

Hillsborough Opposes Dissolution of Department of Agriculture

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The Hillsborough Township Committee took action Tuesday night opposing the State Administration's proposed plan to dissolve the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, as part of the 2009 Fiscal Year Budget, through the adoption of a resolution.

"The dissolution of the Department will disperse its various divisions among existing government agencies where they won't be able to effectively work together. This could leave New Jersey citizens vulnerable to animal and plant disease, agro terrorism or other threats to the general health and safety of our state's food supply and natural resources," stated Committeeman Carl Suraci, liaison to the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

"The Department of Agriculture is involved in very important initiatives, such as conserving plants and urban forests; containing diseases, such as bird flu; suppressing the Gypsy Moth and Asian Longhorned Beetle; laboratory testing; advising the State Domestic Security Task Force; and the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program, which serves hundreds of thousands of needy New Jersey citizens daily," continued Committeeman Suraci.

Because ninety-three percent of the Department's funds are from federal monies, the dissolution of the Department would provide less than a .002% savings to the 2009 Fiscal Year State Budget.

Ninety-six percent of the Department's federal funding is through the federal school breakfast and school lunch programs; the State of New Jersey matches these monies.

"Elimination of the Department of Agriculture and the school breakfast/lunch program is ludicrous. New Jersey is looked at as a national leader in enhancing the quality of food selections offered to students. For the amount of overall money abolishing the department would save, it would do more harm than good," stated Deputy Mayor Frank DelCore.

"This is a department that is very important to the residents of New Jersey, while we realize it here in Hillsborough, many do not," added Deputy Mayor DelCore.

"Through the elimination of the Secretary of Agriculture, farmers will lose a very strong voice on their behalf in the Governor's cabinet and that can only have a negative impact on public policy decisions when it comes to farming," stated Mayor Anthony Ferrara.

The Department's Divisions of Animal Health, Plant Industry, Agricultural and Natural Resources, and Markets have worked collectively to ensure the food safety of New Jersey's agricultural products. It has also provided for the development and expansion of the State's aquaculture market, allowing for the development of health guidelines, inspections, laboratory testing and certification of a consumer driven Jersey Fresh product.

The 2009 Budget proposal calls for the elimination of the Department of Agriculture in order to produce a cost savings from the removal of administrative functions.

Dissolving the Department of Agriculture receives would cut the State budget by \$614,947 in administrative costs.