

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Stabilizing and fostering an active and productive agricultural industry is critical to retaining viable farms. Facilitating investments in agricultural infrastructure supports, maintains and expands the business of farming. At the same time, identifying and facilitating the creation of new markets helps farmers access an ever-changing marketplace.

Overview

Just as important as preserving the state's farmland is preserving the state's farmers and the agricultural industry that sustains them.

New Jersey's diverse food and agriculture complex is valued at approximately \$63 billion and benefits not only the state's economy, but also all New Jerseyans who enjoy locally grown food and farm products and privately maintained open space in their community. From fruits and vegetables, nursery stock and aquacultured shellfish to corn, grain, field crops and livestock – New Jersey is far from a one-crop state.

Helping the industry to grow and expand is essential to maintaining the various working landscapes of agriculture. A strong and vibrant agricultural industry will be in a position to resist development pressure and help New Jersey contain sprawl and achieve its smart growth goals.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan recognizes agriculture as a significant contributor to the state's economy and supports the industry's future economic growth in ways that promote the continuation of agricultural land use. Several of the agricultural policies in the plan address economic development specifically.

However, most municipalities and counties do not consider agriculture when they plan for economic development activities in their region. Although farmland preservation efforts have increased significantly throughout the state, protecting farmland from development alone does not guarantee that the land will be actively and viably farmed. Formulating strategies that address farming as an economic sector supports farmland preservation efforts and strengthens the business of farming.

The geographical data contained in the Strategic Targeting Project will be a valuable tool to help municipalities and counties as well as the state identify key areas to locate agricultural industries and support businesses, based on the agricultural production of the region. Identifying the state's key agricultural regions will help focus agricultural retention efforts and enable the implementation of the objectives outlined throughout this Agriculture Smart Growth Plan.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture's approach to smart growth planning connects farmland preservation efforts with economic development strategies and marketing opportunities for today's farmers.

New Jersey's proximity to large, affluent markets has always been an advantage

Expanding the Marketplace

As a result of efforts by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to establish 10 new market opportunities

- New Jersey schools received 3,300 cases of New Jersey peaches in 2003 to help alleviate a late-season oversupply of peaches.
- The Borgata Hotel and Casino contracted with a Buena farmer to supply custom-ordered produce for its 11 restaurants – the first partnership of this type between a casino and New Jersey farmer.
- Ready Pac – a major processor of salad blends and fresh-cut produce – increased its purchases of lettuce and other greens from New Jersey farmers by 20 percent?
- The inaugural Jersey Bred Festival drew more than 9,000 to Monmouth Park for the first-ever full card of races for New Jersey-bred thoroughbreds.
- Ten new community farmers markets opened for the first time, bringing the number of farmers markets operating statewide to a record 60.

for the state's food and agriculture industry. In addition, the state's increasing immigrant population creates a new demand for agricultural products. As consumer demands change, so too must the agricultural industry. Identifying these new markets and providing the products consumers demand is an ongoing effort in the ever-changing agricultural industry.

In January 2003, the delegates of the 88th State Agricultural Convention endorsed economic development strategies for nine key sectors of New Jersey's food and agriculture industry. These strategies address horticulture, produce, dairy, aquaculture, field crops, livestock, organic farming, equine and wine production. These

strategies are currently being implemented.

The Department recognizes that a healthy agricultural industry is largely dependent on healthy plants and animals. The Department administers numerous programs to ensure the health of livestock and poultry and plant stock. These programs help to safeguard animal and human health and ensure pest-free plants in the marketplace.

At the same time, the Department realizes that promoting the wide variety of agricultural products the Garden State offers is critical to sustaining the industry. The Department's Jersey Fresh promotion program is a long-standing economic development tool. This nationally recognized marketing and grading program promotes the

consumption of Jersey produced agricultural products and ensures consumers a high-quality product. For nearly 20 years, the Jersey Fresh program has been successful at strengthening consumer awareness of the traditional New Jersey-grown fruits and vegetables. The Department will build on the success of this program and broaden the umbrella of products that are identified as Jersey produced. In addition, strategies for supporting value-added products will be developed to increase farmer participation in the market chain and allow for additional income beyond the sale of fresh-market, New Jersey-grown commodities. Value-added agriculture refers to taking raw agricultural products and refining them in some way to add further value to them, for example, through processing or packaging. New markets typically start out small, but have the potential to grow into highly profitable sectors as agriculture continues to evolve to meet the demands of a changing marketplace.

