recycled Asphalt Pavement and Asphalt Millings. Any farm considering using these products should consult that guidance document before determining to use or accept millings on their property.

### **PINELANDS** (2023)

It is critical that New Jersey Farm Bureau continues an ongoing dialogue with the Pinelands Commission stressing the need to treat farm and forest landowners in the Pinelands with respect and in a way that protects their equity.

- NJFB should monitor any future attempts to create new PDC regulations to protect against the devaluation of PDC values.
- New Jersey Farm Bureau should support a re-evaluation of the pinelands formula to confirm it reflects the current comparable land values outside the Pinelands.
- Farm Bureau should oppose any CMP amendments that would diminish the demand for PDCs, work with Pinelands Commission members when necessary to help stimulate private-sector interest in Pinelands Development Credits (PDC's) and closely review potential CMP amendments to suggest such changes.
- There was a decision by the Pinelands Development Credit Bank Board that allowed for the donation of PDCs for a low-income senior housing development project. NJFB should oppose any future PDC donation requests made to the PDC Bank Board regardless of the projected use.

The Pinelands Agricultural Advisory Committee has been inactive for several years. It has been replaced by a formal agriculture advisory subcommittee, comprised of Commission members. The subcommittee's meetings are open to the public, but there is no formal obligation that they include agricultural interest from within the Pinelands region in these meetings. Farm Bureau should explore with Pinelands Commission staff the possibility of adding non-voting farmer members to this new subcommittee. Failing that, Farm Bureau should work to ensure that the recommendations of the subcommittee are representative of the interests of farmers from within the Pinelands region. The full Ag Advisory Committee should be re-activated for consideration of major agricultural policy matters.

- Farm Bureau supports a program to allow non-agricultural activities to adequately reflect the needs of farm businesses within the Pinelands, consistent with allowances for such activities on farmland outside of the Pinelands and expansive enough to include events or activities where marketing the output of the farm plays a significant role.
- Farm Bureau shall monitor the distribution of funds under the Garden State Preservation Trust to ensure that it reflects the geographic diversity of the state to the maximum extent practicable and feasible.
- Funds allocated for Pinelands purchases by the GSPT shall only be used for farms within the Pinelands region, while there are active farmland applications pending. Landowners should be notified when and if funds are allocated for Pinelands purchases.
- The current Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) does not allow equine activity in the preservation district. The CMP only allows berry agriculture and horticulture of native plants and other agriculture activities compatible with existing soil and water conditions that support traditional Pinelands agriculture. Equine farms that existed prior to the act are allowed, but any new equine activity is not considered agriculture. NJFB should support an amendment to include equine agriculture in the preservation district.
- Farm Bureau supports low impact/low intensity recreational uses on farmland in the Pinelands region.

The NJFB supports the promotion of sound science when decisions are made when considering the need to use herbicides or pesticides in the Pinelands. The commission has an ongoing debate

on using herbicides to control vegetative cover impacting fire towers and fire control projects in the preserve. The Pinelands commission should not consider restricting the usage of pesticide or herbicides when needed to control a plant or pest.

With the ever-changing dynamics of agriculture, it is important that the Pinelands Commission support the Right to Farm within the Pinelands. Agriculture is an indigenous industry to be protected by the Pinelands Protection Act and Comprehensive Management Plan. Due to the diversity of crops and labor-intensive crops grown in the Pinelands, it is important that growers can expand all aspects of their business such as labor camps, packing facilities and supporting structures without onerous restrictions, such as having to purchase a PDC credit or surrendering the same. It is important that the Pinelands Commission understands and supports the continuation and growth of agriculture within the Pinelands boundaries. Agricultural production areas should be permitted to have small business entities that support agriculture infrastructure.

Farm Bureau will also encourage the inclusion of farmland within the Forest Area into Agricultural Production Areas designation under the Pinelands Plan that will entitle them to allocation of Pinelands Development Credits and the accompanying share of GSPT.

The State Ethics Commission ruled that some Pinelands Commission members recuse themselves from all discussions concerning landowner and agricultural issues because of a perception of conflict of interest. The Pinelands Protection Act requires these interests to be represented and that agriculture be promoted and enhanced.

Farm Bureau should work to see that legislation to permit members of the Pinelands Commission to participate in discussion and vote on amendments to the comprehensive management plan becomes law. Failing a legislative remedy, NJFB should formally challenge the State Ethics Commission's ruling. Further, all discussion by the Pinelands Commission concerning landowner and farm interests should be suspended until full ag representation is restored.

