

## CHAPTER 6: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SUSSEX COUNTY



The business of agriculture and its economic base, supporting infrastructure, marketing, and profitability have gained renewed focus in New Jersey. The success of the farmland preservation program in Sussex County is not only measured by acres preserved, but also by the programs put in place to support the farmers and their businesses. Sussex County has one of the most successful Agritourism programs in New Jersey and is the host of the annual State Fair – a showcase for farmers and their products. The County’s agricultural community and its supporting groups and agencies understand that a farmland preservation program constitutes much more than the act of preserving land. In order to be a full partner in a successful farmland preservation program, agriculture as an industry must be vibrant, self-sustaining, and innovative.

The State of New Jersey offers Sussex County farmers a number of support services and programs ranging from technical advice to farm loans. One of these is the *New Jersey 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 *Agricultural Smart Growth Plan*. The *Tool Kit* embraces the five components that have been identified by the State as critical for the future of farming: Farmland Preservation, Innovative Conservation Planning, Economic Development, Agriculture Industry Sustainability, and Natural Resource Conservation. (*NJDA Agricultural Smart Growth Tool Kit*)<sup>1</sup>

As part of this emphasis on the business of agriculture, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) has issued its 2007 “*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 Agritourism. 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 for those markets 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.*” (*NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies*)<sup>2</sup> Sussex County taps into its close proximity to the greater metropolitan region and aggressively markets the county’s agricultural products through its successful Agritourism industry. Sussex County farmers continue to look for ways to reinvent themselves and their products, and to explore new markets and new methods for promoting their businesses.

## 2007 NJDA Economic Development Strategies

Major efforts by the N.J. Department of Agriculture (NJDA) are directed at increasing the demand for New Jersey grown produce through branding, Agritourism, farm direct sales programs, and farm markets. The NJDA *Economic Development Strategies* for 2007 include each of these activities. (NJDA 2007 *Economic Development Strategies*) NJDA is committed to promoting Agritourism through the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism, the Jersey Fresh website, the distribution of printed materials, and other forms of advertisement. Sussex County farms with appropriate activities, as well as County farmers markets and ‘u-pick’ farms, benefit from this promotion.

NJDA’s Jersey Fresh and Jersey Grown labels program is continuing to evolve and is working closely with the Jersey Fresh Hospitality Industry Program, to reinforce the marketing of Jersey Fresh produce to the hotel, restaurant, education, and institutional food service industries. The program strongly promotes the use of the Jersey Fresh brand to supermarket chains and other retailers. The Department also promotes New Jersey grown organic products as distinct from and of higher value than competing products by recently establishing the Jersey Organic brand. (NJDA 2007 *Economic Development Strategies*)

Using recommendations outlined in the 2007 “*Economics Development Strategies*” report, Sussex County can build upon its strong agricultural base and continue to direct county programs to ensure sustainable agriculture practices and profitability. The following is a brief discussion of each of the subsets of Sussex County’s agriculture industry as they relate to the 2007 “*Economics Development Strategies*” report. For each the “*Economics Development Strategies*” report indicates that counties and its farmers should continually seek new local, state, and interstate markets to strengthen market share.

**Produce** which includes vegetables, fruits, grains, oilseeds, beans and dry peas accounted for total crop sales of \$2.5 million in 2002. This same category of products accounted for 27% of total farms in the county for 2002. As 2002 was a drought year, these figures are skewed downward due to drought-related losses. For instance, in 2002 harvested vegetable acreage was 870 acres, down from 1,274 and 1,409 acres in 1997 and 1992, respectively. Measured as acreage farmed, produce is one of the smaller agriculture industries in the county. This is largely due to the fact that much of the county’s farmland base is rocky and sloping, and thus not ideally suited to the needs of produce. However, produce is an important component of the County’s Agritourism industry, with vegetables ranking third in agricultural commodity value in 2002 (*Sussex County Agricultural Profile*)<sup>3</sup>, at \$1.46 million in sales, or 18% of all crop sales. As such, the county can continue to strengthen and expand this sector of the agriculture economy as opportunities arise. Some strategies Sussex County could follow are:

- Strengthen the *Jersey Fresh Hospitality Program*;
- Promote the *Jersey Fresh* brand;
- Explore “Contract Growing”, that is, growing produce for specific customers on a contract basis; and,
- Promote Farm Markets and Pick Your Own operations.  
(NJDA 2007 *Economic Development Strategies*)

