

SECTION VI. Economic Development

A. Consistency with NJ Department of Agriculture Economic Strategies and Other Regional Plans/Initiatives

The State of New Jersey offers farmers a number of support services and programs ranging from technical advice to farm loans. One of these services is the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) Smart Growth Toolkit, which provides information to support municipal governments, businesses, non-profit groups, and local citizens in their efforts to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the 2006 NJDA Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey. The Tool Kit embraces the five components that have been identified by the NJDA as critical for the future of farming: Farmland Preservation, Agricultural Land Use Planning, Economic Development, Natural Resource Conservation, and Agricultural Industry Sustainability.

As part of this emphasis on the business of agriculture, NJDA issued its 2011 Economic Development Strategies, which identify and propose methods to expand and enhance various subsets of the agriculture industry in New Jersey, including produce, horticulture, dairy, livestock and poultry, field crops, organic, equine, wine, and agri-tourism. The NJDA observes that "local access to large affluent markets has long been an advantage for the marketing of (those) products. While our markets are still there, competition has become tougher, New Jersey's produce industry must continually work to rediscover its competitive advantages, improving access to nearby markets and strengthening consumer loyalty."

As Millstone Township farmers continue to look for ways to reinvent themselves and their products, and to explore new markets and new methods for promoting their businesses, it is important that the Township continues to develop new ways to help farmers increase their profitability and coordinate with federal, state and county agencies and other organizations, both in the public and private sector to find solutions. These may include workshops, newsletters and other opportunities for farmers to continue to educate themselves about:

- Better ways to manage their farm as a business;
- Trends in agriculture;
- Ways to diversify, add value and maximize profitability;
- Technical advice and assistance with choosing and marketing their products; and
- Advances in technology that may help them farm more efficiently and productively,

As the produce sector continues to grow in Millstone Township and with the increased interest by consumers in organic produce and animal products, Millstone Township farmers may be encouraged to expand or diversify into this sector. As a result, Millstone Township may look to:

- Improve marketing of organic and natural produce;
- Explore various additional markets, including local restaurants and grocery markets and cooperative farm stands at municipal and county events;
- Explore the feasibility of establishing licensed food preparation facilities and meat processors in the County to facilitate growth of value-added products in this sector;
- Promote agri-tourism for organic and natural farm stands;
- Promote the Jersey Organic brand when established by the NJDA;

- Educate growers about organic and natural regulatory and certification requirements and about the availability of federal funds to help offset certification costs; and,
- Explore ways to support organic food growing and processing, such as assisting growers, with the help of the NJDA and the Rutgers Extension, to identify products that can benefit as organic (high value/high demand products)

Nursery, Greenhouses, Floriculture and Sod

Nursery, greenhouses, floriculture and sod are important agricultural commodities in Monmouth County. This agricultural sector accounted for total sales of \$53.3 million, or 69 percent of total sales in the County. One likely and major reason this sector of the crop industry has become so important is due to the continued nonagricultural population growth in the County and region, providing a ready market for these products. The County can continue to strengthen and expand this sector of the agriculture economy as opportunities arise. Some strategies to follow are:

- Ensure plant health
 - Continue inspections for harmful pests and disease and seeking ways to increase use of new methods of pest control
 - Inspect and certify disease-free nurseries and conduct seed certification to ensure high quality turf grass seed for sod growers
 - Encourage the NJ Agricultural Experiment Station to continue its research in identifying new strategies of agricultural products resistant to pests, diseases and new plant introductions
- Increase consumer awareness
 - Strengthen the Jersey Fresh and Grown in Monmouth brands to enable the industry to benefit from a common trademark identifying locally produced horticultural products
- Improve State and Public contract requirements
 - Continue to work with government agencies such as the National Resource Conservation Services, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Environmental Protection to use New Jersey produced products whenever possible.

Field Crops

Soybean production is a key crop for Millstone Township. In 1983, roughly half of the field crop acreage (2,342 acres) were devoted to soybean production. However, acreage and production have been slowing. In 2017, soybean production covered 882 acres or roughly 39 percent of the total land area for field crops. Soybeans remain the Township's most common field crop.

Hay accounts for a small but significant portion of the County's agriculture sales. In 2017, approximately 8,404 tons of hay (all types) were produced, compared to 12,640 in 1982. Much of the hay is grown as feed on livestock farms, never making it to market, and is therefore not included in census sales figures. To continue and expand its strong marketplace in the County economy, some strategies Monmouth County could follow are:

- Explore new markets, and also ways to expand existing markets; and,
- Support the livestock industry which uses hay as feed

Corn for grain has historically been the dominant field crop in Monmouth County. In 2012, 2,263 acres of agricultural lands in the County were tilled for corn resulting in the production of 243,441 bushels. In 2017, the acreage decreased to 1,733 acres but production increased to 275,348 bushels (2017 Agricultural Census). The value of sales for corn for grain decreased from roughly \$1.7 million in 2012 to \$1 million in 2017. Corn requires relatively less labor and costs inputs than produce, nurseries and greenhouses, and livestock, making it more profitable. It is also grown on livestock farms as feed for animals. Therefore, much of the corn grown never makes it to market and is not included in any census sales figures.