Farm Bureau believes that applications for new residential development should require some purchase of Pinelands Development Credits. We support the pending changes for the credit program to do this, without any exemption for affordable housing.

The Commission's new stormwater management rules became effective January 18, 2022, and expand beyond NJDEP's stormwater regulations in that they require green infrastructure to manage the stormwater close to the source, treat stormwater through infiltration into the subsoil, treat stormwater through filtration by vegetation or soil, and/or store stormwater runoff for reuse. The Commission's new rules will, for the first time, require stormwater management for minor development. Minor residential development will be required to retain and infiltrate clean stormwater generated from the roof of a house by using green infrastructure measures, which include dry wells, pervious paving systems and small-scale bioretention systems such as a rain garden. This requires excessive expense to hire an engineer to comply with this regulation for a single-family residence. NJFB opposes this excessive regulation for minor developments especially outside urbanized and suburbanized areas, considering this impact on residents in the pinelands. If these regulations stand, then the agency should publish tabular standards which can be implemented without specific engineering by homeowners.

Farm Bureau shall also monitor the appointment process for the seven governor-sourced nominations to the 15-member Pinelands Commission by the Murphy administration. Among the

seven, there ought to be individuals selected who can represent agriculture, local stakeholders, and residents of the region.

### **MANDATED CONSERVATION EASEMENT DEED RESTRICTIONS** (2021)

The SADC, the DEP, and municipalities are authorized by N.J.S.A. 13:1D-9 to formulate comprehensive policies for the conservation of natural resources, to promote environmental protection, and prevent pollution of the environment of the State, and are authorized by N.J.S.A. 13:8B-3 to acquire and enforce conservation restrictions. Even the smallest permit or other approval can be used to require the landowner to prevent use of the rest of the property through a conservation deed restriction.

Through these easements the public gains control of the use of thousands of privately owned and maintained acres at no cost. Each conservation easement specifies what is to be protected and often what methods are to be used. No changes can be made in perpetuity without permission of the owner of the easement and amendment of the deed. A governmental entity or a nonprofit owner of the easement may have the right to inspect the property at any time and monitor to ensure that the deed requirements Farm Bureau should:

- Remind the administration of the land use and land equity effects of this over-reaching practice. Landowners should not be forced by the need of a state government permit or approval to donate any future value of their property.
- Work with the SADC to change the contents of their deeds of easement to be more like those used in New York State where the landowner receives an appraisal of and some compensation for all areas preserved for agriculture or natural resource protection.
- Urge all Farm Bureau members to be careful to read all the small print when receiving any action from a state or municipal agency and review it with their own attorney to make sure such a sacrifice of land use and value is necessary.
- Survey members for their experiences with this type of exaction and collect examples of conservation easement deeds imposed without compensation.
- Ask DEP, the SADC, nonprofit land conservation organizations for statistics on how much privately-owned land is protected forever by these deed restrictions.
- Seek legal opinion about how much legal support these easements could have and how to challenge the practice.
- Use this information to develop guidance for Farm Bureau landowners about these conservation restrictions – their nature, their long-term effects, steps a landowner can take to avoid or change them. This could take the form of a section on the Farm Bureau web page, a guidance paper, and/or a future Update article.
- Build an argument for legislation to outlaw this inequitable practice and find legislative support for a bill to deny state, county, local government agencies or nonprofits the ability to require conservation easements without compensation.
- Report the findings of these activities to the Board of Directors in order to develop more action in the future.

### **DEER FARMING** (2021)

The deer farm industry has been strong in Europe, New Zealand and Canada for years. While the marketing of venison in the United States is still developing, deer farming is now growing throughout the United States. Some producers are new to agriculture while others are turning to deer farming to diversify their farm operations.

Deer farming has been in existence in New Jersey since the early 1900's. The 2017 agriculture census shows 8 deer farms with 172 animals in New Jersey. This industry is currently regulated by the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Protection. The Division does not seem to support the potential growth of this industry.

Legislation has been introduced that would transfer the oversight of the deer farming industry from the Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Agriculture. This is the case in neighboring states including New York and Pennsylvania, where deer farming is becoming a fast-growing industry. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports this legislative change.

### **HISTORIC PRESERVATION** (2021)

In New Jersey, regulation of buildings, structures, landscapes, and scenic corridors can develop at the local level through the master plan and ordinance development process. Nomination and listing as "historic" can be at the national and county level. Anything over 50 years old can be deemed "historic." Anyone can nominate a property without the participation of the owner. New Jersey Farm Bureau supports a change in regulation that would require notification of a landowner prior to nomination of their property for historic status. Landowners should also be made aware if their property is being considered for inclusion in an historic district.