**Nurseries and greenhouses** are an important agricultural commodity in Sussex County, ranking first in the state for production of such products. This agricultural sector accounted for total crop sales of \$3.7 million in 2002, or 46% of total crop sales in the county. This same category of products accounted for 11% of total farms in the county for 2002. Due to drought conditions, these 2002 figures are also down from a peak of nearly \$6.0 million in sales from the previous census of 1997. Sales figures are likely to show a growth from the 2002 census due to moderate rain and temperatures in 2007. One major reason that nursery and greenhouse crops have become so important is due to the continued non-agriculture population growth in the county and region, providing a ready market for these products. As such, the county can continue to strengthen and expand this sector of the agriculture economy as opportunities arise. Some strategies to follow are:

- Support efforts by NJDA to ensure plant health and disease-free material;
- Increase consumer awareness of the *Jersey Grown* brand; and,
- Promote “drive up” operations where consumers can buy directly from the nursery or greenhouse.

*(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)*

**Dairy** has historically been the dominant agricultural sector in Sussex County. Though still accountable for the single largest amount of agricultural sales in 2002 at \$4.6 million, dairy production has steadily trended downward since 1971, when the county produced 138 million pounds of milk. By 2005 this quantity had fallen to 38.4 million pounds. The decrease is further reflected in the number of dairy farms and milk cows in 1982 as compared to 2002. In 1982 there were 137 dairy farms; by 2002 the number had decreased to only 30. In 1982 there were 6,406 milk cows; in 2002 the quantity had fallen to 1,943. A combination of high input costs (land prices and taxes), low milk prices, and unfavorable weather conditions have driven this trend, which may very well continue if strong steps are not taken to reverse it. To sustain and augment the county dairy industry, some strategies Sussex County could follow are:

- Promote *Jersey Fresh* dairy products locally and statewide;
- Explore various additional products and markets for dairy;
- Work to ensure the health of the dairy industry, and the quality of processed milk;
- Work to bring a local processing creamery back to the area;
- Aggressively market value-added dairy products; and,
- Work to lower high input costs such as taxes on dairy farms.

*(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)*

**Hay** is by far the dominant field crop measured by acreage in Sussex County. In great part this is due to the fact that the county’s rolling hills and relatively poor soils are ideal for hay. It is a “natural” crop for Sussex county farmers to grow, requiring relatively less labor and cost inputs than produce, nurseries and greenhouses, and livestock. Hay accounted for \$1.4 million in sales in 2002, or 17.3% of all crop sales. Due to 2002 drought conditions, this amount is lower as compared to most years. In addition, 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. Sussex County hay farms account for 43% of all farms in the county and nearly 80% of tilled farmland, or 21,195 acres in 2002. This is actually an increase from

the 19,287 acres tilled in 1997. In addition, the number of hay farms grew from 460 in 1997 to 490 in 2002. To continue and expand its strong market place in the county economy, Sussex County could:

- Explore new markets, and also ways to expand existing markets.  
(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Corn** for grain is also a dominant field crop in Sussex County, second only to hay in tilled acreage at 4,059 acres in 2002. This is also a “natural” crop for Sussex County farmers due to the county’s rolling hills and relatively poor soils. Like hay, it requires relatively less labor and costs inputs than produce, nurseries and greenhouses, and livestock. 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 census sales figures. In the 2002 drought year sales fell to \$382,000; it was one of the lowest corn yields in recent history at 101,000 bushels. To continue and expand its strong market place in the county economy, a strategy Sussex County could follow is to explore ways to produce renewable fuels, thus adding a ready market for Sussex County corn. (NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Livestock and poultry** operations include non-dairy cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens. This has historically been a strong agricultural sector in Sussex County. Due to high land costs, many farmers have opted not to engage exclusively in dairy farming; rather, they are sectoring their farms into various agriculture products such as other livestock or field crops. If land values continue to increase it is likely that 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. Non-dairy cattle are the leader in non-dairy livestock agriculture for Sussex County with 4,500 head in 2006, and 182 farms in 2002. Sales of non-dairy cattle exceeded \$1.0 million in 2002 and may expand in coming years, especially if dairy continues to decline. Poultry, hogs, and other animal sales were \$400,000 in 2002, up from \$300,000 in 1997. To strengthen and expand its place in the county economy, some livestock/poultry strategies Sussex County could follow are:

- Ensure animal health;
- Assist farmers with farming techniques, regulatory requirements and the latest research for livestock and poultry. (This could include additional cooperation with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Sussex County, NJDA and NRCS); and,
- Promote the Agritourism portion of livestock and poultry, such as petting zoos.  
(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Organic Farming**, including crops and animals, is a growing niche market in Sussex County. With the increased consumer awareness in food production, organic products and the markets that support them will continue to gain a stronghold on the agricultural economy and become more “mainstream” as people demand high quality, readily accessible, and affordable, organic products. Certification of organic farms is regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture via the Organic Food Production Act of 1990, and can be somewhat costly and time consuming as compared to non-organic farming. This may dissuade some farmers otherwise amenable to this type of farming. “Natural” farming is a type of farming that seeks to emulate organic farming, but is not regulated or overseen by

laws or regulations as is organic farming. Natural farming is somewhat less costly and time consuming than “organic”, and as such, may be a viable option for some farmers, and their potential customers. Sussex County is in an excellent position to poise itself to facilitate the growth of these agriculture products, as well as to take advantage of these markets. Sussex County should explore:

- Improve marketing of organic and natural produce;
- Work with NJDA to establish a “Jersey Organic” Brand as a way to promote and market organic products;
- Educate growers about organic and natural regulatory and certification requirements; and,
- Explore ways to support organic food growing, processing and marketing.  
(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Equine and Sheep** agriculture has grown in recent years. The number of sheep and lambs has risen from 1,673 in 1997 to 1,865 in 2002, while during the same time period sheep and lamb farms increased from 80 to 122. There were 374 equine farms in 2002, and 2,737 horses (figures from earlier years are not available). In 2002 equine and sheep sales were \$700,000, up from \$600,000 in 1997. It is important to note that many of the equine farms in Sussex County consist of pasture and stable horses, and provide riding lessons, a fact which is not reflected in sales figures but contributes greatly to the county’s economy. To continue and retain the County’s market share in the state and region equine and sheep industry, Sussex County farmers should:

- Ensure the health of horses and sheep;
- Promote the industry at shows and festivals, such as the March to November horse shows at the Sussex County Fairgrounds; and,
- Promote the Agritourism aspect of the equine and sheep industry through petting zoos, horse and pony rides, and boarding and riding lessons.  
(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Wine** is a relatively small part of the Sussex County agricultural industry. At present, the county has one winery (Westfall Winery in Montague Township). As of 2002, there were 48 acres in grape production. (*Sussex County Agricultural Profile*) To encourage the growth of this small, but potentially important market, Sussex County should:

- Encourage increased wine production;
- Encourage county wine festivals and participation in the New Jersey annual wine festivals and tours;
- Coordinate with wineries from other New Jersey counties, and New York and Pennsylvania, to grow a regional wine industry;
- Encourage additional cultural and agricultural events in association with wine festivals; and,
- Market wines to local restaurants.  
(NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies)

**Agritourism** is a critical link in the long-term sustainability of Sussex County and New Jersey’s agriculture industry. According to the 2007 NJDA “Economic Development Strategies”, “*Agricultural tourism draws upon two great strengths of the Garden State, a*

*rich agricultural heritage and a large population of affluent consumers” ... Agritourism is critical to ensuring the future viability of agriculture in the state.” Agritourism should be not only county and state wide, but also interstate to draw visitors from the neighboring states of New York and Pennsylvania.*

Sussex County is the state leader in developing Agritourism. This is evidenced by the success of a Farmer’s Market held weekly at Olde Lafayette Village which the county was instrumental in starting, its pre-eminence as the host of the New Jersey State Fair, and its highly successful brochure entitled “Enjoy Four Seasons of Agriculture in Sussex County”. This brochure lists names, addresses, and telephone numbers of farms within the county, broken down by type of farm, and the types of activities (such as hayrides). The brochure also lists ancillary facilities for tourists to enjoy, such as camping, hotels, bed and breakfasts, and state parks and forests. A similar, subsequent market spearheaded by Sussex County is the brochure entitled “Enjoy Four Seasons of Agriculture in the New Jersey Skylands”. This brochure includes the seven counties of Bergen, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Warren. The brochures are available at [www.sussexfarmvisits.com](http://www.sussexfarmvisits.com).