Corn production plays a large role in Millstone Township. In 2017, corn for grain accounted for 9 percent of the Township's field crop acreage. Corn production and its economic development are pivotal for Millstone.

According to the 2011 New Jersey State Agricultural Convention, the following economic strategies can be implemented and encouraged in regard to field crops:

- Ensure plant health by the implementation of the Mexican Bean Beetle parasite program, soybean rust monitoring surveys, and the release of beneficial insects to control tarnished plant bug and mile a minute weed, in addition working with the National Resource Conservation Service and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension.
- Support organic field crop production to increase value of the crops and linking growers with organic food processors, retailers, animal feed suppliers, and all other handlers
- Support plans for green energy initiative such as bio-fuel plants and related bio-fuel businesses which could elevate the price of regionally produced grain or other agricultural products.

Equine Industry

The equine industry has been a consistently dominant agricultural industry for Monmouth County. As of 2017, there were 364 farms of equine related industry with a total of 3,952 heads. This sector, which includes horses, ponies, mules, burros and donkeys, generated \$8.6 million in sales, or 11 percent of total county sales in 2017. To continue to retain the Township's market and share in the County and State equine industry, horse owners can:

- Ensure health of horses by raising awareness of disease threats and animal safety
- Promote the "Jersey Bred" or "Jersey Equine" logo
- Promote the industry at shows, festivals and other seasonal events
- Promote the equine industry through boarding and riding lessons

Livestock and Poultry

Livestock and poultry operations include non-dairy cattle, sheep, hogs, and poultry. This has historically been a strong agricultural sector in Monmouth County. Due to high input costs, many farmers have opted not to engage exclusively in dairy farming, but rather are sectoring their farms into various agriculture products, such as other livestock. If input costs continue to increase it is possible the dairy industry may continue to decline, but the County's farmers can see this as an opportunity to diversify to other agricultural products such as non-dairy cattle, poultry, hogs, and other animals. According to the US Agricultural Census from 2017, livestock, poultry, and products made up \$13.2 million in sales for the county.

Non-dairy cattle are the leader in non-dairy livestock agriculture for Monmouth County with 234 sold across 49 farms in 2017, according to the US Agricultural Census. Sales of non-dairy cattle was approximately \$167,000 in 2017.

Poultry, which includes egg production, meat chickens, turkeys and ducks, is another large livestock industry in Monmouth County. In 2017, there were 192 farms which produced any type of poultry and/or eggs in the County.

The Township has seen its role in the above livestock categories fluctuate over the years. Yet, with the Township's focus on general harvested crops such as soybeans and hay, it is important to support the County's economic development efforts to increase potential markets for the Township's livestock and poultry production, through techniques such as:

- Ensure animal health;
- Explore various additional products and markets, including local restaurants and grocery markets;
- Work to bring more livestock veterinarians back to the area. This strategy can include economic incentives;
- Aggressively market value-added dairy products from goats;
- Assist farmers with farming techniques, regulatory requirements and the latest research for livestock and poultry. This would include continued and additional cooperation with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County, NJDA and NRCS; and,
- Promote the agritourism portion of livestock and poultry, such as petting zoos.

Additionally, the following economic strategies can be implemented and encouraged in regard to livestock and poultry practices, according to the State's 2011 Economic Development Strategies:

Ensure animal health through the implementation of best management practices.

- Work with markets by supporting the sale and marketing of locally produced meat and eggs.
- Support youth programs such as NJ Junior Breeders' Fund loan program, and 4-H clubs throughout the State.

Agritourism

Agritourism is a significant link to long-term sustainability of Millstone's agricultural industry. According to the 2011 Agriculture Economic Development Strategies, "many residents consider agriculture a novelty and something to be explored and enjoyed." Agriculture can not only attract people from Monmouth County, but it can also attract visitors from other counties and even from neighboring states.

Seasonal farm stands, petting zoos, hay rides, pick-your-own, and seasonal events in the county help to attract visitors. The following are a few techniques discussed by the 2011 NJ State Agricultural Convention Economic Development study:

- Expand roadside programs by working with the NJ Department of Transportation to expand Tourist Oriented Designated Signs and coordinate efforts to gain approval for a discounted agritourism rate; and
- Consumer promotion by distributing inexpensive agritourism brochures with industry websites and contact information to help promote season events and direct farm marketing opportunities in addition to expanding the promotion of the visitnjfarms.org website.

