Spotlight on the Rutgers Student Organic Farm

“Providing fresh, locally grown produce all summer long to a population hungry for a homegrown experience.” It reads like a slogan, doesn’t it? And it’s an apt one for the Rutgers Cook Student Organic Farm. Located on five acres off Ryders Lane in New Brunswick, the farm – believed to be the largest student-run organic farm in the country – has been operating since 1993. Student interns staff the farm, which in turn provides jobs for those who have an interest in sustainable agriculture.

The idea of community-supported agriculture, or CSA, has been a farmer’s best friend for almost two decades, but farm director Ed Durner noted the movement is enjoying a burst of popularity as interest in eating locally grown food swells. According to Local Harvest, an organic and local-food website, about 50 farms nationwide offered shares in 1990; the number is closer to 2,200 today.

In 2009, 175 shareholders will take part in the CSA project at Rutgers with some 400 names on a waiting list. Durner receives up to three calls or emails daily from area residents begging to become part of the trend. “People are becoming more and more educated about where their food is coming from, and about the benefits of eating organically,” the Rutgers researcher said. Books by such mainstream writers as Barbara Kingsolver and Michael Pollan also help fuel the movement, Durner added.

By selling “shares” in its harvest, the Cook Student Organic Farm represents a win-win-win situation for the university. The farm is guaranteed an annual income, enough to keep it self-sustaining; students who till the land as interns learn the joys and challenges of working on an organic farm; and consumers reap the best of the farm’s harvest on a weekly basis.

Every Thursday afternoon or Friday morning throughout the growing season, members drive up to a shed on Rutgers Horticulture Farm No. 3 at 67 Ryders Lane to pick out their harvest from bins and shelves piled high with colorful fruits and vegetables.

The cost to join the Cook CSA this year is $430 for a 16-week share (June through September) or $650 for a 24-week share (June through November). Last year, the basic fee of $400 bought $1,070 worth of produce compared with prices at Whole Foods or Wegmans, Durner said. It also bought a taste of the lesser-known crops New Jersey farmers harvest every year; for example, minutia, a crunchy lettuce that resembles a blade of grass with saw teeth, and claytonia, a green high in vitamin C.

Any left-over produce goes to Elijah’s Promise Soup Kitchen in New Brunswick.
Spotlight on Gates Foundation Funding

Research on health and wellness is among the top priorities of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, and three researchers at the school are receiving support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and collaborating donors for projects to combat threats to world health and hunger, particularly in developing countries. Reflecting Rutgers’ strong land-grant tradition, faculty members pursue mission-based teaching, research, and outreach that address pressing global challenges and provide real-world approaches to complex global problems.

**Eric Lam** (Plant Biology and Pathology; director of the Biotechnology Center for Agriculture and the Environment) is creating a new way to fight infectious disease through an innovative approach to disease prevention using RNA therapeutics and transgenic tomatoes. The Gates Foundation’s Grand Challenges Explorations program has awarded Lam a $100,000 Phase I grant.

**Carl Pray** (Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics) wants to improve decision making on policies and investments in agricultural research, development, and innovation. With $500,000 from the Gates Foundation, Pray is leading a team from the United States, Canada, Europe, and developing countries that will collect and analyze data on private sector agricultural R&D and innovation.

**Ilya Raskin** (Plant Biology and Pathology; Biotechnology Center for Agriculture and the Environment) is leading an effort to discover new drugs derived from botanical sources to treat malaria. In 2005, Gates committed $100 million over five years to then Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMW), a nonprofit foundation supporting the development of new, affordable anti-malarial drugs. With more than $340,000 per year, the MMV is funding the U.S./South Africa Antimalarial Drug Consortium led by Raskin.

Celebrating the Cook College Class of 2009

The Cook College Graduation Convocation was held on May 22. Hundreds of graduating seniors accepted their diplomas on the banks of Passion Puddle on the G. H. Cook Campus. Dale Cruzan III, a former national FFA award recipient, served as the Class of 2009 representative. This year’s graduation speaker was Steven J. Mento, president, CEO, co-founder, and chairman of the board of Conatus Pharmaceuticals, Inc., who holds bachelor of arts, master of science, and doctoral degrees in microbiology with an emphasis in virology from Rutgers.
Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments

The Solid Waste Resource Renewal Group at Rutgers NJAES received a 2009 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2 Environmental Quality Award and was honored at a ceremony on April 24 in New York City. The EPA describes this award as “the highest recognition presented to the public by our office. Award recipients come from all sectors of our community, including non-profit, environmental and community groups, individual citizens, environmental education and business organizations and members of the news media.”

