

Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire
Chris Sununu
Governor

Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food
Shawn N. Jasper
Commissioner

Vol. 98

Thursday, January 2, 2019

No. 1



From Your Commissioner

Vacant Positions and Unexpended Appropriations

By the time you read this, another year will have ended. While it has been a good year for the department, we still have much work to do. I never would have believed that after two years on the job, we would still have positions left to fill. I have been scratching my head about how that is possible. That head scratching got me looking into where we are with vacancies, posting of positions and new hires. Once I figured it all out, it makes a bit more sense.

Part of the challenge of running any department in the state, is that departments are expected to lapse (turn back to the treasury) a set percentage of the annual appropriation. In our case that works out to \$250,000 per year, in each of the next two years. For a number of reasons, I would never expect to fully spend our total appropriation of about seven million dollars a year. However, to turn back 3.5% of the appropriation, is a challenge for a department where the lion's share of the spending is made up in personnel costs, contracts and grants.

Over the past few years, we have more than met our lapse numbers due to vacant positions. This has put a real strain on the ability of our employees to do everything expected of them. While I doubt that it was ever intended to work out that way, it has been our reality. As much as I have tried to fill all our vacancies, it just hasn't happened. But I am determined to see all the vacancies filled within the next few months.

In this budget, which began officially on October 1st, we have one part-time position to fill in the Division of Agricultural Development. That is a new position and the job description needs to be approved before it can be posted. We have one position, which will be transitioning to a vacancy in the Division of Weights and Measures, which will open-up a position in the Commissioner's Office. That will still leave a position open in Weights and Measures, but that job will be left vacant for a few more months, as out of seven authorized positions, only two have been there for more than seven months.

Regulatory Service was fully staffed for a short while, but, due to a resignation, we have a vacancy in that division. Hopefully, we will be able to fill that position this week. The Division of Pesticides has two vacancies. One is due to a retirement and one is a new position created in this budget and funded by fees. This new position will bring the division back to the staffing levels of ten years ago. We hope to have one of the positions filled very shortly.

In the Division of Animal Industry, there is a new Veterinarian Technician position. This position was created to deal with the changes to the pet vending law, which will result in many more pet vendors being licensed. The application deadline for this position closes on Friday and as I write this, we have

17 applicants. I am pleased to say that since I have been Commissioner, there have been no vacancies in the Division of Plant Industry.

All of this means that we currently have a vacancy rate of about 15% or six full-time positions, of which two are new positions. As it is so late in the fiscal year, even if we fill all our vacancies soon, we will still meet our lapse numbers and then some. However, if that happens, meeting next year's goal may not be easy. I don't know what will happen if the goal isn't met and I hope I don't have to find out. Happy New Year!

Shawn N. Jasper – Commissioner