A focus on historic landscapes and scenic corridors is a concern for agriculture, not only because property values may be affected, but also because farm modernization or change to new crops or technology may be more difficult or impossible.

New Jersey Farm Bureau shall:

- Investigate the takings implications of designation of historic landscapes, "viewsheds," and scenic corridors.
- Work with the SADC to find ways to additionally compensate farms for historic and scenic values when preserving a farm.
- Be watchful for adverse actions on the local and municipal level and be prepared to educate town officials and the public regarding the cultural interpretation of agriculture and the historic role agriculture has and continues to fulfill in New Jersey's landscape.
- Determine whether the Right to Farm Act requirement for an agricultural impact statement applies to these state-supported actions.
- Assert and reinforce the fact that agriculture in practice and agricultural chattel are the present-day evidence and artifacts that can aid in the interpretation of agriculture as a cultural resource to the general public.

### **BRIDGE CHANGES AND ROAD WIDENING** (2021)

Farmers in New Jersey typically farm many parcels of land and need to move large pieces of farm equipment on public roadways to get from one field to another. When bridges are upgraded or redesigned, they are often made impassable for some farm equipment. When this occurs, farmers have to re-route, often miles out of their way.

Farm Bureau encourages county and state entities, when contemplating a bridge re-design, to contact the farm community through the appropriate county board of agriculture. The agricultural community should be asked for their input on size, width and weight accommodation.

The farm community must meet with the NJDOT to discuss this concern and initiate efforts to help communities become aware of this need and better plan agricultural routes. There is precedent for this in a recent Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission DVRPC transportation study for the Burlington Route 206 Farm Belt where agricultural routes were mapped by the farm community itself.

With increased traffic, the transportation infrastructure is continuing to be upgraded and expanded. New Jersey Farm Bureau recognizes the need for these improvements, but requests that the impacts of those changes, such as water runoff onto adjacent farmland, be addressed at the planning stages by the entity doing the project.

### **HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX/AGRITOURISM** (2019)

Currently a portion of the hotel room tax collected by the state is dedicated to funding travel and tourism promotion in the state. NJ Farm Bureau supports having a portion of the state-wide proceeds returned to the County Travel and Tourism Boards where the revenue has been generated to support local travel and tourism destination and promotion for agritourism farms.

There is a New Jersey Tourism Policy Council consisting of 23 members representing lodging, food service, eco-tourism, cultural, conventions, amusement, outdoor recreation and historical sector and the six tourism regions. New Jersey Farm Bureau should support legislation to amend the council for an additional seat to represent the agritourism industry.

### **AGRITOURISM LIABILITY PROTECTION ACT** (2023)

Rising numbers of agritourism customers and visitors across the state have created higher risk and higher premium costs for those farm operators. Additionally, that increased risk may lead to a rise in lawsuits by the public who visit these locations. The situation deserves a review that would clarify customer versus business owner responsibilities for these agritourism activities (such as hayrides, petting zoos, pony rides, corn maze, etc.).

New Jersey Farm Bureau should seek in the 2024/25 legislative cycle, state legislation that would provide farmland owners with liability protections for all public on farm activities, consistent with the protections afforded through the Pick Your Own and Equine Liability Protection Acts.

### **PROPERTY RIGHTS** (2019)

Farm Bureau shall seek the enactment of state policy to protect all property owners from the adverse effects of excessive land use regulations. This policy should resemble the property rights protection legislation in the state of Florida known as the Bert Harris Act or Measure #37 of Oregon. Those laws both recognize that while some laws, regulations and ordinances may not amount to a constitutional taking, they can still cause an inordinate burden or “regulatory taking” on property owners, and such burden should be compensated for.

In September 2013 the Governor signed legislation clarifying two important rulings impacting eminent domain; (Gallenthin v. Paulsboro; 2007) which found that “underutilization” is not a sufficient justification for eminent domain unless the property otherwise meets the criteria for blight. This law adds clarifying language to the “Local Redevelopment and Housing Law”. Additionally, the law would codify another court ruling (Harrison Redevelopment Agency v. DeRose; 2008) which called for proper due process and early notification procedures if eminent domain is being considered for redevelopment purposes.

Farm Bureau should make sure all members have access to the latest information about regulation that would affect property rights and values including eminent domain, on the NJFB website.

### **USE OF FOOD BY-PRODUCTS/SOURCE SEPARATED FOOD WASTE** (2017)

Waste material recycling, if done properly, can be a significant way to conserve natural resources and energy. Composted material used as an input for soil nutrients and replenishment is also a potential way to merge waste disposal with farm production practices. Both recycling and the use of compost materials are generally seen as beneficial to society and usually having a positive environmental impact.

