



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
HEALTH / AGRICULTURE BUILDING
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May 9, 2011

David J. Rosen
Legislative Budget and Finance Officer
Office of Legislative Services
State House Annex
PO Box 068
Trenton, NJ 08625-0068

Dear Mr. Rosen:

The Department of Agriculture is responding to the May 2, 2011 request from Chairman Louis Greenwald regarding follow-up questions from our testimony on April 28th. Should you or the Assemblyman have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my Office.

1. What is the economic impact to New Jersey crops from the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug?

Response: Although the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug has been in the state for a number of years without impacting the agricultural industry, it has recently been shown to cause significant economic damage to agricultural crops in this state as well as other states in the region.

In response to the sudden regional increase in crop damage caused by the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, the USDA has established a national workgroup to evaluate insecticide needs for the upcoming growing season. Representatives from the Department serve on the workgroup, along with Dr. George Hamilton, Chair of the Rutgers Department of Entomology, and Dean Polk of Rutgers Cooperative Extension Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program.

There are a number of fruit and vegetable crops susceptible to damage, and teams are evaluating currently labeled materials and crops where Section 18 requests to the U.S. Environmental Protection Administration may be needed.

In New Jersey, some of the major crops affected by this insect include apples, peaches, soybeans, sweet corn, tomatoes and peppers. Potential economic losses are difficult to predict. However, last year, organic growers in western Maryland and West Virginia reported 90- to 100-percent crop losses due to this insect.

2. What specific best practices and measures has the Department implemented to increase efficiency and effectiveness and reduce costs in its operations and services?

Response: The following represent examples of the types of best management practices referred to by Chairman Greenwald during the hearing and which have been employed by the Department:

Coordination of Mislabeling/Misbranding Enforcement with Division of Consumer Affairs – In June 2010, the Department announced a joint effort with the Division of Consumer Affairs to cooperate on enforcing laws against mislabeling or misbranding produce as being from New Jersey when it is not. NJDA inspects stores, farmers markets and other locations where these violations may be found. Consumer Affairs has sole authority to write citations and assess fines. In an effort to work cooperatively, Agriculture and Consumer Affairs have developed a form that agriculture inspectors could fill out. Inspectors are instructed to gather all relevant information and to take photos of violations. Those could then be submitted expeditiously to Consumer Affairs for action. Legislation would be required to provide inspectors with the authority to write citations and assess fines.

Pursuing More Opportunities for Farmers to Provide Food to Schools – New Jersey’s farmers grow an impressive array of healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables. With the implementation of the NJDA’s Model School Nutrition Policy in 2006-2007, schools were directed to replace sugary and high-fat foods with more nutritious offerings. This would provide New Jersey farmers an opportunity to sell more of their products into the schools, but for one fact – the height of New Jersey’s fresh-market season happens to occur during the summer months when school is not in session. To address this problem, the NJDA has secured a \$51,000 Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program grant to work with the Rutgers University Food Innovation Center to develop value-added processed food items that would be made from Jersey Fresh produce but could be held and made available once the school year begins.

Creating Wider, More Beneficial Markets for New Jersey’s Dairy Farmers – New Jersey’s dairy farmers have a hard time recouping their cost-of-production in this high-cost state and given the pricing structure set by the Federal Milk Marketing Order. Helping farmers develop specialty value-added products would help them become more viable. The Department has pursued this on several fronts. It has worked with the Department of Community Affairs to pursue the concept of a dairy processor at which milk from New Jersey farms would be processed into specialty products sold at higher prices than conventional fluid milk. The farmers would see this reflected in the price they are paid for their raw milk by the processor. Ideally, that same processor would also enable farmers to bottle a “Jersey Fresh” milk, which would capitalize on the high interest in consuming locally produced products. The Department and DCA also are meeting with farmers around the state to discuss pursuing other value-added products such as yogurts and cheeses that would bring farmers more for their product than selling it into the conventional fluid milk market.

Proactive Approach to Alternative Energy on Farms – New Jersey is striving to increase the use of alternative energy sources, both to increase the amount of our home-grown production of energy (thus reducing how much we import) and to address the environmental impacts of the wider use of fossil fuels. The joint effort of the NJDA, BPU, DEP, Division of Taxation and others have helped move forward the concept of farmers installing alternative-energy systems on their farms to reduce their own utility bills through net metering. This multi-agency work is resulting in Agricultural Management Practices guidelines for farmers to use so that they can confidently add alternative-energy systems without jeopardizing their Right to Farm protection under the law. Additionally, the Department reconstituted the multi-agency Biofuels/Bioenergy Working Group, in which various state agencies and Rutgers University’s EcoComplex team work to simplify the permitting and approval processes for those seeking to establish companies that create biofuels or other forms of bioenergy in New Jersey.

