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New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

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Annual Assessment of the Needs of Production Agriculture in New Jersey
with input from New Jersey Farm Bureau and
the County Boards of Agriculture of New Jersey

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Historically, the efficiencies that have been achieved in production agriculture during the twentieth century have been the result of publicly supported agricultural research carried out by the nation's land grant universities and the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service (USDA ARS). During the past several years, dollars for publicly-supported agricultural research have been reduced, programs have been cut back, retiring personnel have not been replaced and the agricultural community is feeling the effects in decreased research and extension.

While state and federal budget constraints are acknowledged, however, there is a growing sentiment among the agriculture community that the land grant university at the New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station (NJAES) has also shifted its focus and limited resources away from programs that support the agriculture industry.

An example of this shifting focus is perhaps most evident in personnel decisions that have been made over the past several years. Some of the industry's most relied upon agricultural agents and specialists have retired. Despite the agriculture industry's efforts, those positions have either remained vacant or program associates/program coordinators (with lesser degree requirements) have been hired in the place of tenure track faculty. Further, in what many see as a blatant example of a movement away from its agricultural mission, the NJAES hired five environmental county agents whose work does not relate to production agriculture at a time when the agriculture community was being told that the aforementioned agents and specialists could not be replaced. The impacts of these hiring decisions are evident as the agriculture community works with the remaining agricultural agents who are facing additional pressures to manage research responsibilities that were once in the wheelhouse of specialists.

The agriculture community is also concerned with the NJAES budget priorities as they are focused less on programs that benefit production agriculture. One example of this is the increased amount of time that some specialists are spending teaching rather than doing agricultural research and extension, even though those positions receive funding from the NJAES budget.

It is because of these concerns that the agriculture community has set out to identify current key research and extension needs for the industry to maintain and increase our ability to feed our nation and the growing population of the world. It has been the role of publicly supported agricultural research to improve the quality and efficiencies in production agriculture, which today allows one farmer to feed over 100 people. It is this efficiency that correlates with less than 10% of an average person's income being spent on food. As we look to

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and U.S. Department of Agriculture. The New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.

the future, it is the increase in production efficiency which will allow our farmers to produce enough food to feed a growing population. To meet this demand for increased agricultural production efficiency, we must have the research that the land grant universities and the USDA Agricultural Research Service provide. The private sector alone cannot provide the basic research required.

A committee of farmers representing different commodity groups was selected by County Boards of Agriculture throughout the state to determine the needs of production agriculture with respect to agricultural research and extension through Rutgers University, our land grant university, and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. This effort to examine each commodity's needs for support from specialists and agricultural agents has been a collaboration of the County Boards of Agriculture, the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, the Board of Managers and the New Jersey Farm Bureau. These needs stated below will be assessed and reviewed on an annual basis by the aforementioned parties.

Overall Findings

The Committee holds a steadfast position that in order to best serve the agriculture industry, the university and the NJAES must maintain a team of both specialists and agents. Specialists are needed to do the applied research and to assist agents with problem solving when issues arise. Agents are necessary to fulfill their role as communicators to the agriculture community.

The Committee recommends that the hiring process be more inclusive of the agriculture community in order to address the needs of the industry. The NJAES should better utilize its Board of Managers to receive advice and approval on hiring priorities, the interview process and hiring decisions.

Needs for Researchers and Specialists

All Commodities:
Across all commodity groups, the Committee identified the following needs:

- **Fertility Specialist**: To determine adequate fertility needs for optimum plant growth without producing excess nutrient loads in conventional and organic production and in using soilless media. There is also a need for research on the use of time release fertilizers to provide adequate nutrition for optimum plant growth in most crops.
- **Mechanization Specialist**: To benefit all sectors of the agricultural industry in New Jersey. There is a need for an agricultural engineer to work on mechanization and labor saving devices and to evaluate equipment that may be available in Europe or other parts of the world to determine the suitability of this equipment for New Jersey agriculture. Labor is becoming more of an issue all the time. Mechanization is critical to keeping NJ agriculture viable when labor shortages occur.
- **Plant Pathologists, Entomologists, Weed Scientists**: Every commodity needs to have researchers and specialists to work on diseases, insects and weeds that threaten our crops. The Committee strongly recommends that plant pathologists, entomologists and weed scientists that retire be replaced as soon as possible with PhD level candidates.

- **Irrigation Management Specialist**: The Committee identified a need for an irrigation management specialist that could work with all commodity groups as well as work on water allocation issues.
- **Marketing Specialist**: Research and education are necessary for all facets of marketing including; direct marketing, retail marketing and agritourism. A marketing specialist would assist all commodities.

Nursery:

- **Nursery Management Specialist**: The Committee found the University and NJAES to have a very inadequate staff to provide research and extension for the highest value agricultural commodity group in the state. A Nursery Management Specialist should be a priority.
- **Entomologist**: Research is needed to study insect pests of ornamental plants
- **Plant Pathologist**: Research to study diseases of ornamental plants commonly found in nurseries are also needed.

Floriculture:

- **Floriculture specialist**: The current specialist in this position at the University is nearing retirement age. The Committee recommends this position be filled with another floriculture specialist when this retirement occurs.

Sod:

- The Committee found that sod was being adequately served. There is sufficient funding coming from outside the University and NJAES to adequately staff a research and extension program for sod.

