**RESOLUTION # 18**

**SOIL HEALTH**

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey is a national top-10 producer of a number of high-value fruit and vegetable crops; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey has approximately 720,000 land acres in cultivation statewide, across approximately 10,000 farms; and

**WHEREAS** conservation practices have the potential to make agriculture more carbon-neutral, more productive and more profitable; and

**WHEREAS**, the benefits of climate-friendly farming practices create healthier soils, which better protect cropland to endure seasonal floods, droughts, and heatwaves, and sequester more carbon; and

**WHEREAS**, regenerative stewardship of healthy soil practices, including: crop rotation, cover cropping, conservation tillage, application of compost, and reduced input costs, can increase yields by building topsoil and increasing the microbiome, thereby improving resiliency to weather impacts and loss; and

**WHEREAS**, many New Jersey farmers are already active in conservation practices that reduce agriculture’s contribution to greenhouse gases while stabilizing eco-systems, enhancing beneficial insects, and increasing stormwater and nutrient holding storage capacity in the soil; and

**WHEREAS**, since 2012, New Jersey has increased by 25 percent, the multi-species cover cropping practices, from 50,893 acres to 63,607 acres in 2017; thereby maintaining soil cover, implementing erosion control, maximizing soil structure, and sequestering carbon in the soil; and

**WHEREAS**, federal direct payments to farmers for aerial cover crop practices have ranged from $30 to $70 per acre in New Jersey (in 2019); and

**WHEREAS**, from 2012 to 2017, New Jersey farm operations reported a 13.2-percent increase in conservation practices, from 1,050 to 1,189 farm operations; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey’s ranking in conservation tillage acres rose from 28th in the nation to 21st in national ranking from 2012-2017, reflecting an increase from 88,180 acres to 104,499 acres in conservation tillage operational practices; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2018 Agriculture Improvement Act (Public Law 115-334, “The Farm Bill”), provided approximately $25 million in funding through USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service for states to carry out new on-farm conservation innovation trials to test new or innovative conservation approaches and, under the Act, directed the Secretary of Agriculture to provide incentives to producers to improve and evaluate soil health gains.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 105th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 5-6, 2020, do hereby urge the State of New Jersey, through the Department of Agriculture, to dedicate funding, subsidies and/or tax incentives to purchase appropriate equipment and reimbursement for soil carbon sequestration.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Department of Agriculture, working in conjunction with the farm industry, and through education and outreach to leaseholders and landowners, to enact policy programs that establish conservation tillage farmer alliances.