

December 11, 2019
Testimony
Rep. Jeff Van Drew

Member Day – House Committee on Agriculture

I represent New Jersey's second congressional district which encompasses over 40 percent of the state's land mass and my district is a leader in the state across most crops for market value of agricultural products sold.

Many times when we think of New Jersey we forget it is "The Garden State" and even fewer know that nickname comes from a 19th century southern Jersey farmer named Abraham Browning.

Mr. Browning coined the term when describing New Jersey when two-thirds of the state's landmass was rolling farmland.

Today, New Jersey's second congressional district, my home, is responsible for forty-eight percent of the state's total agricultural sales.

As the state's economy has changed, New Jersey's agricultural industry is still the state's third largest industry and in South Jersey, the importance of the agriculture economy cannot be overstated.

In order to continue to help and support our farmers and their families, I would like to highlight three areas that I believe are vital for the continued growth and success of our agriculture economy.

Rural Development

Having over 40% of the land mass of any state means you will have rural parts to your district no matter where you come from.

My district encompasses 8 counties and 92 towns, where the eastern shore is beaches and aquaculture, and the western mainland is farmland and agriculture.

These hard working communities need our support for continued economic growth and support.

For example, rural towns such as the Borough of Woodbine and Downe Township have been the recipients of USDA Rural Development Grants for Water and Waste Removal.

For communities such as these, where they are below sea-level and flooding can be a major problem, these systems are vital.

We need to continue to support our farmers and rural communities and provide them with the tools and technology that is commonly afforded to non-rural areas.

Broadband

I am proud to support the ReConnect Program, which helps support our rural communities get access to broadband internet access.

Although New Jersey is rarely thought of as rural, where I come many of our rural communities have been lacking in access.

This has been an issue I have cared about over my career, taking on the issue as a State Senator as well.

The importance of this program and similar programs to do business, access opportunities in education, and receive specialized health care in rural America today cannot be understated.

The broadband programs that Rural Development administers continue to have strong interest from rural communities who are looking to either obtain or improve access to broadband.

Research

Research is vital for the continued growth of our agriculture industry, whether it is to grow more efficient crops or it is in search of disease resistant crop strains.

One of the countries prominent research facilities is Rutgers University, a land grant institute that has been doing great work for our farmers.

A research effort that has been extremely successful in New Jersey was to study the impact of Fairy Ring Disease in Cranberries.

Cranberries are one of New Jersey's top crops and the State ranks 3rd in the country for sales.

I would like to thank Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Conaway for this opportunity.

These priorities in research, rural development and access to broadband highlight the importance of the work being done in the agriculture industry; and help to ensure New Jersey stays the Garden State for generations to come.