



## BACKGROUND

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### **THE GARDEN STATE.....FOR GOOD REASON Farming in New Jersey Since the Lenni Lanapes**

Why is New Jersey nicknamed “The Garden State?” How much of its 4.75 million acres is devoted to farmland? How many farms are there in this little, densely populated state, that packs approximately 1,000 people into a square mile, while the national average is 27?

If you can answer these questions, then you know New Jersey has agricultural boasting rights. (In case you don't know the answers: 805,682 acres -- approximately 17% -- is farmland and there are 9,924 farms, averaging 81 acres per farm. As to the name, "Garden State," Abraham Browning of Camden is credited with coining it during the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, calling New Jersey the "Garden State, like an immense barrel, filled with good things to eat and open at both ends, with Pennsylvanians grabbing from one end and the New Yorkers from the other"). New Jersey ranks second in the nation in blueberry production, third in cranberries and peppers and fourth in peaches. Its largest crop is nursery/greenhouse, with equine its second – New Jersey has more horses than Kentucky.

New Jersey farms provide residents with field-fresh fruits and vegetables from June through October. Farm stands and farmers' markets are increasingly popular and 87% of respondents to a recent survey said they would like to buy locally grown produce, given a choice. The state Department of Agriculture's campaign for “Jersey Fresh” is clearly having results, with many restaurants now listing farms that supply their menu items.

#### **The Beginnings of New Jersey Farming**

When the Dutch landed on the western banks of the Hudson River, in the 1600's, they found native Americans using sophisticated farming techniques to grow crops they had never before seen. The Lenni Lanape knew which of the varied soil types were well suited to what crops. Corn was the mainstay, planted much as it is today, and fertilized with dead fish; but settlers also found cultivated beans, pumpkins and squash. Growing wild were cranberries, blueberries, wild onions, strawberries, grapes, asparagus; and some items that have passed out of the common vernacular – katniss root, hopniss, taw-ho – probably for good reason.

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The Dutch established plantations along the Hudson, while Swedish settlers did the same in the southern region, along the Delaware River. The life of farmers had never been easy, but this new world showed promise of good harvests. New Jersey's climate was good, the soils generally better than those in Europe and when more land was needed, there were forests to cut providing abundant wood for building and leaving rich land for more cultivation.

Settlement of the state continued to follow patterns established by the Dutch – small hamlets amidst vast rural areas, rather than the more usual pattern of urban centers with land emanating outward and becoming increasingly rural. New York on one end and Philadelphia on the other were all the urban centers these early settlers needed, which could be one reason that to this day, New Jersey lacks major cities.

By 1625, almost 150,000 sheep were recorded in New Jersey, supplying meat and wool to New York and Philadelphia. The same year, horses were recorded in New Jersey, with horse breeding an important industry – which continues today, with equine being the state's second highest agricultural revenue earner, after greenhouse/nursery, producing \$117,000,000, according to the 2002 Department of Agriculture census. The introduction of horses was quickly followed by large quantities of hogs, cattle, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys pigeons and guinea fowl. Historic documents allege that Swedish farmers, following their native customs, kept the chickens in their homes, serving as morning wake-up calls for starting the chores.

In 1685, according to chronicler of the times, George Scott, plantation acreage between "Shrewsbury" and "Berghen" totaled about 280,000 acres, with each plantation encompassing 30,000 to 60,000 acres. By 1749 New Jersey was noted for apples and peaches, described as being "so scarce in Europe that they were reserved for the very rich, but in New Jersey, so abundant that those falling to the ground were just left there."

