

Monmouth County Agriculture Development Board
Division of Planning



Minutes for a Regular Meeting of the
MONMOUTH COUNTY AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
July 7, 2026, 7:00 PM

Hybrid Meeting at One East Main Street, Freehold, NJ or Audio and Video Conference via WebEx

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Bullock called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Mr. Bullock read the "Open Public Meetings Act" Compliance Statement.

ATTENDANCE:

Present: Bullock, Clayton, DeFelice, Giambrone, Holmes, Pettyjohn, Van Mater
Staff: Barris, Beekman, Bezahler, Honigfeld, Kiley, Schmetterer
Representatives: Chris Helmlinger, Sean Pizzio, Alina Robinson, Betty Velez-Gimbel
Public: Nicole Abbot, Gavin Cummings, Lori Cummings, Michael Holzer, Vincent Iuzzolino, John Mazza, Chris Mumford, Kim Paulmenn, Anna Struk, Edward Struk, Frank Toia, Ramona Toia, Rajeev Venkat, Nicole Voigt, Kathleen Williams, Richard Williams

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. DeFelice motioned to adopt the June 2026 Regular Session minutes. Mr. Van Mater seconded the motion, which passed by voice vote.

CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

Ms. Kiley went through several items of correspondence including a letter from the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture, an invitation from Warren County Community College Agriculture and Economic Development and a report issued by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture summarizing the results of the New Jersey Agritourism Grant Program for fiscal year 2026. In addition, there was a news release issued by the SBA Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience regarding the availability of loans for those impacted by the freeze from April 19-22 of 2026.

REGULAR REPORTS

- A. *Chairman:* Mr. Bullock addressed the letter from the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture by saying that a subcommittee is meeting to address some of the concerns in the letter. Mr. Bullock indicated that progress is being made on the bylaws.
- B. *SADC:* Mr. Pizzio went through the highlights of the May SADC meeting. He updated the board on the Woodland Easement Purchase Program and , noted how many applications are in the preservation pipeline (Monmouth County has 5), listed recent and upcoming outreach events and

speaking engagements, and discussed Executive Order #18 which waives the 51% annual sale requirement for on-farm markets.

- C. *Staff*: Ms. Kiley reminded Mr. Bullock of staff's willingness to highlight Mr. Buscaglia's service to the MCADB and prepare a resolution. Mr. Van Mater moved and Mr. DeFelice seconded the motion to have staff draft a resolution, which was approved by voice vote. Ms. Kiley supplemented the Chair's report and mentioned that the subcommittee met five times and have completed their work on the replacement policy and the bylaws. At this point, the work products are with County and Board counsels.
- D. *Municipal Representatives*: Chris Helmlinger, Upper Freehold Township, reported that the Township Committee wished to make the Board aware of an issue some operators of farm markets are having with the Monmouth County Board of Health. The issue stems from the Monmouth County Board of Health's interpretation of the State's regulations and has resulted in some markets being shut down for up to four weeks. Several public officials, representatives of the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture, members of the New Jersey Farm Bureau, and representatives of Monmouth County Department of Health, met which resulted in a short-term solution. The Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Health have differing interpretations. There is a pending meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture and the State Commissioner of Health to seek a more permanent solution. Currently, the affected markets will need to resubmit applications every two weeks and comply with additional inspections. Ultimately, the inconsistent interpretations of the rules across the County and the State are putting Upper Freehold farmers at a disadvantage.
- E. *County Board of Agriculture*: Mr. DeFelice mentioned the Board of Agriculture is on summer recess but is getting ready for the Monmouth County Fair. The Board continues its safety *See a Tractor? Slow Down* campaign placing signs strategically around the county.
- F. *Rutgers Cooperative Extension*: None

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Bullock reminded the Board of a previous discussion regarding the adding of reports from the Board of Health and the Soil Conservation District to the Regular Monthly Reports section of the agenda. Following a brief discussion, Mr. DeFelice made a motion to approve the proposal. The motion was seconded by Mr. Giambrone, which was approved by voice vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Evaluation

Ms. Honigfeld presented a recent project undertaken by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). According to the NRCS memo dated May 15, 2026, the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) is being updated and the final results will be published in the electronic Field Office Technical Guide for use by NRCS, local government agencies, partners, and the public in making land-use decisions and protecting important agricultural lands.

Ms. Honigfeld advised that staff was given the opportunity to review the proposed revisions and submit feedback before the results are finalized. Ms. Honigfeld shared some of the comments that were submitted by staff to date.

Ms. Honigfeld further explained that the Board has historically used LESA as part of the evaluation criteria when preserving farmland through the County Easement Purchase Program and its successor, the County Planning Incentive Grant Program (County PIG). *County PIG Policy 6a – Criteria and Application Evaluation Procedures for The County Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) Program* requires a property to have a Land Evaluation score of at least 55.

