SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 4231

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 9, 2021

The Senate Environment and Energy Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 4231.

This bill would create a grant program within the Department of Agriculture (department) to provide matching grants to the owner or operator of (1) unpreserved farmland; (2) a farm for which pinelands development credits have been sold or otherwise conveyed pursuant to the "Pinelands Development Credit Bank Act," P.L.1985, c.310 (C.13:18A-30 et seq.); or (3) a farm that is located in a sending zone pursuant to section 13 of the "Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act," P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-13).

Contingent on available funding, the department would award grants of up to $200 per acre, not to exceed a total of $20,000 per applicant for up to 50 percent of eligible project costs, which would include the cost to purchase deer fencing, the maintenance costs of existing deer fencing, or any other costs established as eligible project costs as defined by the department. To be eligible for the program, an applicant would be required to have a minimum of $10,000 in gross sales in the preceding calendar year from agricultural or horticultural products grown or derived from the applicant's farm operation. A grant recipient would be required to retain the land in agricultural or horticultural production for eight years following receipt of the grant. If a grant recipient does not retain the land in agricultural or horticultural production or sells the land within eight years of receiving the grant, the recipient would be required to repay the grant on a pro rata basis.

The bill would define unpreserved farmland as a commercial farm, as that term is defined in section 3 of P.L.1983, c.31 (C.4:1C-3), on which a development easement has not been conveyed to, or retained by, the State Agriculture Development Committee, a county agriculture development board, a county, a municipality, or a qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization pursuant to any State law enacted for farmland preservation purposes.

The department would be required to request annually, as part of its budget proposal, such amount as may be necessary to fund the deer fencing matching grant program. The department would also be required to work with the Division of Fish and Wildlife in the Department of Environmental Protection, the United States

Department of Agriculture, and any other applicable State or federal agency, to pursue any available federal, State, local, and private funding for the grant program. The department would be required to adopt rules and regulations to implement the grant program.