The New Jersey Museum of Agriculture traces the agricultural history of the Garden State from pre-colonial times to the present, with exhibits ranging from old fashioned farmhouse utensils to futuristic technology that promises to revolutionize the industry of farming, and fascinating historic artifacts in between. Visitors discover that New Jersey farm practices in the 1700s entailed using up the land on one small tract, abandoning it and moving to another. These practices were so harshly criticized by a Swedish visitor that farmers were embarrassed into changing their ways. Displays show farm implements invented by New Jerseyans: in 1797, Charles Newbold invented and patented a cast-iron plow to replace primitive wooden tools, but farmers rejected it, claiming iron poisoned soil, stimulated weeds and prevented seeds from germinating. In 1828, John Deats patented a plow that vastly improved techniques of clearing weeds and actually became a standard piece of farm equipment.

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### **The Rise and Decline of New Jersey Farm Populations and Farmland**

The 1943 New Jersey Department of Agriculture *Historical Facts and Figures, Circular #339* presents fascinating data that is useful in tracing the development of farming in the state, for example:

In 1790, the census recorded only a rural population totaling 184,139. The 1810 census recorded a total population of 245,562, with 239,583 (97%) rural and 5,979 (2%) urban. The 1880 census showed a first-time shift, of 1,131,116 total population; 515,805 (45%) rural and 615,311 (54%) urban.

By 1940, the shift was monumental, with 4,160,165 total population; 765,392 (18%) rural and 3,394,773 (82%) urban. The 2000 national population census didn't even break out rural and urban populations in its total count of 8,414,350.

As would be expected, farmland acreage too has been in decline since those early census reports. In 1880, out of 4.75 million acres within the state, the farm acreage was 2,929,773 acres – nearly 2/3 of the total. Farm acreage peaked in 1870 at 2,989,511, and began a decline that by 2000 left 805,682 acres devoted to agriculture. New Jersey farmers took the declines in stride, merely resolving to farm better and bigger on less land. They changed crop focus from corn and grains, which required large tracts and were better suited to the western plains, to vegetables, fruit, berries. They turned their animal husbandry from beef cattle to dairy cattle, horses and goats. The 2002 agricultural census shows an actual increase in horses and goats from its 1997 census, with equine increasing to 3,047 from 2,689 and goats nearly doubling to 8,312 from 6,116. And, for the first time, that 2002 census records “floriculture crops” totaling 17,280,688 and New Jersey's top crop in terms of cash receipts, worth \$367,898,000.

### **Birth of the New Jersey Farm Bureau**

World War I took a big toll on the farm community in New Jersey, with so many farmers leaving to fight. When they returned, they found fragmented communities of individual holdings functioning independently and often at odds with each other. Clearly, organization was called for and thus was born the *New Jersey Council of County Boards of Agriculture* – a mouthful of a name, which soon evolved into the *New Jersey Farm Bureau*, reflecting the nomenclature of the newly formed American Farm Bureau Federation. With its headquarters in Trenton, near the state seat of government, the newly formed bureau was obviously setting itself up to remind legislators that the state's farmers needed support.

The first Farm Bureau president was Harry Taylor, a dairy farmer in Freehold, Monmouth County. He constantly championed the idea that through unity of organization, there is strength. His vision set the tone that continues today, under the presidency of Richard Nieuwenhuis, owner-operator of Boslands Flower Shop and Greenhouses in Wayne, Bergen County.

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World War II brought new challenges to New Jersey farming. Industrialization had taken firm hold on all areas of life and national state laws were enacted that addressed urban working conditions but were also applied to farm communities. Workers' unions were established and child labor laws passed. Farming no longer could be a private family venture; it now was a very public enterprise, with regulations and reviews of every area from working conditions to how fields were cultivated, fertilized, harvested and taken to market.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a member organization of more than 19,000 farmers and farm-related entities within the Garden State. It is the only organization solely dedicated to representing the grass- roots interests and directives of its members in educating all levels of government and the public on the farm community's policies and positions. The Farm Bureau also takes a lead in seeking out initiatives, activities and ventures to enhance the profitability of producer members and the ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason*.

The Farm Bureau is a hands-on organization of farmers working for farmers. Its goals continue to be: *improving net farm income and improving the quality of life for farmers*. It keeps vital New Jersey's nickname – *The Garden State for Good Reason!*

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