Ms. Honigfeld explained that based on her discussions with the NRCS, a Land Evaluation (LE) score of 55 under the proposed methodology is expected to be commensurate with a LE score of 55 under the existing methodology. Ms. Honigfeld requested that the Board review the proposed data and determine whether it has any additional input to provide NRCS. Ms. Honigfeld further indicated that the Board may want to revisit the County PIG criteria based on the final results. Mr. Holmes requested that the Board have another month to look at the data before commenting.

Letter of Support for a State Direct Easement for Howell Township, Block 170, Lot 18.02 Howell Township.

Ms. Bezahler explained that the property located in Howell Township (Block 170, Lot 18.02) is being pursued by the State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC) under the Direct Easement Purchase Program. For various reasons, the SADC is requiring the County and municipality to contribute financially to the preservation of this property. Ms. Bezahler requested that the Board prepare and sign a letter to the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners recommending that Monmouth County participate financially in the easement acquisition. Mr. DeFelice motioned to do so, and Mr. Pettyjohn seconded which was approved by voice vote.

RIGHT-TO-FARM AND STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Status Reports

Mr. Beekman reported the following updates on Right to Farm matters:

Lazy Rooster will be heard later in the evening, and the Rosenfeld Ranch resolution will be memorialized later in the agenda as well.

Carm's Farm: Mr. Beekman indicated that he and the Respondent's attorney are working with the township on some preliminary matters.

Samrock Stables: The farm is working on revisions to its May 27th site plan element submission to the township and MCADB staff.

Winding Brook Farm, LLC: The matter is currently under appeal. Mr. Beekman is responding to discovery that has been served on the County.

Conflict Resolution Request – Memorialization of Resolution No. 2026-6-1 Howell Township vs. David Rosenfeld, 184 Kent Road, Howell

Mr. Beekman explained to the Board that the Respondent has retained an attorney who reached earlier in the day regarding this matter. Mr. Beekman advised the Board to proceed with the memorialization; however, there may be further procedural steps after the memorialization.

Mr. Van Mater motioned to memorialize Resolution No. 2026-6-1, and Mr. Pettyjohn seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Commercial Farm Certification Hearing for Site-Specific Agricultural Management Practice Determination Request (Block 43, Lots 16.01 & 16.02, Millstone Township).

Mr. Beekman spoke to the audience and explained that the current hearing was solely to determine whether the MCADB has jurisdiction. Mr. Beekman referred to the State's (N.J.S.A. 4:1C-1 *et seq.*) criteria for commercial farm determination. Mr. Beekman explained procedurally how the hearing would work and reiterated that the evening's hearing only relates to whether the farm is a commercial farm, as defined by the State of New Jersey.

Mr. Beekman introduced the Applicant's counsel, Ms. Nicole Voigt, who asked the Applicant, Michael Holzer, to join her at the podium for her opening comments and subsequently his testimony. Mr. Beekman administered the swearing in of Mr. Holzer.

Ms. Voigt introduced the Applicant and explained the SSAMP request is a scaled-down version of the request that went before Millstone Township some years back and proceeded to review the criteria for commercial farm eligibility and the corresponding evidence included in the submission.

Mr. Holzer confirmed ownership information and confirmed he is the day-to-day operator. Mr. Holzer indicated when he purchased the different farms and what currently takes place or is proposed to on each of the parcels. Mr. Holzer explained that the main farm operates at 174 Sweetmans Lane (174) and 176 Sweetmans Lane (176), in Millstone, and that he owns property at the corner of Charleston Springs Rd and Stagecoach Rd (Charleston) which makes up his farm management unit. The planned cidery would be at 176 Sweetmans Lane.

Mr. Holzer explained the agricultural production occurring on the farm management unit indicating an apple orchard, hay production and livestock. He is currently only selling hay and apples and confirmed the farm meets the minimum criteria of \$2,500. Ms. Voigt directed the Applicant to authenticate the receipts that were submitted as evidence by reading them into the record. Ms. Voigt asked her client to confirm he continues all aforesaid production in the current year. Ms. Voigt asked the Board members if they had any questions. Mr. Beekman directed Ms. Voigt to go through permissible activities (N.J.S.A. 4:1C-9). Ms. Voigt asked her client to read into the record the NAICS codes pertinent to the application which he did by reading from Exhibit AS-002a.

Mr. DeFelice asked how many acres make up the orchard and how many trees were planted and when? Mr. Holzer responded: 3.5 acres, 1,000 trees, roughly five years ago. Mr. DeFelice then asked how many acres are being farmed for hay. Mr. Holzer explained that on 174 it is about 23 acres, on 176 it is about 4 acres, and on Charleston it is the whole property at 27.5 acres. Mr. DeFelice asked who does all the baling. Mr. Holzer replied that he has hired people to do it although sometimes employs other farmers' employees. Mr. Holzer added that he was not doing it himself in the beginning but had transitioned into doing it. Mr. DeFelice asked if he purchased the equipment and Mr. Holzer replied, yes.

