

ASSEMBLY AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO
ASSEMBLY, No. 4036

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 19, 2022

The Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 4036.

This bill, as amended, requires the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to conduct a review and issue a written report regarding the State Farmland Preservation Program.

The review would examine the financial and performance records over the last ten years of the Farmland Preservation Program. The review would also examine the acquisition and management of preserved farmland, the finances and staffing of the Farmland Preservation Program, and a comparison of the committee's practices and internal performance metrics with neighboring states.

Following the review, the committee would prepare a written report that would include, among other things:

(1) a historical breakdown of the previous ten years of the Farmland Preservation Program, including the timeline of each application, the number and reasoning behind failed preservation applications, the amount paid to farmers for preserved farmland, and any violations of deeds of easement;

(2) an annual breakdown of the previous ten years of each county in the State on the acreage of the farmland acquired, the types of agricultural activities and crops on that farmland, and whether the farmland is located in the pinelands area, the Highlands planning area, or the Highlands preservation area;

(3) an annual breakdown of the previous ten years of federal and State funding for farmland acquisition, separated by total, expended, encumbered, and uncommitted funds, with each fiscal year tracked separately;

(4) any additional details on the administrative budget of the Farmland Preservation Program, including, but not limited to, advertising, travel, training, and subscription costs;

(5) a detailed breakdown, by category, of the full-time equivalent staff for the Farmland Preservation Program and whether the full-time equivalent staff positions are filled or unfilled;

(6) an overview of the SADC's practices and internal performance metrics and a comparison of such practices and metrics with neighboring states;

(7) recommendations on how the committee can improve the efficiency and pace at which farms can be preserved under the Farmland Preservation Program; and

(8) a study of the outstanding land in the State that may be preserved and an aggregate assessed value of that land.

The report required by this bill would be submitted to the Governor and the Legislature no later than 90 days following the enactment of this bill.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amendments:

1) clarify language in the findings and declarations concerning the decline in the average yearly acreage of preserved farmland;

2) require the SADC report include identification of whether farmland is located in the pinelands area, the Highlands planning area, or the Highlands preservation area; and

3) make technical corrections to subsection c. of section 2 of the bill.