Integrated Pest Management – Through its work in the Alampi Beneficial Insect Laboratory, the Department aids farmers, nurserymen and others in avoiding the use of chemical pesticides where possible by replacing those chemicals with biological and other control methods (known as Integrated Pest Management). Beneficial insects are raised at the lab, where they are studied for effectiveness in controlling pests that are harmful to crops and other plant life. New Jersey farmers lose an estimated \$290 million annually through crop loss or damage caused by agricultural pests or by spending money to fight those pests. The work of the Alampi Insect Lab reduces that burden on farmers by using non-chemical controls to reduce the populations of insects that harm plants.

PIG Grant Information Availability – Updated information about the Planning Incentive Grants, which help communities plan for a future that includes agriculture and preserved farmland, is readily available to interested people on the Department’s website, making it easier and faster for municipal planners and others interested in the process to determine just what the latest status of the program is, including the funding status of a given county and the timing of approvals by the State Agriculture Development Committee.

Strengthening the Rural-to-Urban Connection – New Jersey’s unique advantage for agricultural operators is that its farms are surrounded by nearby major cities, both inside the state and in surrounding states, that provide a large close-in market of consumers. To capitalize on that characteristic, the Department works to create connections between the rural and urban/suburban areas of the state. One area where this is flourishing is in connecting rural farmers to food processors in the cities. Examples include connecting an Atlantic County eggplant farmer with a Camden food processor to create frozen eggplant parmesan entrée and the aforementioned effort to link dairy farmers with a specialty milk processor. This effort also includes the ever-growing list of urban community farmers markets, often one of the few places in a major city where residents have access to fresh fruits and produce. The Department is working toward expanding that link by proposing the “FreshMobile” concept, in which a mobile refrigerated mobile unit would travel into inner-city neighborhoods to improve residents’ access to fresh fruits and vegetables in-season and processed foods made from New Jersey agricultural products outside the fresh season.

Expanding Products Covered in the “Jersey Grown” Program – “Jersey Grown,” a spinoff of the “Jersey Fresh” branding and promotional program, promotes the green industry by highlighting plants, trees and other non-produce plant materials grown in the Garden State. In the past year, that list has increased to include not only household and garden plants, shrubs and trees, but also New Jersey-grown sunflower-seed for birds (not for human consumption) and the recently unveiled “Made With Jersey Grown Wood” products such as birdhouses that are made exclusively from trees certified to have been grown in New Jersey.

Food Safety Initiatives/Third-Party Audits – While Quality Grade and Inspection have long been a component of the “Jersey Fresh” branding program, lending a food-quality component in addition to the promotional benefits of the program, the Department has in recent years added additional food-safety training for farmers. With attention to food-safety under the federal Food Safety Modernization Act, it is more important than ever for farmers to be able to provide retail and wholesale customers with proof of the safe-handling practices. To date, the Department has worked with Rutgers University to educate approximately 3,000 New Jersey farmers in the basics of food safety on the farm and has prepared many of them to undergo a third-party audit in order to provide even greater assurance to their customers of their food-safety practices.

Food Safety at Farmers Markets – Some community farmers markets vendors desire to sell homemade pies, jams and other items. However, Chapter 24 of New Jersey’s Health Code establishes strict provisions as to where and how those foods can be prepared to be eligible to be sold in “regular

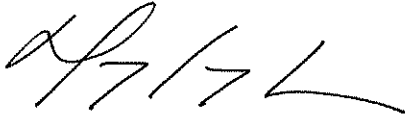
retail establishments,” which includes farmer markets. In order to both enable vendors to capture new markets by preparing and selling such foods in accordance with New Jersey law, and to protect the public from foodborne illnesses, the Department developed an easy-to-use brochure and chart, distributed to community farmers market managers and accessible on-line, that details the Chapter 24 requirements for preparing and selling such foods.

Paperless, Web-based Interaction with School Food Service Providers – The Department conceived, developed and operates the online SNEARS (School Nutrition Electronic Application and Reimbursement System) program, which includes Program Administration and Reimbursement, to conduct all interactions with school food service providers in a more efficient, timely and effective manner than in past practices using paperwork. SNEARS has evolved to be the major communication channel to School District sponsors.

3. What amount of savings have been realized from the implementation of the Governor’s transition team recommendations for the Department?

Response: The Department of Agriculture continues to review the recommendations of the Governor’s transition team and will implement when feasible. The requested information can be provided at that time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Fisher', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Douglas H. Fisher