Mr. DeFelice referred to a photo of apples in the submission and asked how much each bin of apples weighed, Mr. Holzer said about 750 pounds. There was an exchange about the varieties and the impact of recent freeze. There was an exchange regarding the marketing and sale of the hay and the Applicant's customers between Mr. Van Mater and Mr. Holzer including confirmation that Mr. Holzer is producing small square bales. Mr. DeFelice inquired where the livestock is being held, and Mr. Holzer confirmed that the animals were on the homestead, which is 176. There was an exchange regarding an animal waste plan and Ms. Voigt indicated her client is aware of the requirement and will comply should it become necessary. Mr. Beekman requested that the Applicant read into the record which protected activities under N.J.S.A. 4:1C-9 the Applicant is engaging in, to which Mr. Holzer read the relevant sections from the application submitted (Exhibit AS-002).

Mr. Beekman asked the township's attorney, Mr. VanKat, if there were any questions for the Applicant to which Mr. VanKat had none.

Mr. Beekman then opened up questions from the public. Richard Williams asked what size the lot was where the cidery would go. Mr. Holzer replied 9 acres. Several folks asked questions that were unanswered as they weren't applicable to the commercial farm portion of the hearing or were not

questions directed at the Applicant. There was further clarification regarding the intention of the public question period in a commercial farm determination by both Mr. Beekman and Ms. Voigt. Gavin Cummings asked for specific quantities of each livestock category on the farm, which Mr. Holzer answered: 7 goats, 30 chickens, 5 ducks, 4 pigs, 12 rabbits, 2 dogs, 1 turkey, 7 geese. The second part of the question was not applicable to commercial farm determination and the Applicant's testimony. Kim Paulmenn referenced the On-farm Direct Farm marketing 51% rule and how that impacts the farm given it is only nine acres. Ms. Voigt addressed the question stating that the current application is for a farm management unit which is much larger than the nine acres. Ms. Voigt pointed out the distinction between farm management unit acres and tax parcels. Ms. Voigt stated that the farm management unit includes roughly thirty-five contiguous acres, of which the nine acres referenced by Ms. Paulmenn is included. She then reiterated that the cidery would take place on roughly 24 contiguous acres and that the total farm management unit in its entirety includes aforesaid 24 acres and another 27 across town. Ms. Voigt indicated that while the 51% On-farm Direct Marketing requirement is not relevant to the commercial farm determination, she would gratuitously address the question which she did. Ms. Voigt added that Mr. Holzer's farm management unit would comply with such regulations when applicable.

Mr. Beekman opened the floor for public comment as it relates to commercial farm determination. Kim Paulmenn spoke about the competition (Screaming Hill, Cream Ridge, and Emerys), and the size of those properties compared to the property in question. Frank Toia asked if the Board noticed how close the property was to the residences. Mr. Toia indicated that there is an abundance of pesticides being used and it is sprayed in the air and gets in their yards and pools. Mr. Toia said they are ok with the farm, and are dealing with the pesticides, but the cidery should be looked into further. Richard Williams read directly from the Millstone Township's denial of Mr. Holzer's original municipal submission (Exhibit A-019) and asked the Board to consider what the Township has already documented regarding Mr. Holzer's proposal. Mr. Venkat spoke as counsel to Millstone Township. Mr. Venkat indicated that the Township defers to the Board as to the determination of commercial farm. Mr. Venkat stated that Township "reserves the right to file limited opposition to the SSAMP portion of the application". Mr. Venkat stated he understands the Board would like such information by July 13, and the township intends on complying with that timing.

Mr. Beekman indicated that the Board would now deliberate. After a brief discussion, Mr. Beekman clarified the proposed motion by Mr. Giambrone. The motion was to determine that Mr. Holzer has met the Right to Farm threshold criteria and that the Board would like to maintain jurisdiction to hear the activities portion of the matter. Mr. Beekman confirmed that was the motion and Mr. Holmes seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chris Mumford, of Wall, stated he has a farm in North Wall. He and his wife have been restaurateurs in Monmouth County for the last 35 years. Mr. Mumford indicated that he retired in 2018 and started a business called Hay Mumford, which includes growing heirloom tomatoes. They bought a farm in North Wall a year and a half ago with no agricultural infrastructure and have been trying to put in a high tunnel, barn, small farm store, and greenhouse. Mr. Mumford indicated that he already has a \$31,000 grant for the high tunnel. Mr. Mumford indicated the variance he needs from Wall is to accommodate a 277-foot setback as opposed to Wall's 400-foot requirement. Mr. Mumford said he has been held up now for about six or eight months. Mr. Mumford was asking to be heard by the MCADB so that he can grow on his property and get his livelihood back and hopefully be able to sell product by this spring.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, August 5, 2026, at 7:00 PM.**

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from Mr. Pettyjohn seconded by Mr. DeFelice, the meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM, which was approved by voice vote.