A highlight of the County’s Agritourism program is the popular ten day Sussex County Farm and Horse Show/New Jersey State Fair held yearly at the Sussex County Fairgrounds in Frankford Township. A farmer’s market sells a wide variety of local agricultural products, including vegetables, fruits, and flowers to fair visitors, and has been extremely popular and successful since its inception. Additionally, the Sussex County Division of Planning is partnering with the Sussex County Board of Freeholders and Sussex County Farm and Horse Show Board of Directors, to establish a permanent, three season Farmers Market at the County Fairgrounds. The start-up of the permanent market is being financed by a \$300,000 Economic Development Grant from the federal government, and will also highlight Agritourism in the County. *(Donna Traylor)*<sup>4</sup>

Included within the Appendix is a list of County farm stands and pick-your-own farming establishments. Establishing a permanent signage program to alert and direct tourists and local residents to these local markets will help increase their business and profitability.

In addition, the New Jersey Highlands Council recently awarded the Sussex County Agriculture Development Board a \$50,000 grant to further develop and grow Agritourism initiatives within Sussex County and the Highlands. Through the Sussex County Division of Planning, the Board is to develop an agriculture marketing plan by the Spring of 2008. *(Kim Ball Kaiser)*<sup>5</sup>

## **Agricultural Industry Retention, Expansion and Recruitment**

By providing key strategies and techniques, the NJDA 2007 *Economic Development Strategies* endorses the expansion and strengthening of all areas of the agriculture industry. Diversity of agricultural commodities to broaden the County’s agricultural base now dominated by hay, corn, dairy, and horticulture would help to ameliorate any economic downswing in either the general economy or a specific sector of the County’s agriculture

industry. Some key items that the Sussex County agriculture community may consider for economic development are:

- **“Sell” agriculture as part of the Sussex County “landscape”.** To many county and state residents not familiar with the business of agriculture and its importance to Sussex County’s economy and lifestyle, Sussex County farms are less well known than they otherwise could be. *(Tim Brill)*<sup>6</sup> These county and state residents may feel it is a matter of time before Sussex County’s (as well as other counties in New Jersey) farmland becomes commercially or residentially developed. This perception, though highly unlikely to become a reality, is grounded in the decline of farmland acreage in Sussex County (141,223 acres in 1959 as compared to 75,496 acres in 2002 per the *2002 Census of Agriculture*), due in large part to residential subdivisions and retail stores. As more and more Sussex County farmland becomes preserved through the Farmland Preservation Program, this lack of awareness should fade. It is important that the county’s agricultural community join in coordinated efforts to “sell” agriculture as a way of life that is enduring and significant to the county and its economy. Area residents must be aware of preserved farmland either through signage on preserved farms (supplied by SADC), and other outreach mechanisms, such as the Agritourism brochures, adult and youth farmer education, the New Jersey State Fair in Frankford Township, farm stands and pick your own operations, and Community Supported Agriculture operations.
- **Supply products, including farming equipment such as tractors and diskers, seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, pesticides, etc.** Large scale agriculture suppliers, which supply medium to large size agriculture operations, no longer exist in Sussex County. The only suppliers in the area are several small, local suppliers. *(Donna Traylor)* Without an adequate amount of suppliers within reasonable driving distances of farms, the business of farming can become expensive and time consuming, and not profitable. The county agricultural community may pursue a variety of options, including tax incentives, to entice suppliers to return to Sussex County. As agriculture in Sussex County becomes more “permanent” through increased preservation efforts, former suppliers who have left the area may return if they sense that a profitable supply business can be operated in the area.

Some farmers now receive equipment parts from suppliers via United Parcel Service, Federal Express, or similar delivery services. This is becoming more of a necessity, as less supply stores are located in the area. However, since delivery prices are relatively low, and farmers do not have to take the time to physically drive and pick up parts and supplies, this can actually be a very economical way to receive certain parts and supplies. However, mail order will not work for delivery of bulk supplies such as feed or fertilizer, which must be picked up at distant locations, or delivered for a fee.