B. Agricultural Industry Retention, Expansion and Recruitment

The Millstone Township website (www.millstonenj.gov) includes information regarding the Trading Post, Right to Farm Ordinance, Right to Farm Act, press releases and seasonal advisories (i.e. bagworms, farm tractors, etc.). The local cable news channel also provides seasonal advisories. The Millstone Township OSFPC has worked hard to develop a good relationship with the local farmers and landowners and to bring credibility to the program. The AAC also holds seminars; past topics included farmland assessment, the State's Right-to-Farm Act and the Farm Conservation Plan.

The OSFPC participates in a variety of community events, such as Millstone Day, that promote local farms and farmland preservation, as well as raise awareness of the commercial farm building code. The AAC also facilitates discussions regarding right to farm issues. The Township also educates the members of the Planning and Zoning Board on matters related to farmland, including presentations on the State's Right to Farm Act, the Township's Right to Farm Ordinance and the Commercial Farm Building Code. The Township has a regular newsletter that spotlights local farms and maintains an electronic mail distribution list to provide timely notices and alerts to farmers. The Township also has a reduced building permit fee schedule for farm buildings.

In the future, the Township intends to establish a farmers market, encourage farmers to use the Trading Post for products produced locally, and solicit topics for upcoming seminars. The Township will continue to conduct educational seminars and promote the image that the Township is interested in preserving all the farmland it can. Many businesses are needed to support the agriculture industry. Appendix I lists the suppliers and services available locally and regionally.

Millstone Township is well positioned geographically within the center of the eastern seaboard between Boston and Richmond, VA, a one-hour drive to either New York City or Philadelphia with easy access to the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway and Routes 195, 295 and 9.

As the cost of fuel continues to rise, the Township's location allows farmers to benefit from shorter trips than farmers in Lancaster, PA and other farming areas to the west and south. Shorter travel times also provide the added advantage that perishable items can travel safer with less damage.

Further, produce and nursery stock growers benefit from the affluent residential markets of central and northern New Jersey, New York City, Philadelphia and Long Island. While many nursery farms have experienced flat commercial markets over the last four to five years, many of the local nursery operations have tapped into the affluent residential markets located within a two-hour drive of the Township.

The "Jersey Fresh" program that is promoted by the State of New Jersey has increased retail opportunities for vegetable and field crop growers, which has proven beneficial since wholesale

prices tend to fluctuate more frequently than retail prices. Millstone Township has some of the best soils in the State which produce higher protein grains and flavorful vegetables (such as "Jersey" corn and tomatoes) than other areas. Agriculture is a business that requires land to produce crops, nursery stock, livestock, etc.

Access to a pool of workers is also essential. Therefore, access to affordable land and dependable labor is critical to a farm's success. Land grants, more preservation funding, or creative programs that can make land affordable for farmers would help maintain the land base that is vital to the industry and additional government assistance in setting up a work visa center where farm employers could go to arrange for farm labor are some ideas to help maintain the viability of agriculture. Access to low interest loans or grants to assist farmers to begin a farming operation is essential to offset costs associated with equipment, crop insurance and fertilizer leaves.

Additional stores, suppliers and large tractor supplies are all needed by local farmers but whether the demand can sustain these supportive businesses is not known. Local farmers are likely to continue to travel to Lancaster and/or buy supplies over the internet. Another issue facing the agricultural community is the need for additional labor hands

There are many agriculture community representatives who are active in the business and industry development groups. The following is a partial list of leadership roles in agriculture related organizations that farmers in Millstone have served:

- Member of the MCADB
- Member of the Millstone Township Economic Development Committee
- President of the New Jersey Horse Council
- Member of the New Jersey Equine Advisory Board
- President of the Board of Directors Tri County Co Op
- Members of the Monmouth County Equine Commission
- Members of the Board of Directors Standardbred Breeder and Owners Association
- Member and Past President of the American Equine Practitioners
- Members of the New Jersey Vegetable Growers
- Members of the Millstone Township OSFPC
- Members of the Millstone AAC

Funding to preserve farming is the primary resource needed to help make positive changes for agriculture in Millstone Township. Without a strong agricultural land base, the viability of farming is questionable. With more land being lost to development, time is running out for preservation. Other resources that were raised as needs by local farmers included an adequate farm labor source, updated equipment and the ability to get parts and expertise to repair the machinery, water for irrigation, elected officials to support necessary farm legislation, and the possibility for farmers to receive a reduction in the cost for electricity used for farming and fuel for growing and transporting produce.

Millstone Township and the AAC can assist in the economic development of agriculture as an industry by encouraging residents and farmers to participate in business and agriculture industry groups to further establish farm friendly programs, such as farmland preservation, low interest loans, and a farm labor program.

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