Vegetables:

- The Committee found support for the vegetable industry to be profoundly lacking with regard to a vegetable horticultural researcher or specialist for the state's second highest income generating agricultural industry.
- **Vegetable Horticulturist**: A specialist is needed to do research on cultural practices, variety evaluation, etc. The horticulturist at the University left to take a position in NY approximately 15 years ago and has not been replaced. The horticulturist at RAREC retired approximately 10 years ago and has not been replaced. Dr. Mel Henninger has just retired. There is no indication that Dr. Henninger's position will be filled.
- **Vegetable Entomologist**: This position is vacant due to the retirement of the vegetable entomologist at RAREC. This position needs to be filled at the PhD level. This position must not be filled with a program associate working under the tree fruit entomologist.

Cranberry and Blueberry:

- **Physiologist**: The cranberry industry, in particular, needs a Physiologist to research the physiological effects of increasing temperature on cranberry production. A physiologist could also work on physiological problems of blueberries.

Livestock:

- **Nutrient Management Specialist**: A specialist is needed to do research on nutrient management. In particular, the dairy industry is in need of a specialist to do research in the area of nutrient management and milk quality.

Equine:

- The Committee identified a need for more services for the equine industry as a whole and in particular in southern New Jersey. There are great facilities that service the northern part of the state, however, services are lacking in the southern region. Although not necessarily a specialist need, the Committee found that the equine industry needs more outreach and education in the area of manure management and its impacts on the environment.
- **Nutrient Management Specialist – Equine**: Horse hay and pasture are different from that required by dairy animals and this is a matter of concern to the equine industry.

Apiary:

- **Honey Bee Specialist**: The recent hire of a pollinator specialist to do research on wild bees does not meet the needs of the agriculture industry for a honey bee specialist.

Aquaculture:

- **Aquaculture Specialist**: The Committee identified two specific needs for aquaculture: research on how to overwinter small clams and the mechanization of oyster culture. It should be noted that there is currently someone working in these areas on a temporary, grant funded basis. The committee feels this position should be funded on a permanent basis.

Needs for Extension Agents

The Director of Extension, Dr. Larry Katz, has stated that NJAES is considering replacing some agricultural agents with program coordinators or program associates as a possible cost- cutting measure. The Committee considered the pros and cons of tenure track faculty (agents) versus non tenure track staff (program coordinators or program associates). The tenured agent faculty has provided a very stable, professional extension program to production agriculture throughout the state. When comparing New Jersey's tenured agent faculty to agent staff in other states without tenure, the Committee found that the tenured faculty tends to stay in their positions for a longer period of time and have a higher degree of technical expertise. The agricultural community values this expertise and the ability to build trusted relationships with its agriculture agents. The only downside the Committee found is the occasional agent that may not perform up to the level required, but the Committee did not feel this weakness warranted the loss in stability and expertise found with the current tenure system.

It is the Committee's understanding that of the 25 agricultural agents (not including the five environmental county agents) there are 16 agricultural agents that are either already eligible or who will be eligible within 5 years for retirement. This statistic is staggering when it is looked at with the possibility that these positions may not be filled by the NJAES, especially given the last eight agricultural agents to retire have not been replaced. The Committee strongly urges NJAES to replace retiring agents with tenure track agent faculty as quickly as possible and at the same level of technical expertise now required (Master's degree or higher).

Most pressing is the need to hire an agent with expertise in tree fruit to replace the retiring Jerry Frecon in Gloucester County and an agent with expertise in nursery to replace the recently retired Rich Obal in Monmouth County. However, concerns were also expressed that it must be a priority to keep agriculture agents in both the north and south regions of the state with expertise in tree fruit, vegetables, small fruit, nursery, livestock, field crops and marketing. In order to maintain the continuity of the aquaculture program in South Jersey, a plan must be put forth in order to ensure the replacement the Marine Agent stationed in Ocean County upon his retirement. The Committee also found a need for an agent with expertise in the area of organic production. Please note that this does not mean there needs to be an agent dedicated solely to organic agriculture, but the Committee feels this is a growing field that is currently underserved by the NJAES.

Conclusion

The value of the work provided by the NJAES agricultural agents and specialists in areas that impact agriculture producer needs cannot be overstated. The agricultural community's appreciation for the work that comes out of its land grant university is great. Although we understand the strict budgetary constraints facing the NJAES, there is a vital need to continue and improve upon programs that will allow the agricultural industry to grow efficiently and better meet the needs of New Jersey and beyond. The Committee, on behalf of the agricultural industry in New Jersey, urges Rutgers University and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station to increase the involvement of the industry it serves in hiring priorities and decisions. Going forward, top priorities must include the hiring of a horticulturist and entomologist for vegetable crops, and a nursery management specialist, plant pathologist and entomologist for ornamental crops to meet the needs of the two highest income-generating commodities in the state. It must also be a priority to hire a replacement for the retiring agricultural extension agent in Gloucester County working with tree fruit and the retired agricultural agent in Monmouth County working with nursery. The other needs outlined in this report should be accomplished within the next three years. The agricultural community in New Jersey stands ready to support NJAES requests for public funding to meet these needs.

Footnote

There is an existing structure in place to identify the needs of the production agriculture community at the NJAES. This is accomplished through the Board of Managers with support from the county boards of agriculture, stakeholder meetings, and other agricultural organizations. The utilization of this structure by the NJAES is imperative to the success of production agriculture in NJ.

Signed and Dated:

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Lou Makrancy, President