The 2009 National Association of County Agricultural Agents Search for Excellence honored two New Jersey teams from the school and experiment station. The winning entry under Search for Excellence in Young, Beginning, or Small Farmers/Ranchers was “Animal waste management plans for New Jersey animal producers/self certified.” Team members were Bob Mickel (Hunterdon County agricultural and resource management agent), Stephen Komar (Sussex County agricultural and resource management agent), Bill Bamka (Burlington County agricultural and resource management agent), Dave Lee (Salem County agricultural and resource management agent), Michael Westendorf (Animal Sciences), and Carey Williams (Animal Sciences). The winning entry under Search for Excellence in Livestock Production was “Meat goat production school, marketing project and consumer/producer survey.” Team members were Bob Mickel and Stephen Komar.

Outreach Efforts: Public/Community Service

Daniela Sharma (Animal Sciences) is part of a team led by Lisa Karr-Lilienthal from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and by Amy Fischer, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, which is collaborating on a proposal to create an eXtension Community of Practice for Companion Animals via eXtension.org. Their proposal will be funded at $75,000 over three years. This resource will help to deliver easy-access online extension material and will offer experts across the country to assist with material development and answer user questions.

Integrated Pest Management Training
Rutgers Cooperative Extension personnel continue to collaborate with the New Jersey Environmental Federation, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and others to develop and conduct IPM training sessions focusing on the landscape and turf component for school district IPM programs. Two sessions were recently held in Jackson and Jersey City, in which Richard Weidman (Middlesex County agriculture associate) gave presentations on turf and landscape management. Overall evaluations were extremely positive, noting the knowledge of the speakers and the value of the information.

NJAES Water Resources staff participated in a number of collaborative events in April:
- Madeline Flahive DiNardo, Greg Rusciano, and Amy Boyajian partnered with Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension to present several rain garden site selection, installation, and maintenance sessions as well as “Train-the-trainer” sessions for professional landscapers, master gardeners, and others in Frederick County, Virginia.
• Madeline Flahive DiNardo, Amy Boyajian, and Jillian Thompson installed a demonstration rain garden at the Summit Middle School on April 21–22 in Summit, Union County for middle school students and environmental action club participants.
• Amy Boyajian presented “Stormwater 101” and “Rain garden site selection and installation” as part of the Stormwater Management in Your Backyard program for the Master Gardeners of Union County on April 28 at Trailside Nature Center in Mountainside.

Promoting Farm Safety
Agriculture is among the most dangerous occupations and farm equipment is implicated as one of the greatest hazards on a farm. Reducing other hazards can make farm work safer for both family workers and hired help. Raymond Samulis (Burlington County agricultural and resource management agent), has conducted training sessions, twilight meetings, proper pesticide handling and application sessions, youth safety trainings, and other demonstrations to address farm safety. Participating groups have included local farmers, cranberry growers, vegetable growers, local cooperatives, Junior Breeders groups, sweet corn growers, and farm children. Total attendance to date exceeds 650 producers and farm families. With funding from the Burlington County Board of Agriculture, these training sessions are held in collaboration with the Burlington County Fire Training Academy and the Burlington County Farm Bureau Women.

Mark Your Calendar!
Rutgers’ pioneering role in mosquito control will be highlighted as part of the Executive Dean’s Distinguished Lecture series. Gordon M. Patterson, professor of history at Florida Tech will deliver the Distinguished Lecture in Entomology on June 22 in a presentation titled “Waging war on the insect menace: Rutgers and the origins of the American anti-mosquito crusade.” Members of the agriculture community are invited to attend this free lecture and reception, starting at 3 p.m. in the Neilson Dining Hall, on the George H. Cook Campus, New Brunswick. Please contact Patricia Kastner by email at kastner@sebs.rutgers.edu or by calling 732-932-7000, ext. 4211.

Practical Hive Management Tools for Beekeepers: Beyond the Basics
WHEN: June 11–12 in Bridgeton OR June 19–20 in Pittstown, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
WHAT: These two-day hands-on instructional programs are designed for apiarists who have knowledge of the industry and have kept a colony for at least one (1) full year.
MORE INFO: Contact Jenna Kimock at ocpe@njaes.rutgers.edu, 732-932-9271

Communicating Conservation to Citizens
WHEN: June 29, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
WHERE: Horticulture Farm 2 - Ralph Geiger Turfgrass Education Center
WHAT: Lecture and seminar sponsored by the NJAES Office of Continuing Professional Education
MORE INFO: Contact Jenna Kimock, ocpe@njaes.rutgers.edu, 732-932-9271

This report is produced by the Office of Communications. For information or to provide comments, please contact Paula Walcott-Quintin at quintin@aesop.rutgers.edu or 732-932-7000, ext. 4204.