

## **NJDA Address to the Assembly Budget Committee**

**Thursday, April 28, 2011.**

Good morning, Chairman Greenwald and members of the Committee. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Agriculture's budget with you today.

The Department's missions can be viewed as encompassing four major categories: Providing promotion of the state's agricultural products and industry; ensuring the plant and animal health necessary for a sound agricultural sector; preserving farmland and helping farmers conserve the natural resources that are so vital for their operations; and, in a responsibility that the NJDA has in common with only two other agriculture departments in the nation, ensuring nutritious, healthful school lunch and breakfast programs as well as community feeding programs.

The Garden State's agricultural landscape changes from sector to sector and even farm to farm within each sector – whether it is the fruit and vegetable operations concentrated in our southern farms, the array of horticultural operations dispersed throughout the state, the dairy farms of our northwestern and southwestern corners, the equine operations in the central and northeastern counties that are vital contributors to our state's economy, or the bustling aquaculture and fishing of our coastal areas. Each has its own challenges and each relies upon the Department for divergent resources.

Sometimes this wide diversity sparks debate about what really constitutes agriculture. In a crowded, urbanized state like New Jersey, the answer to that question isn't always easy. What we do know is that, with nearly 9 million people in our own state and a close-in market of millions more in many large, nearby cities, New Jersey needs every bit of agricultural production we can muster.

Each year, we know, the consuming public demands that our local our farmers and fishermen provide more for their needs. Such is the challenge to our state's agricultural operators – and to this Department. We meet that challenge by being a more-nimble, smarter, more efficiently managed workforce, one in which each employee is willing and able to tackle multiple tasks.

Our constant commitment to cross-training employees and working with partners in the agricultural industry and academia help stretch our state dollars beyond what they merely might be able to pay for in a less creative environment.

Due to the constrained budgets of recent years, we have accessed more federal resources to accomplish our mission. However, we are

also cognizant that the President and Congress now face the kinds of fiscal challenges we have faced here for the past several years. This is going to require us to be even more creative about using more electronic-based interaction with our constituents, like our Facebook page and web-site, our web-based payment systems for school food-service operators or real-time communications on social media for both our industry partners and our state's residents.

In the area of marketing, we have been successful, from the supermarket to the farmers market, with the "Jersey Fresh" brand and the newer related brands like "Jersey Grown" and "Jersey Seafood." Because we have been successful in those efforts, retailers of all kinds – from high-end supermarkets to community farmers markets – leverage our state funds through the marketing chain to promote the products that come from right here in the Garden State. When retailers spend their own money to put the "Jersey Fresh" or other brand logos in their

advertising circulars, that leverages the reduced promotional funds we have had in recent budgets into far more exposure to consumers than we as a Department can afford to do on our own.

Over this past year, we have assisted those who take the raw products from our farms and turn them into something more, something “value-added.” To date, there are dozens of products under the “Made With Jersey Fresh” label, including: canned tomato products and salsas, frozen vegetables, breaded eggplant entrees, and various types of mozzarella, colby and cheddars and even cheesecake.

We’ve also branched out in our “Jersey Grown” brand, which promotes plants, trees and other nursery-type stock grown in New Jersey. Under a partnership with the Audubon Society, we recently unveiled “Made With Jersey Grown Wood” birdhouses, which are certified made only with wood that comes from New Jersey trees. That adds to the rollout

we did last year of Jersey Grown sunflower seeds, which has spawned a new industry based around hundreds of acres of sunflowers swaying in the breeze in New Jersey.

Also, we've expanded those places where fresh New Jersey agricultural products are highlighted to reflect the demand for Jersey Fresh products beyond the supermarket, farmstand and farmers market. In the past year, we have partnered with our first "Jersey Fresh" hospital, the first "Jersey Fresh" restaurant chain, and the first "Jersey Fresh" wholesale club.

This ever-growing function, presence and working impact of the Department means we do more with less while expanding our responsibilities. The Department uses cross-trained employees to bridge work across Divisions in order to accomplish our goals in the following areas:

1. Surveillance and Regulatory: Inspecting plants and animals for the detection of diseases and the safety of the food source; third-party audits; review of food-distributions systems for compliance to regulations; inspection of fertilizer and feed; and licensing of milk and organic products.
2. Food Distribution: Commodity distribution; the state's anti-hunger initiatives; school lunch and breakfast programs, as well as summer camp and adult day care food distribution; and preparation for feeding people at emergency shelters in the case of man-made or natural disasters.
3. Marketing and Research: Branding agricultural products, such as "Jersey Fresh"; promoting our fruit, vegetable, dairy. Equine, seafood and other sectors; research into invasive pests and plant species, and controlling them with a minimum of chemicals.
4. Preservation and Conservation: Farmland preservation; stewardship of the land, soil and water that are vital to agricultural viability, as well as to maintaining the quality of life

for all residents. The high level of support for agriculture by New Jersey residents makes it clear they appreciate these efforts.

