

ASSEMBLY, No. 285

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 220th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2022 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman BRANDON UMBA

District 8 (Atlantic, Burlington and Camden)

Assemblywoman CLAIRE S. SWIFT

District 2 (Atlantic)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman Sawyer

SYNOPSIS

Establishes “New Farmers Improvement Grant Program” to provide matching grants for farm improvements to beginning farmers.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/7/2022)

1 AN ACT concerning grants to beginning farmers for farm
2 improvements and supplementing Title 4 of the Revised Statutes.

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4 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

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7 1. As used in this act:

8 “Beginning farmer” means a person who desires to engage in
9 farming and has never farmed before, who has engaged in farming in
10 the State for 10 years or less as of the effective date of this act, or who
11 qualifies as a first-time farmer pursuant to 26 U.S.C. s.147(c)(2).

12 “Department” means the Department of Agriculture.

13 “Farming” means the cultivation of land for the production of
14 agricultural crops, the raising of poultry, the production of eggs, the
15 production of milk, the production of fruit or other horticultural crops,
16 grazing, the production of livestock, aquaculture, hydroponics, the
17 production of forest products, or other activities designated by the
18 department pursuant to rules and regulations.

19

20 2. a. There is established in the Department of Agriculture the
21 “New Farmers Improvement Grant Program,” to provide matching
22 grants for farm improvements to beginning farmers investing in
23 diversification of their farming operations and innovations for the
24 sustainability of those operations. The department shall award grants
25 of between \$15,000 and \$50,000, for up to 50 percent of total project
26 costs. The department shall award matching grants to eligible farmers
27 only for projects that:

28 (1) expand or diversify agricultural or horticultural production on
29 the farm or extend its growing or production season;

30 (2) implement innovative agricultural or horticultural techniques
31 that increase the use of sustainable practices such as organic farming,
32 food safety, reduction of farm waste, or water conservation; or

33 (3) create or expand partnerships with other farms, regional food
34 hubs, or agriculture-dependent institutions and entities to improve the
35 processing, selling, and distributing of agricultural or horticultural
36 products.

37 b. Eligible costs to be funded by a matching grant under the
38 program shall include the purchase of new or used machinery,
39 equipment, or supplies, or the construction of buildings and physical
40 structures to be used exclusively for agricultural or horticultural
41 purposes, and any other costs established as eligible costs pursuant to
42 rules and regulations adopted pursuant to subsection e. of this section.

43 c. A farmer shall be eligible for a matching grant, and may apply
44 in the form and manner prescribed by the department, if:

45 (1) the farmer is 18 years of age or older and is a beginning
46 farmer;

1 (2) the beginning farmer materially and substantially participates
2 in day-to-day production of agricultural or horticultural products raised
3 on the farm, as determined by the department;

4 (3) the farm is 150 acres or less and located wholly within the
5 State; and

6 (4) the farming operation has a minimum of \$10,000 in gross
7 sales in the preceding calendar year from agricultural or horticultural
8 products grown or derived from the applicant's farm operation as
9 reflected in either personal or business federal tax return forms.

10 d. The Department of Agriculture shall request annually as part of
11 its annual budget proposal a minimum of \$100,000 to fund the grants
12 authorized pursuant to this section. The department shall also pursue
13 and develop, with the Department of Environmental Protection, the
14 United States Department of Agriculture, and any other applicable
15 State or federal agency, any available federal, State, local, and private
16 funding for the grants authorized pursuant to this section.

17 e. The Department of Agriculture shall adopt, pursuant to the
18 "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et
19 seq.), rules and regulations necessary to implement this act, including,
20 but not limited to, establishing other costs as eligible costs in addition
21 to those established in section b. of this section and the manner in
22 which a beginning farmer shall provide the required 50 percent match
23 for a grant.

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25 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

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28 STATEMENT

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30 This bill establishes in the Department of Agriculture the "New
31 Farmers Improvement Grant Program," to provide matching grants
32 for farm improvements to beginning farmers investing in
33 diversification of their farming operations and innovations for the
34 sustainability of those operations. The bill defines "beginning
35 farmer" as a person who desires to engage in farming and has never
36 farmed before, who has engaged in farming in the State for 10 years
37 or less as of the effective date of the bill, or who qualifies as a first
38 time farmer pursuant to federal law at 26 U.S.C. s.147(c)(2).

39 To date, the State of New Jersey has spent \$1.148 billion to
40 preserve farmland in the Garden State. New Jersey cannot rely only
41 on the success of land preservation to preserve farming. The State
42 must take further action to preserve its farmers as well. Currently,
43 the average age of a farmer in the United States is 57.5 years. The
44 national average age has increased by 1.6 percent annually since
45 1994, on average, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture
46 conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture. The

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- 1 average age of a New Jersey farmer is 59.7 years, according to the
- 2 same report. The State-wide average age has increased more
- 3 drastically at 2.72 percent annually since 2002, on average.