NOFA NJ Testimony

Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Meeting

11/30/2022

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| The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on this matter. We understand that the logistics industry in our state presents the potential for significant economic opportunity, but we urge the Committee, and all residents of New Jersey, to consider the negative consequences of unchecked warehousing sprawl.  We could express concerns regarding impacted air quality, stormwater runoff, traffic disruption, and other environmental nuisances; we could discuss how large logistics outfits are a burden on local resources and overall community health; we could certainly criticize the accepted cultural norms that value cheap goods and excessive consumerism over healthy local communities. However, most critical to this conversation is the threat imposed upon New Jersey’s agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, and open space.  There are already innumerable intense threats to NJ farms, farmland, and our food system security. While we boast an incredible Farmland Preservation Program, New Jersey is one of the states most threatened by loss of farmland to development. American Farmland Trust’s *Farms Under Threat* report ranks the Garden State as third in the country for potential loss of farmland, with 16-20% of our agricultural land projected to be converted by 2040 should we continue business as usual. Further, New Jersey lost a greater share of its agricultural land to development than any state – more than 25 percent in the 25 years between 1982 and 2007.  Food system security is also a serious concern and priority. Not only do more than 1 in 12 NJ households (285,000) experience food insecurity, our state and country as a whole is fed by a fragile food system, reliant upon national and international supply chains and cheap imports that, again, undermine local business and community health. When do we begin to calculate the loss of production and yield due to rampant development and lackluster food policy? It’s imperative to understand that New Jersey must be able to feed New Jersey if we are to be truly food-secure, and we cannot do so without protecting farmers and the land they grow upon.  Climate goals  The threat is immense, but what can be done to improve the situation? While many of these suggestions are easier said than accomplished, NJ leaders should consider the following:   * Policy & Planning   + Place a moratorium on new approvals until comprehensive, regional planning can be explored and implemented   + Provide resources and funding necessary for municipalities to develop and/or update Municipal Land Use Law to proactively address the threat of warehouse sprawl and environmental degradation.   + Reinforce the State Planning Commission’s Warehouse Siting Guidance to be more than a guidance document   + Require substantive criteria to show the actual need for warehouses within each community   + Revisit Senate Bill 3688, which gave neighboring municipalities a voice and an opportunity to protect themselves from warehouse developments in neighboring municipalities   + Increase opportunities for municipalities to receive payment for ecosystem services or other mechanisms that would allow a municipality to invest and steward ecologically and agriculturally valuable lands * Protecting Farmland   + Increase funding for NJ’s Farmland Preservation Program     - Increase accessibility and opportunity for farmers to access preserved farmland (lease to own opportunities?)   + Decrease minimum acreage criteria for farmland preservation and value each acre preserved   + Increased resources and funding to assist farmers with succession planning and farmland transition   + Redirect a portion of warehouse tax revenue to fund increased farmland preservation   New Jersey agriculture needs assistance. The average age of a New Jersey farmer is now over 60 years. Land access is beyond challenging, both for beginning farmers as well as recognized, award-winning experienced farmers. The cost of labor and inputs is rising rapidly, too fast for most producers to keep up with. We urge New Jersey’s leaders to protect our industry against yet another threat to our food system, our working lands, and our way of life.  Sincerely,  A picture containing arthropod  Description automatically generated  Devin Cornia  Executive Director  Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey | BOARD OF DIRECTORS:  **President**  Mike Rassweiler  North Slope Farm  **Vice President**  Al Johnson  Organic Inspector  Education Committee Chair    **Treasurer**  Kim Rizk  Jammin’ Crepes  Finance Committee Chair  **Secretary**  Stephanie Harris Stonehedge Farm  Cali Alexander  Goatwell Farm  Policy Committee Chair  Tomia MacQueen,  Wildflower Homestead  Tessa Lowinske Desmond, Princeton University,  Firefly Homestead  Jacqueline Ricotta, Ph.D. Delaware Valley University  Arianna Lindberg  Rutgers University  Nate Kleinman  Experimental Farm Network  Meredith Melendez  Rutgers Cooperative Extension  STAFF:  Devin Cornia,  Hungry Work, LLC  Executive Director  Sean Reilly. Collop Services,  Finance Director  Tony Kennette,  Kennette Productions,  Communications Director |