

ASSEMBLY, No. 3617

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 17, 2022

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman PARKER SPACE

District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Wirths

SYNOPSIS

Directs Dept. of Agriculture to develop and implement beginning farmer mentoring program in cooperation with certain agricultural and educational organizations and entities.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 AN ACT concerning beginning farmers and supplementing Title 4 of
2 the Revised Statutes.

3

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

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7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that agriculture is a
8 critically important industry in the State; that preserving a viable
9 agricultural base in the State will ensure that there is sufficient
10 fresh, locally grown produce and other agricultural and horticultural
11 products available for the public to consume and enjoy, which in
12 turn contributes to promoting the health and welfare of the people;
13 that the public also enjoys many aesthetic benefits from the
14 presence of farms in their communities; that the continuing
15 existence of farms and farming in the State is threatened by
16 numerous pressures and stresses, especially in such a densely
17 populated and developed state as New Jersey; that one of the major
18 issues confronting agriculture in both the State and the nation is the
19 increasing average age of farmers, thus demonstrating that there is
20 insufficient recruitment of new or beginning farmers; that
21 furthermore, the National Agricultural Statistics Service in the
22 United States Department of Agriculture reported in its 2012 census
23 of agriculture that nationally the average age of the principal
24 operator of a farm rose from 55.3 years in 2002, to 57.1 years in
25 2007, and then to 58.3 years in 2012; that, similarly, in New Jersey
26 the average age of the principal operator of a farm rose from 57
27 years in 2007 to 59 years in 2012; that farming cannot survive if
28 there are too few farmers in the State; and that, therefore, it is
29 appropriate and necessary to create a mentoring program whereby
30 experienced farmers can impart their knowledge to beginning
31 farmers so that they will have a greater chance to succeed, thus
32 ensuring that agriculture will continue to be a major industry in the
33 State, in both the near and distant future, and that the Garden State
34 will always prove itself worthy of that name.

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36 2. a. The Department of Agriculture, in consultation and
37 cooperation with the State Agriculture Development Committee, the
38 New Jersey Farm Bureau, the county boards of agriculture, Rutgers
39 the State University, the New Jersey Agricultural Society, and any
40 other appropriate agricultural, horticultural, or educational entities
41 in the State, shall develop and implement a beginning farmer
42 mentoring program by which experienced farmers would provide
43 guidance, advice, and other appropriate assistance to beginning
44 farmers so that they and their farms may succeed and thrive. The
45 department shall develop the structure of the beginning farmer
46 mentoring program and the roles the agricultural, horticultural, and
47 educational organizations and entities shall serve within it.

1 b. The department:

2 (1) shall incorporate into the beginning farmer mentoring
3 program any online linking services and resources established by
4 the department, and shall develop further avenues and opportunities
5 for, experienced farmers to mentor beginning farmers, including
6 establishing criteria for mentoring and the eligibility of farmers to
7 mentor or be mentored under the program; and

8 (2) may partner with appropriate public or private organizations
9 or entities to accomplish the purposes of this act, including entering
10 into agreements or contracts with those organizations or entities to
11 operate the program, in whole or in part, under the general
12 supervision of the department.

13 c. The department shall adopt, pursuant to the “Administrative
14 Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), any rules and
15 regulations necessary to implement this act.

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17 3. This act shall take effect immediately

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STATEMENT

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22 This bill would require the Department of Agriculture, in
23 consultation and cooperation with the State Agriculture
24 Development Committee, the New Jersey Farm Bureau, the county
25 boards of agriculture, Rutgers the State University, the New Jersey
26 Agricultural Society, and any other appropriate agricultural,
27 horticultural, or educational entities in the State, to develop and
28 implement a beginning farmer mentoring program by which
29 experienced farmers would provide guidance, advice, and other
30 appropriate assistance to beginning farmers so that they and their
31 farms may succeed and thrive.

32 The bill also would authorize the department to partner with
33 appropriate public or private organizations or entities to accomplish
34 the purposes of the bill, including entering into agreements or
35 contracts with those organizations or entities to operate the
36 program, in whole or in part, under the general supervision of the
37 department.

38 This bill is necessary because, according to the latest available
39 data, in New Jersey the average age of the principal operator of a
40 farm rose from 57 years in 2007 to 59 years in 2012. A similar
41 trend is occurring nationally. Farming is unlikely to survive in New
42 Jersey if this trend continues. Thus, it is necessary to create a
43 mentoring program whereby experienced farmers can impart their
44 knowledge to beginning farmers so that they will have a greater
45 chance to succeed, thus ensuring that agriculture will continue to be
46 a major industry in the State, in both the near and distant future.