Equipment and supply stores in the area include:

- Gro-Mart in Bloomsbury, Hunterdon County
- D&R Equipment in Ringoes, Hunterdon County
- New Holland Equipment in Washington Township, Warren County

- Tractor Supply in Sussex County
  - Farmside Supplies in Sussex County
- ***Inter-county cooperation and healthy competition among New Jersey counties with strong agricultural economies and heritages should be the norm, not the exception.*** The more broad-based (i.e. multi-county or state-wide) agriculture is, the better chance it has to succeed long term. This cooperation to strengthen the agricultural base is evidenced by the County's Agritourism brochure. Regular cooperation among the County Agriculture Development Board, Board of Agriculture, and local Chamber of Commerce is critical, and is reported to occur on a regular basis within Sussex County. (Donna Traylor)
  - ***Farmers need to be adaptable to farm for, and supply, emerging markets in and out of the County.*** Farms in the County, while increasing in total number from 1982 (613) to 2002 (1029), have decreased in average size during that same time period (119 acres in 1982, down to 73 acres in 2002). (*Sussex County Agricultural Profile*) This decrease in farm size, also typical of other New Jersey farming counties, is due in large part to the decline of dairy farms (which require large acreage). Subsequently, farms are being subdivided to facilitate the increase in beef cattle, equine, nursery and greenhouse, sheep and goat farms, which require less acreage. (Donna Traylor) The county's larger farms for example, can (and do) grow hay for the rising equine and beef cattle industries within the county. Smaller farms mean more opportunity to focus on specialized farm products for designated customers. As agriculture is indeed a business, farmers will need to continue to be adaptable and change with the needs and wants of its customer base.
  - ***Market Research*** – Working closely with Rutgers University Food Policy Institute and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Sussex County, the County's agriculture community may identify and integrate market research on agriculture and economic trends. In this way, Sussex County will remain a leader in New Jersey's agriculture community. The Food Policy Institute can be reached at (732) 932-1966.
  - ***Promote in-state, permanent markets*** – Working with the Department of Agriculture, Sussex County can seek contracts with other state agencies to sell and market their products. This includes the Department of Corrections for prison use, and schools, to supply healthy, fresh farm products for use in their cafeterias. Area hospitals and senior/nursing homes are also possible customers. Since all of these are permanent institutions, once established these markets can be considered as "permanent customers" and revenue sources for the Sussex County agriculture community.
  - ***Flexible regulatory programs with various agencies*** – The 2006 *Agricultural Smart Growth Plan* for New Jersey, prepared by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, identified flexibility in government regulation as an important component relative to farm viability. (*Agricultural Smart Growth Plan 2006*)<sup>7</sup> Working with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and through advocacy groups such as the New Jersey Farm Bureau and Sussex County Board of Agriculture, the local farming community can

ensure regulatory flexibility to the greatest extent possible. Examples where regulatory flexibility is important are the Department of Environmental Protection's Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act Rules" (N.J.A.C. 7:7A-et. seq.), which grant exemptions for agricultural activities, and also the Flood Hazard Area Control Act Rules (N.J.A.C. 7:13). The latter, recently re-adopted, include numerous agriculture permits-by rule and general permits, which allow the continuation of agriculture activities in otherwise regulated flood prone areas.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau (Bureau) is an advocacy group for New Jersey farmers. Its mission "*is to represent agricultural producers and enterprises at all levels of government - local, state, federal and international. This representation includes the influence of regulations and laws, the creation of positive public relations, and the seeking out of initiatives, activities and ventures to help the profitability of the producer members. This organization will remain faithful to the democratic process managed by representatives from every part of the state*" Dave Klemm is the Director for the Sussex County Chapter, and Brian Hautau is the alternate.

Discussions with the Bureau indicate that farming is extremely difficult in Sussex County and the state due to three major factors. The first of these is due to high property taxes, high land values, and high insurance costs; farming in New Jersey is extremely expensive relative to other parts of the country, which in turn reduces profit margins for New Jersey farmers. Simply put, it is extremely difficult to make money as a farmer in Sussex County. Second, the regulatory environment in New Jersey is extremely harsh, mostly due to NJDEP regulations. Examples are required stream buffers, which reduce acreage which can be farmed, and also protection for threatened and endangered species. Third, is that commodity prices in New Jersey are lagging behind other parts of the country, and a farmer's time is therefore not adequately compensated. Suggestions to make farming more profitable for New Jersey farmers include:

- A moratorium on downzoning, since this lowers a farmer's land equity;
  - An immigration bill with a guest worker program;
  - More regulatory flexibility;
  - Full funding for open space; and,
  - Full funding for Transfer of Development Rights, especially in the Highlands Region. (*Peter Furey*)<sup>8</sup>
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- ***Sussex County has more cropland devoted to corn, switchgrass, and other farm products, which could be used to produce ethanol.*** At present, there are no plans to build an ethanol plant in the northern part of New Jersey. However, there is potential that such a plant could be built in the southern part of New Jersey, or in Delaware State. Closely following developments relative to such a plant will allow farmers to poise themselves to sell "raw materials" to an ethanol plant. Such a plant could prove to be an economic engine for Sussex County farmers. Perhaps Sussex County farmers could, in conjunction with farmers from adjacent counties, form a cooperative to share the cost and logistics of shipping raw materials to an ethanol plant. The county can also

encourage state and local governments, as well as constituency groups, to encourage the development and building of an ethanol plant.