An Agricultural Management Practice (AMP) for the land application of food processing byproducts was adopted by the SADC in 1999. Farmers land-applying these products should follow the guidelines provided in the AMP to receive full protection under the Right to Farm law. Farm Bureau should make farmers aware that this AMP is available for their use.

Legislation was passed to encourage food waste recycling with the goal of encouraging its use for energy production. Farm Bureau worked to ensure that food waste used by farmers for animal feed or for composting would remain acceptable recycling alternatives.

Farm Bureau supports the current regulation that calls for the feeding of food waste products to be under the authority of the Department of Agriculture and calls for it to remain within NJDA.

With the increased desire to have food waste used for animal feed there is a need for additional research to develop AMP's for such uses. The NJFB would support research to develop best management practices to make the use of food waste for livestock feed practical and limit neighbor conflicts.

Both the farm and food industry need research to develop best management practices to make this practical. Some of the negative results on farms that have initiated the practice are listed below:

- Storage and smell of the organic material particularly when disturbed.
- The extreme smell of the manure generated by the food source digestion.
- The lingering putrid odor of the manure when spread on fields.
- Acidosis created in the cattle's stomach when fed this food source—the recommendation of free choice of sodium bicarbonate did not solve odor problem.

Suggested areas that could be researched, but not necessarily limited to:

- Ration of feed: percentages of grains, roughage, food waste and effect on odor, nutrition, and weight gain.
- Economic methods of this manure as a fertilizer whether spreading, injecting etc. to reduce odor.
- How all these factors impact animal feeding operations/concentrated animal feeding operations, AFO/CAFO.
- Are there any public health concerns because of high levels of gases in the air outside? On farm or fields after spreading (Need more scientific data other than the current state policy of nose sniffing—to subjective.)

### **HISTORIC PESTICIDES** (2016)

The use of persistent pesticides primarily for crop production left residuals in soils that exceed current NJDEP soil remediation standards. These pesticides typically include arsenic and various organo-phosphate pesticides such as Chlordane, Dieldrin, DDT along with others. The NJDEP has determined that these residuals may pose a human health risk in residential settings. In March 1999, the Historic Pesticide Contamination Task Force issued their final report entitled "Findings and Recommendations for the Remediation of Historic Pesticide Contamination".

Since the time that document was published, the Department has approved various technical options to address historic pesticide residuals on agricultural land when it is converted to residential use. The NJDEP does not require any evaluation or remediation for land which will remain in agricultural use.

Passage of the Site Remediation Reform Act in 2009 changed the process and regulations regarding Historic Pesticides. These changes were fully implemented in 2012 which now require that a Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP) specify requirements and issue the final approval for the remediation of historic pesticides. In August 2016, the NJDEP Site Remediation and Waste Management Program issued the report, "Historically Applied Pesticide Site Technical Guidance." This document is intended to serve as guidance for those conducting remediation to ensure compliance with NJDEP rules.

### **DEFINING 'FARM MARKETS'** (2015)

Direct marketing is becoming an increasingly popular business enhancement tool for farmers throughout the state of New Jersey. These direct marketing activities include establishing on-site farmers markets and roadside stands, participating in community tailgate farmers markets and other means of selling products direct to consumers.

There are other retail establishments also identified as "farmers markets" but there is no farmer involved and much, if not all, of the product being sold is coming from out-of-state or third-party sources. These types of farmers markets undercut business opportunities for community farmers markets, road stands, tailgate markets and other venues specializing in locally grown produce.

New Jersey farmers report that these so-called farmers markets sometimes mis-label goods to give consumers the false impression that these products and production of these products happens in state. Maintaining the integrity of the "farmers market" label by clearly distinguishing between those producing and selling these local products and those that do not is integral in further developing consumer awareness of retail opportunities to purchase in-state products. A similar resolution was adopted by the State Board of Agriculture at its 2014 convention.

Farm Bureau shall support the State Board of Agriculture to work in close coordination with farmers throughout the state that participate in direct marketing activities, to investigate ways to formally identify and distinguish these farm markets that truly specialize in selling local products and take the appropriate steps to make any needed corrections to avoid this type of false representation of farmers and false labeling of produce sales.