Another way to ensure a strong food and agriculture industry statewide is for state agencies, counties and municipalities to commit to ensuring regulations and programs are flexible and supportive of the farming community. It is critical that other state agencies, especially the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Labor and the New Jersey Commerce Commission, consider the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan when making important decisions regarding existing and proposed infrastructure, developing and amending regulations and programs, and protecting environmental and historic resources. It is especially critical for the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with the Department of Environmental Protection to craft regulations that provide flexibility for agricultural operations, while protecting the environment. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is committed to working with these state agencies to promote economic development activities and other improvements that will support and grow New Jersey's agricultural industry.

Objectives & Strategies

- Develop new growth opportunities to help agriculture meet the needs of a changing marketplace.
 - Identify new emerging trends in agricultural markets and develop 10 new markets per year.
 - Work cooperatively with state agencies to facilitate and promote infrastructure and market opportunities like an ethanol plant, food-processing facilities and farm markets.
 - Implement the economic development strategies endorsed by the State Agricultural Convention as part of the Department's industry-building efforts including: broadening the Jersey Fresh promotion effort to include organic, horticulture, aquaculture and other New Jersey-grown products; increasing consumer awareness of the benefits of buying locally produced agricultural products, and identifying new markets for New Jersey products and potential venture funding mechanisms for agribusiness entrepreneurs.
 - Work with Rutgers University's Cook College to continue demographic research into the ethnically diverse marketplace of the Northeast corridor and develop new products to meet the needs of the marketplace, including those of residents in urban centers.
 - Collaborate with the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station's food innovation center and Rutgers Cooperative Extension to launch proactive and innovative programs and activities that address new opportunities and technology and the needs of the agricultural and food industries.

- Continue to improve the nutrition of New Jersey’s citizens through programs such as Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), and the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids

Q. What is it?
A. A statewide initiative to combat childhood obesity and improve academic performance by promoting better nutrition and physical activity in schools.

Q. What agencies are involved?
A. The departments of Agriculture, Education and Health and Senior Services.

Q. What’s the Department of Agriculture’s role?
A. To develop a model school nutrition policy that sets standards for fat and sugar content, provide training on incorporating more fruits and vegetables into the school meal program, and work with Rutgers University to implement a Farm to School program.

- Explore funding options to advance the development and expansion of agricultural facilities and infrastructure systems.
- Use food mapping – a tool to identify gaps in the food distribution system – to identify new markets for New Jersey’s farmers and educate consumers about the source of their food.

■ Municipalities and counties with significant agricultural resources should incorporate agriculture into their economic development plans.

- Include agricultural representation in local and regional business organizations and economic development agencies.
- Integrate agriculture into traditional business support systems.
- Engage local Chambers of Commerce and associated organizations to develop a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that links growers with local buyers and residents.
- Work with the Office of State Tourism to promote agri-tourism and eco-tourism activities to support the farm economy by allowing farmers to benefit from additional sources of income.
- Coordinate historic preservation, open space and recreation efforts with agricultural preservation/retention efforts.
- Create economic development incentives and include flexible land use regulations to support the expansion of food and farm-related businesses.

- Use the Strategic Targeting Project priority areas to identify locations for agricultural support businesses.

In order for agriculture to be successful in New Jersey, it must be economically viable. Looking ahead for new and emerging markets, as well as alternative uses for products already grown in the state, is just as important as preserving farmland. The diversity of New Jersey's agricultural products, coupled with the state's close proximity to major markets, creates a foundation for continued success for New Jersey's third largest industry. Key to this success will be the commitment from municipalities, counties and other state agencies to incorporating agriculture into their economic development efforts.