

NJDA, Vegetable Growers Merge Convention

Jeff Beach, NJDA

Two of New Jersey agriculture's most influential annual gatherings are joining forces for the first time in January 2012 to create a formidable showcase of the Garden State's agrarian advances.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) and the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey (VGANJ) jointly announced the merging of their respective conventions into one massive convention/trade show. While both groups will conduct separate programs, the combined convention will appeal to New Jersey's diverse agricultural industry by promoting greater participation and interaction among a wider cross-section of industry members from all sectors.

The convention/trade show is slated for the week of January 16, 2012 at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City.

Held since 1914, the NJDA conducts a legally mandated annual convention of the state's entire agricultural industry. As specified under New Jersey statutes, each year delegates representing all sectors of the industry must gather to elect two members to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, elect farmer-members to the Fish and Game Council, and set agricultural policy for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture through a series of formal resolutions voted on by the delegates.

Founded in 1955, the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey's mission is to disseminate knowledge of the growing and marketing of vegetables through cooperation with the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension, the New Jersey and U.S. Departments of Agriculture, and all other existing organizations and committees working for or interested in the vegetable industry of the Garden State.

Each year, the VGANJ hosts a convention/trade show where farmers attend educational sessions, earn continuing education credits, and learn about the latest advances in fruit and vegetable research. The New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and Rutgers Cooperative Extension plan and coordinate these sessions.

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher said the State Board determined that a VGANJ proposal to merge the conventions would benefit all sectors of New Jersey agriculture by bringing the policy aspects of the State Convention together with the broader educational elements of the VGANJ gathering.

"Our convention is all about hearing the opinions and views of members of New Jersey's agricultural community to help us best utilize the Department's resources to serve this very important industry," Secretary Fisher said. "We welcome the opportunity to widen the scope of attendees and expand our ability to hold listening sessions. Hopefully, everyone will find the additional seminars and a trade show beneficial in helping them improve their individual operations."

VGANJ President Joe Marino added that combining the conventions also will help the state's farmers stay abreast of recent developments even in tougher economic times.

“The recent economic climate has made it tough for farm families to expend the money to attend numerous conventions and trade shows typically held during the off-season,” Marino said. “We hope that by combining two events into one, convention participants will experience a greater value in attending. If this proves successful, we hope that other New Jersey agricultural entities will want to join us, and make this convention the one ‘must-attend’ event of the year.”