It should be noted that switchgrass utilizes less of the groundwater resource, and fewer pesticides and other chemicals, than corn. (*Kent Hardmeyer*)<sup>9</sup> As such, the county can consider encouraging the appropriate entities to develop an ethanol plant that utilizes more switchgrass than corn. Such a plant could not only aid the economic development of Sussex County, but would also add to the long term goal of natural resource conservation.

- ***Sussex County should work closely with municipalities to encourage towns to include agriculture in economic development plans, municipal master plans, and local zoning, and to engage towns to support locally grown agriculture and Agritourism.*** This “bottoms up” approach would foster a broad base for agriculture within the county, helping to assure economic viability. One way for towns to support locally grown agriculture is to pass and enforce right to farm ordinances. Thirteen of the 24 municipalities in Sussex County have such ordinances, which are presented in *Chapter 8* of this plan.
- ***Minimum wage impact on farm businesses*** – In January 2006, the “*Agriculture Transition Policy Group*” (Group), composed of government and industry representatives, submitted a report to then Governor-elect Corzine, with recommendations to keep agriculture strong and viable in the Garden State. The Group reported a serious problem facing New Jersey farm employers. This was the State minimum wage, which was raised to \$6.15 per hour in October 2005, followed by a second increase to \$7.15, effective October 2006. Many farm employers struggle to cope with the multiple financial effects of these legislated mandates. The minimum wage is frequently used in agriculture as an “indicator wage,” the basis to peg other wage rates, year-end bonuses and a host of other non-wage benefits that are part of the employee’s remuneration. (*Report of the Agriculture Transition Policy Group*)<sup>10</sup> With production costs in New Jersey higher than in most other areas, due in part to high labor costs, it is more costly and less profitable to produce commodity items in New Jersey than elsewhere. A comparison of neighboring states indicates New York with a minimum wage of \$7.15 per hour, and Pennsylvania with a minimum wage of \$6.25 per hour, putting Pennsylvania farmers at a labor price advantage over Sussex County farmers.

However, the impact of this labor price advantage is somewhat mitigated by the fact that Sussex agriculture is limited in the amount of labor it utilizes. Generally, the production of vegetables and fruits (produce) require the highest amount of hired farm labor, mainly at harvest time, to pick and process the vegetables and fruits. Sussex County has relatively little production of these products. Other products such as hay, corn, dairy, beef cattle, etc., which are more prevalent in Sussex County, require little or no hired farm labor (most labor is done by farm families). As such, farm labor costs are not as large a problem for Sussex County farmers as they are for other parts of the state which have major produce agriculture industries.

- ***The Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) of Sussex County and the Rutgers University Agricultural Experiment Station*** are vital to the long term economic sustainability of agriculture in Sussex County, and the State of New Jersey. Farmer education programs keep the Sussex County agriculture industry apprised of the most recent farm research and techniques, which helps Sussex County farmers to remain competitive. The Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization trains young people in agriculture practices, preparing them to be future Sussex County farmers. Both the RCE and FFA are discussed in detail in *Chapter 8*.

## **Sussex County Economic Development Programs**

Sussex County has an active economic development program to assist the county's agricultural community to stay strong and vibrant. The following is a listing and brief discussion.

- ***“Commercial Kitchen”*** – A pilot program is underway to allow use of the Sussex County Vocational & Technical School's certified kitchen, for production of value-added farm products. So, for example, a raspberry farmer could use the Vo-Tech kitchen to produce raspberry jams for sale at a local farm stand. Production of such value-added products allows county farmers to effectively lengthen their “selling season”, increasing income and making their farm operation more economically viable.
- ***Goat Project*** – This is a technical assistance statewide program run by RCE of Sussex County, which advises interested farmers on the production and marketing of goat products.
- ***Sussex County Dairy Project*** – This is an effort to increase profitability for the dairy industry by adding value to the milk produced in Sussex County. The RCE of Sussex County, New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), and the Sussex County Board of Agriculture embarked on this initiative in 1999. The project sought and subsequently received funds to study the feasibility of processing local milk products in Sussex County. The Interim Report on the Dairy Project, published in June of 2001 by Rutgers Center for Management and Entrepreneurship, indicated that establishing such a processing plant would be feasible. The Sussex County Cooperative Milk Producers Association has initiated a second study to further this effort. Use of funding from the United States Department of Agriculture, the NJDA, and Rutgers University will help to explore the possibilities associated with Sussex County milk producers owning and operating their own processing plant to create value-added dairy products produced in Sussex County. (*Sussex County*)<sup>11</sup>
- ***Community Supported Agriculture*** – Economic support of the agricultural community also comes from local grass roots groups. This support is embodied in Community Supported Agriculture which consists of:

