

REASONS TO KEEP THE N.J. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (NJDA)

- importance of the industry and open farmland to the state demands that it have its own state agency and cabinet member. There are 1.01 million acres of farmland in the state, which constitutes 50% of the remaining undeveloped lands (open space) and 20% of the state's total land base.
- agriculture generates millions of dollars in tax receipts from sales tax on nursery products, horse industry impacts and payroll taxes from the \$200 million worth of hired labor industry-wide. Cash receipts from farm commodities produced was \$924 million in 2006, which ultimately generates a multi-billion dollar impact to the state's economy. Agriculture pulls its own weight; it in no way is a cause of the state's budget deficit problem.
- the state has invested nearly \$1.1 billion on 163,700 acres to retire development rights on farmland since 1982, some 20% of the actively-devoted farmland. Closing the NJDA removes the natural leadership for this significant state investment in open space.
- closing the NJDA saves the state budget very little money, since most of its vital services will need to be transferred to other state agencies (during the July, 2006 shutdown of state government, some 52% of the NJDA employees were deemed "essential" and were told to report to work; the average for other state agencies is 28%). In fact, savings could be as little as \$341,000 (Div. of Administration costs per year), excluding the possibility of unforeseen costs incurred when the transfers of these "essential" offices are accomplished. From a cost/benefit basis, closing the NJDA makes no sense.
- losing the NJDA undermines the industry and the production of local fresh produce, which is so counterproductive in these days of shipping food across the country and the corresponding food safety and "carbon footprint" concerns. (Tractor trailer shipping costs from Calif.-NJ is now \$6,200 per trip!). The NJDA Markets Division supports the very popular community tailgate markets. Food trends in supermarkets now emphasize "buy local."
- closing the NJDA will be viewed by many farmers as demoralizing and "the last straw" for those who have already been skeptical about the erosion of state support for farming in recent years. A Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. poll last year showed 63% of statewide respondents associated farming with the Garden State Moniker; an earlier poll in 2004 found that 69% said it was "very important" to having farming in New Jersey. What would they think of eliminating the NJDA?

- the farming industry strongly opposes any change or loss of the Agriculture Secretary position. This position is more than a century old! The Secretary holds a position on numerous national boards, lending prestige and a voice for New Jersey agriculture. Furthermore, the Agriculture Secretary chairs several state agencies and is generally regarded as the highest profile individual for agriculture in the state.
- as the general economy drifts further into recession, consumers are also fearing spikes in the food price inflation. Eliminating the NJDA removes a longstanding advocate for locally-grown, reasonably-priced food commodities at a most inopportune time.
- with its urban core and sprawling suburban communities, many New Jersey residents have little understanding of the basics in agriculture and its contribution to the quality of life. The NJDA has a series of experienced staffers who are readily accessible to the public and are able to easily explain this specialized industry. In many respects, the Department is a model for state agency responsiveness to the average resident that sustains itself on a modest budget.
- the NJDA is home to a long list of important services to agriculture and the general public: food safety; livestock and poultry disease monitoring; commodity promotion (Jersey Fresh); plant pest control (gypsy moth, Asian longhorn beetle); soil conservation and environmental programs; pet food and livestock feed testing; emergency food distribution (food banks, soup kitchens); seed and fertilizer testing; national leader in school nutrition (637,000 school lunch participants) farmland preservation and agriculture advocacy; liaison with FDA and federal grant funding from USDA; cooperation with academic and research institutions (Rutgers, Cornell, etc.).

All done by a coordinated team of 245 employees!

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