5. Outreach: Partnering with hundreds of commodity councils and trade organizations, such as the New Jersey Restaurant Association, New Jersey Food Council and New Jersey Farm Bureau; as well as Agricultural Education programs, including involvement in FFA, 4-H and farm-to-school initiatives;

Some of our other missions require very specialized knowledge and expertise. For example, we have been successfully working for several decades on ways to reduce the use of pesticides to address plant and crop pests. Our Alampi Beneficial Insect Lab is recognized nationally as a leader in rearing “good” insects that can reduce “bad” insect populations.

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, an invasive pest, was previously seen merely as a nuisance. It didn’t bite people, it wasn’t attacking

crops. All it really seemed to want was to come into our homes when it got cold outside.

But the explosion in the stink bug's population has resulted in it now becoming a crop pest as well as a nuisance to homeowners, as it searches out food sources of any kind. We are currently raising a colony of them at the Insect Lab so we can determine the most effective beneficial insects to reduce the stink bug population.

Our Division of Animal Health, working in conjunction with the Department of Health and Senior Services, is preparing for the impending opening of the new laboratory building in Ewing, this division will be more ably equipped than ever to ensure that diseases like avian influenza, brucellosis and tuberculosis don't get established in animal populations, giving them the opportunity to make the jump to humans.

In recent years, this division has been largely sustained by Cooperative Agreements with federal agencies who work with the states to conduct vigilant surveillance for these types of diseases. With the deep cuts coming in the federal budget, the division has concerns about how much federal partner support will be there. This will mean maximizing the services we provide at the new lab to expand our core functions.

The Department also takes very seriously its role in helping farmers be good stewards of the resources they depend upon for their livelihoods. The recent Animal Waste Rule has resulted in approximately 300 self-certified waste-management plans being developed to date. And the Department is leading a team of federal and state officials, university researchers and industry representatives in developing guidelines for the improvement of soil quality.

Of course, keeping our farmers working the land also means making sure the farmland itself remains available to do so. The Farmland Preservation Program just passed several noteworthy milestones. The program recently preserved its 2,000<sup>th</sup> farm, and we are very close to the threshold of 200,000 acres preserved throughout the state.

With the recent decision by Governor Christie to release the \$146 million in farmland preservation monies approved by the voters in 2009, farmland preservation will move forward through the next 12 to 18 months toward reaching the long-term goals for maintaining an agricultural landscape in the Garden State.

Our growing emphasis on what we like to call the “rural-to-urban connection” has resulted in a partnership with the Department of Community Affairs and the Economic Development Authority to connect rural farmers with urban food processors or opportunities to

create new food-processing facilities. That benefits both the farmer, who gains a new close-in market for his products, and the urban area where food-processing jobs will be created.

From the beginning of our state's existence, agriculture has been a driving force in our economy. It also has been a major reason that, even as we became the most densely populated state in the nation, we continued to enjoy an outstanding quality of life when we preserve farms or just give farmers the tools to continue being successful businesses. By doing that, we help municipalities avoid the costs of additional schools, public services and safety operations. We've cited the statistic often, but it bears repeating. Farmland requires about 36 cents in municipal services for every dollar in taxes it contributes, while residential development costs about \$1.16 for every dollar paid in property taxes.

Whether it is through this kind of contribution to keeping property taxes in check, providing a multitude of inputs to the state's economy, or simply producing the kinds of healthful, nutritious and valuable products our residents desire, it's clear the state dollars spent on ensuring a strong, viable agriculture in New Jersey get results. We are among the Top-10 agricultural states in the production of blueberries, cranberries, spinach, bell peppers, peaches and more

And when we can leverage state dollars through federal matching funds, private-sector expenditures and just plain smart and thrifty methods, New Jersey residents get a lot of "bang for the buck" from the Department of Agriculture.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time, and I thank you again for this chance to discuss our budget.