- A community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes the community's farm. In such an arrangement, the growers and consumers provide mutual support, and share the risks and benefits of agriculture;
- Members or "share-holders" of the farm pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary;
- Members receive shares in the farm's products throughout the growing season;
- Members also receive the satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land and participating directly in food production;
- Members also share in the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests; and,
- Generally, growers receive better prices for their crops, gain some financial security, and are relieved of much of the burden of marketing.  
(*National Agricultural Library*)<sup>12</sup>

A local, grass-roots group supporting community agriculture is The Foodshed Alliance (FSA). The FSA is a non-profit group devoted to “promoting profitable, sustainable farming and locally-grown, fresh, healthy food in northwestern New Jersey”. The FSA closely links the health of land and communities with the existence of local farms, believing that farmers are the key in connecting people with “food, the land, and our sense of place”. These tenets foster a “self-sustaining “foodshed” that supports farmers, nourishes people, respects the land, and strengthens (our) communities.”  
(*Food Shed Alliance*)<sup>13</sup>

An extension of the FSA’s work is the Northwest Jersey “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” Campaign. This is an effort by FSA, local farmers, and community leaders to build connections between farmers and consumers through food guides, food and farming events, and community outreach, and therefore encourage local residents to buy fresh, local produce. As part of the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” campaign, the FSA sponsored the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual “Farm and Food Open House” on Saturday, September 8, 2007. This event featured farm tours, tastings at local farms, and special family oriented events at the farms. Participating Sussex County farms included the Pittenger, Snoep Winkel and Wind Brow Farms. (*Buy Fresh*)<sup>14</sup>

- ***Farmer’s Market*** – The Sussex County Division of Planning is working to establish a permanent, three season farmers market at the New Jersey State Fairgrounds in Frankford Township. (*Donna Traylor*) Such a market would provide an outlet for local farmers to sell their products, and local residents to purchase fresh produce and related farm products.
- ***Lusscroft Farm*** – The farmland-preserved 577 acre Lusscroft Farm in Wantage Township is an extremely important link in the history of Sussex County agriculture. Most notably, it is the site where artificial insemination for dairy cows was developed. The governments of both Sussex County and New Jersey, along with the Sussex County Heritage and Agriculture Association, Inc., are working to establish the farm as

a permanent agriculture and environmental education facility, as well as a facility to promote Agritourism and ecotourism. (*Donna Traylor*) Establishment of the Lusscroft Farm as an agriculture education facility would be an important step in cementing Sussex County's reputation as a leader in state agriculture.

### ***Additional Resources***

There are numerous other resources which can be used by the Sussex County Agriculture industry to assist it in expanding and solidifying its economic base in the county and region wide. Several are listed below.

