ASSEMBLY, No. 5475

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 15, 2021

Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman LISA SWAIN
District 38 (Bergen and Passaic)
Assemblyman RONALD S. DANCER
District 12 (Burlington, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean)
Assemblywoman ANGELA V. MCKNIGHT
District 31 (Hudson)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson

SYNOPSIS

Directs Department of Agriculture to establish New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/24/2021)

AN ACT concerning the establishment of a New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry and supplementing Title 4 of the Revised Statutes.

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

1. a. The Department of Agriculture shall establish a New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry. Through the Farm Liaison designated pursuant to section 1 of P.L.2019, c.94 (C.4:1-48), the department shall:

(1) coordinate outreach to minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, and other farmers in the State who have been historically underserved by farm loan assistance programs, and programs for beginning farmer loans, emergency farm loans, farm loan servicing, farm operating loans, guaranteed farm loans, direct operating loans, direct farm ownership down payment loans, microloans, and other business assistance offered to farmers in the State;

(2) register minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, and historically underserved farmers to receive notification of opportunities to apply for such loans and participate in such programs;

(3) assist in the prioritization of registry applications for minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, and historically underserved farmers;

(4) provide each State registrant with information concerning the federal USDA register; and

(5) provide each State registrant the opportunity to register with the federal USDA register.

b. In cooperation with other State agencies, departments, independent authorities, and lending institutions in the State, the department shall assist each State registrant to apply for assistance programs, farm loan programs, beginning farmer loans, emergency farm loans, farm loan servicing, farm operating loans, guaranteed farm loans, direct operating loans, direct farm ownership down payment loans, microloans, and other business assistance available to farmers in the State.

c. To the greatest extent possible, the department shall ensure the criteria for inclusion in the New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry is the same as the criteria for inclusion in the federal USDA register so that any State registrant may be included in both registries. Whenever the criteria for inclusion in the federal USDA register is updated to include any additional individuals or groups of farmers, the department shall update accordingly the criteria for inclusion in the State registry and coordinate outreach to the additional individuals or groups of farmers.

d. Not more than 180 days after the establishment of the State registry, and every 180 days thereafter, the department shall:

(1) review and compare the State registrants with the farmers who have registered on the federal USDA register;

(2) notify any State registrant not also registered with the federal USDA register of the benefits of registering with the federal USDA register; and

(3) encourage the State registrant to register with the federal USDA register.

e. The department, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), may adopt rules and regulations necessary to implement this act.

f. As used in this section:

"Department" means the Department of Agriculture.

"Federal USDA register" means the United States Department of Agriculture Minority Farm Register and any other similar register for minority, women, and socially disadvantaged farmers, administered by the Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture.

"LGBTQIA+" means a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, genderqueer, queer, intersex, agender, asexual, questioning, and other non-heterosexual-identifying community.

"State registrant" means a minority, woman, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, or historically underserved farmer registered with the New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry established pursuant to subsection a. of section 1 of this act.

"State registry" means the New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry established pursuant to subsection a. of section 1 of this act.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill directs the Department of Agriculture to establish a New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry. Through the Farm Liaison designated by the Secretary of Agriculture, the bill directs the department to:

1) coordinate outreach to minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, and socially disadvantaged farmers in the State who have been historically underserved by farm loan assistance programs, and programs for beginning farmer loans, emergency farm loans, farm loan servicing, farm operating loans, guaranteed farm loans, direct operating loans, direct farm ownership down

payment loans, microloans, and other business assistance available to farmers in the State;

2) register minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, and historically underserved farmers to receive notification of opportunities to apply for such loans and participate in such programs;

3) assist in the prioritization of registry applications of minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, socially disadvantaged, and historically underserved farmers;

4) provide each registrant with information concerning the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) minority farm register; and

(5) provide each registrant the opportunity to register with the USDA minority farm register.

The bill also provides that, 180 days after the establishment of the State registry, and every 180 days thereafter, the department would be required to:

1) review and compare the State registrants with the farmers who have registered with the USDA federal register;

2) notify any State registrant that is not registered with the federal USDA register of the benefits of being registered with both registers; and

3) encourage the State registrant to register with the federal USDA register.

Furthermore, the bill provides that, to the greatest extent possible, the department would ensure that the criteria for inclusion in the New Jersey Minority, Women, and Underserved Farmer Registry is the same as the criteria for inclusion in the federal USDA register so that any State registrant may be included in both registries. The bill also provides that, whenever the criteria for inclusion in the federal USDA register is updated to include any additional individuals or groups of farmers, the department shall update accordingly the criteria for inclusion in the State registry and coordinate outreach to the additional individuals or groups of farmers.

The United States Department of Agriculture Minority Farm Register was established to promote inclusion and diversity in the agricultural and horticultural sectors of the nation’s economy. Establishing a parallel registry in the State would include and bolster the participation of New Jersey minority, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, and historically underserved farmers in the available State and federal loan and assistance programs for farmers. The diversification of the types of people involved in farming in the State would strengthen the agricultural and horticultural sectors of the New Jersey economy and would support the goals and efforts of the Vision 2025 plan prepared by the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers, the State University.

The Vision 2025 plan prepared by the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (Rutgers Vision 2025) is a system of responsive, innovative, and inclusive programs, farms, stations, and centers that is prioritizing investments in infrastructure, information technology, and equipment designed to enable the expansion and development of cutting-edge programs. The New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station's programs, farms, stations, and centers are designed to be national models of responsive, innovative, and inclusive research, education, and outreach that can address grand challenges of the State and broader society, as well as being known for the sustainable management of the land and natural resources these efforts encompass.

A primary focus of the Rutgers Vision 2025 is to evaluate as assets the inclusion of qualified people with the needed skills to deliver new and expanded programs and foster diversity in developing and strengthening the agricultural and horticultural sectors in the State.