### **COUNTY BOARDS OF AGRICULTURE** (2013)

Farm Bureau will continue to promote farmer participation in the county boards of agriculture. There should be some recruitment of new people to add fresh input to the boards, especially where a few individuals have done most of the work for many years. The Young Farmer &



Rancher program may aid in the recruitment of new members, some of whom may be interested in assuming leadership roles at either the county or state level. Farm Bureau will continue its project of increasing its farmer membership throughout the organization. This project of farmer member recruitment and retention will necessitate participation on the local level with members from each county board involved.

Farm Bureau has established a membership committee to find better ways to maintain and expand membership. Each County Board of Agriculture should find ways to work with New Jersey Farm Bureau on membership recruitment and retention activities as well as member engagement in legislative and public outreach on agriculture issues.

New Jersey Farm Bureau must continue its effort to provide each county board of agriculture with up-to-date information regarding their legal requirements for tax purposes.

### **MASTER GARDENERS** (2013)

For over 25 years the Master Gardener program has been training volunteers who assist Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) Cooperative Extension in its mission to deliver horticulture programs and information to the public. Since 1984 over 8,000 volunteers have completed the program and dedicated over 2 million hours to Rutgers Cooperative Extension programs in their counties. The work the volunteers do - answering homeowners' general gardening questions - has played an important role in freeing up time for County Agents to work with producers and professionals in agriculture.

The Master Gardeners play a critical role in delivering to the public the knowledge and work that the Extension has to offer. The Master Gardener program offers a natural link for New Jersey Farm Bureau to expand how it communicates with the public. In the upcoming year New Jersey Farm Bureau should find ways to partner with the Master Gardener program, not only to grow membership, but to share with an interested audience the role agriculture plays in the state, its economy and the communities of New Jersey.

### **BISON PRODUCTION AND INSPECTION** (2009)

Bison are not currently considered meat animals by the USDA. Because of this, the inspection process for bison meat products is much more costly than for other meats. NJFB supports a USDA regulation change to include bison on their list of meat animals.

### **BEEF PROMOTION** (2007)

New Jersey Farm Bureau continues to support the mandatory beef check-off program and related activities of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the New Jersey Beef Council for the promotion of beef and beef-related products, consumer education and beef research activities.

### **LITIGATION POOL** (2023)

New Jersey farmers are sometimes the recipients of unfair and arbitrary enforcement actions arising from either government enforcement agencies or litigation. These normally occur in instances of labor management, environmental issues, land use or farm management practices. Agriculture is a profession dependent on the use of natural resources and a substantial amount of labor and is therefore vulnerable to such legal action on many fronts. An individual farmer is in an unfair position to defend him or herself from "test cases" brought by advocacy groups or government agencies.

Settling these cases because of financial limitations despite one's feelings of guilt or innocence is undesirable both to the individual farmer and the farm community. There may be other farmers in the state who have encountered similar problems and should have their information pooled with other farmers' experiences. The Farm Bureau directors will develop a working policy and protocol to educate and assist farmers on legal problems arising from environmental, labor and right to farm disputes. Such a protocol should include swift and strong support from Farm Bureau in any cases that could set a precedent for farmers statewide.

During the past year of 2023, "swift action" came from NJFB general counsel Lew Goldshore on multiple legal issues encountered by Farm Bureau members across the state. Several of them dealt with RTF interference or nuisance caused by actions of local municipalities and/or neighbors adjoining NJFB member farms. (See annual report to the delegates presented at the Business Session presented by attorney Goldshore.) However, the dominant issue requiring his attention is the proposed Soil Protection Standard of the SADC. Goldshore has provided legal opinions for the record of the SADC in defense of the farm property owners holding deeds of easement (2,900) that would be affected by this potential property rights infringement. Thus, the interests of many individuals were given full attention through the unified action provided by Farm Bureau in accord with this policy.

#### **FARM BUREAU POLITICAL POSITION** (1999)

Farm Bureau represents all the farmers and rural interests in New Jersey and represents their public policy interests. Farm Bureau should encourage individual farmers or groups of farmers to evaluate positions of candidates for elective office that affect their interests and to publicly express their endorsements, therefore.

Agricultural issues are non-partisan and benefit all citizens of the state. When the agriculture community seeks to fill appointments to boards and commissions, political parties should not be a factor in the nomination or subsequent appointment.

#### **PLANT-BASED AND CELL-BASED ALTERNATIVES** (2023)

The New Jersey Farm Bureau shall closely follow the plant-based and cell-based alternative markets by compiling an annual update of the sector. Farm Bureau shall continue to promote food items grown or raised on farms.

The Specialty Food Association (SFA) has predicted that plant-based alternatives will continue to be a top food and beverage trend in 2024. The plant-based alternative sector is now worth \$194 billion annually.