- The New Jersey Department of Agriculture lists various Agriculture Economic Development Services at its website. Examples include Agriculture Credit and Finance, Business Development for Agriculture, Food Manufacturing, and Related Industries. This website and its related links should be utilized by the Sussex County agriculture industry, as necessary and appropriate. The information can be found at [www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/md/prog/agriculturaleconomic.html#top](http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/md/prog/agriculturaleconomic.html#top).
- To help solidify Agritourism and the agriculture business in the county, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture lists on its website over 30 Sussex County roadside markets and pick your own farms. The lists indicate farm or market name, contact information, location, and products available. (*Roadside Markets, Pick Your Own Farms and Community Farmers Markets*)<sup>15</sup> The Sussex County agriculture community can work with NJDA to keep the lists updated and current. The *Appendix* contains these tables, as well as tables with cut your own Christmas Tree operations (*Choose & Cut Christmas Tree Guide*)<sup>16</sup>, and equine operations. Sussex County farmers also occasionally participate in out of state farmer markets. However, due in large part to the limited produce sector of the county, most farmers sell produce locally, or from roadside stands. The aforementioned County Agritourism brochure lists over 110 local farms open to the public.
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) is a “United States Department of Agriculture competitive grants program with regional programs and regional leadership. SARE supports research and education that helps build the future economic viability of agriculture in the United States. SARE funding is authorized under Subtitle B of Title XVI of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990.” (*SARE*)<sup>17</sup> SARE funds are used for:
  - *Farmer/Grower Grants*: These grants have the goal of helping farmers shift to practices that are environmentally sound, profitable, and beneficial to the wider farm community.
  - *Partnership Grants*: These grants are for RCE and NRCS personnel, non-profits, and agricultural consultants who work directly with farmers. Grants are used for on-farm research and demonstration projects that address sustainability.
  - *Professional Development Grants*: These grants fund professional development projects that help RCE educators and other agricultural professionals learn and transmit the knowledge needed to help farmers move toward greater sustainability.

- *Research and Education Grants*: These grants fund research and education projects that lead to farmers adopting sustainable practices. The emphasis is on improved farming practices and an enhanced quality of life for farmers.  
Additional information can be found at [www.uvm.edu/~nesare/](http://www.uvm.edu/~nesare/).
- The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) brings together agriculture experts from Iowa State University, Kansas State University and the University of California “ ... to create and present information about value-added agriculture. The center draws on the abilities, skills and knowledge of leading economists, business strategists, and outreach specialists to provide reliable information needed by independent producers to achieve success and profitability in value-added agriculture.” AgMRC provides information to help farmers “assess value-added market opportunities, investigate processing options and understand business and production issues” for such agricultural commodities and products as Agritourism, renewable energy, livestock, specialty crops, and numerous others. (*Agricultural Marketing Resource Center*)<sup>18</sup> In general, the goals of AgMRC are to:
  - “Create an electronic, Web-based library with powerful search capabilities to make value-added market, economic and business information and other resources available to producers”. The library can be accessed at <http://www.agmrc.org>.
  - “Provide value-added business and economic analysis tools, including information on business principles, legal, financial and logistical issues”.
  - “Conduct research and analysis on economic issues facing producers involved in value-added business ventures”.
  - “Link producers with electronically available information and resources”. (*Agricultural Marketing Resource Center*)

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<sup>1</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Smart Growth Tool Kit “Planning for Agriculture. <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/toolkit.htm>. Accessed June 2006.

<sup>2</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture. 2007 Economic Development Strategies.

<sup>3</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture, State Agriculture Development Committee. Agriculture Census Data, Sussex County Agricultural Profile. April 13, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication with Donna Traylor, Agriculture Resource Specialist, County of Sussex, Division of Planning, Office of Conservation and Farmland Preservation. May 15, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Kim Ball Kaiser, Staff Attorney, New Jersey Highlands Council. September 19, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Tim Brill, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, State Agriculture Development Committee. May 10, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Smart Growth Plan 2006 <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/pdf/smartgrowthplan.pdf> Accessed March 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Personal Communication with Peter Furey, New Jersey Farm Bureau. June 18, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Kent Hardmeyer, United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. May 15, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Agriculture Transition Policy Group, Final Report, January 10, 2006. <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/home/pdf/agriculture.pdf>. Accessed March 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Sussex County New Jersey. <http://www.sussex.nj.us/documents/planning/farmland/FPP%20Chapter%204.PDF>. Accessed June 2007.

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library, Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, Community Supported Agriculture. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>. Accessed June 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Food Shed Alliance, <http://www.foodshedalliance.org/Foodshed%20WebPages/Foodshed%20Pages/whatweareabout.htm>. Accessed June 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Buy Fresh, Buy Local. <http://www.buyfreshnj.org/WebPages/OurCampaign.htm>. Accessed June 2007.

<sup>15</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Roadside Markets, Pick Your Own Farms and Community Farmers Markets. <http://www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh/searches/index.html>. Accessed May 2007.

<sup>16</sup> New Jersey Christmas Tree Growers Association, 2006 Choose & Cut Christmas Tree Guide, <http://www.njchristmastrees.org/>. Accessed May 2007.

<sup>17</sup> New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/grants/sare.html>. Accessed May 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, Mission and Goals. <http://www.agmrc.org/agmrc/About+mission++goals.htm>. Accessed May 2007.