A six-year NJDEP study on comparative risk from environmental stressors, completed in March 2003, concluded that the top four environmental issues in New Jersey were land use change, indoor pollution, invasive species, and outdoor air pollution. As concerns surrounding environmental issues grew statewide, there was also growing recognition that, in sharp contrast to agriculture, there was no extension program integrating research and extension with public input on the issue of environmental stewardship, using a similar hierarchy of advisory groups.

A comprehensive needs assessment of environmental issues on the local and state levels, along with extensive interaction with nonprofit environmental groups in the state, showed a distinct need for trained volunteers who could assume leadership roles with regards to environmental stewardship. This led to the formation of the Rutgers Environmental Stewards, a structured, citizen volunteer program focused on the environment, which would provide “training and experience to solve environmental problems in New Jersey.” Under the program, trained volunteers would work on and advocate for the stewardship of public lands from positions in county and state government, on municipal environmental commissions, planning boards, and zoning boards.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension has formed a partnership with Duke Farms to create a statewide Environmental Stewardship certification program. Collaborators in this partnership include the NJDEP, New Jersey Audubon Society, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, and a rapidly expanding list of environmentally-related organizations from government, academia, and the non-profit community.

An advisory council of internal and external stakeholders was formed to guide the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program and regional instruction locations were established. The program includes four phases: Environmental Education Immersion Series, Volunteerism & Internship, Advanced Training in Environmental Issue Resolution, and Veteran Educator Volunteer. Among the goals are for graduates to acquire the tools to monitor and assess the health of the environment and understand the relevant environmental research and regulatory infrastructure of the state and federal agencies operating in New Jersey.

By the end of 2008, regional classes conducted over the preceding four years provided 660 hours of training to 178 students. The Rutgers Environmental Stewards Program won the 2007 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Achievement Award for Environmental Education.
Spotlight on Dean’s Cabinet Farm Tour

On May 29, members of the Executive Dean’s Cabinet participated in a day-long tour of five farms in central and northern New Jersey, viewing firsthand the diversity of agricultural activities in the region and learning about the challenges and opportunities from owners.

First stop: Peaceful Valley Orchards in Pittstown, a 150-acre fruit and vegetable farm, compete with farm stand, run by a young couple who incorporates IPM as the primary management strategy of their operations. The Orchards is a ‘host farm’ for America’s Grow A Row, where volunteers tend and harvest a portion of the farm’s produce for donation to local food pantries, among others.

Next Stop: Melick’s Town Farm in Oldwick, a large tree fruit, multi-generational family operation that traces its roots to about 1725. This 300-acre operation has multiple locations in central and northern New Jersey, including a Cider Mill & Orchards in Oldwick, the Califon Farm Market & Orchards, and the Bridgewater Farm Market.

Lunch and tour of Readington River Buffalo Company, a 230-acre bison farm in rural Flemington founded in 1996 and dedicated to raising buffalo, more accurately known as American bison. The only buffalo farm in New Jersey, the company is capitalizing on this niche market for low fat, red meat.

Woodedge Wool Farm in Stockton has over 300 llamas and alpacas from which fine quality wools are harvested for local and export markets. Woodedge, which was established in 1976, boasts one of the largest herds of suri llamas in the world and is the first alpaca breeding farm in the state. On the day of the tour, the latest addition to the alpaca herd was born.

Honey Brook Organic Farm in Pennington is one of the oldest operating organic farms in New Jersey, farming in part on rented Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association lands. Honey Brook is the oldest certified organic Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in the state.
Food Innovation Center Wins Economic Development Award

Rutgers NJAES Food Innovation Center (FIC) was named the recipient of this year’s Economic Development Achievement Award by PlanSmart NJ, the premier land use planning organization in New Jersey. As described by PlanSmart NJ, the Economic Development Achievement Award is “designed to honor those that have demonstrated outstanding leadership in promoting economic development in a way that is respectful of the principles of smart growth – improving the regional economic base, whether for an urban, suburban or rural area; connecting jobs to housing and transportation; promoting growth in areas where infrastructure is planned or already exists; and promotes opportunities for all New Jersey residents.” The FIC is a unique business incubation and economic development program, providing expertise to startup and established food companies in the mid-Atlantic region, and with the capacity to reach food and agribusinesses throughout the world. The center provides assistance in business development, market research, product and process development, workforce development and training, regulations and compliance support, and quality assurance and food safety systems. FIC will be presented this competitive award at PlanSmart NJ’s Annual Dinner in October.

Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments

A.J. Both (associate extension specialist in controlled–environment engineering) presented “Alternative Energy Applications” and “Hydronic Lettuce Production” at the 9th Annual Greenhouse Crop Production and Engineering Design Short Course organized by the Controlled Environment Agriculture Center at the University of Arizona from April 26–29.

Chad Ripberger (Mercer County 4-H agent) and Sharon Gore (Mercer County 4-H program associate) coordinated a Get Moving–Get Healthy (GMGH) Food and Fitness Ambassador Training for teenagers and staff from Boys and Girls Club of Trenton, the Martin House Learning Center, and NJ Youth Corps of Trenton at the Trenton Marriott, April 25-26. Members of the GMGH team presenting the training included Annette Devitt (Salem County 4-H agent), Sharon Gore (Mercer County 4-H program associate), Abbie Kesely (Middlesex County 4-H program assistant), and Terri Yost (Morris County 4-H program associate).

Gef Flimlin (Ocean County marine extension agent) was appointed to represent the Northeastern Regional Aquaculture Center on the National Steering Committee for the National Aquaculture Extension Conference.

Nicholas Polanin (Somerset County agricultural and resource management agent) was selected to serve as the North East Region Vice-Chair for the Horticulture/Turfgrass Committee of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA). Daniel Kluchinski (ARMA department chair) was selected to serve as North East Region Vice–Chair and National Committee Chair for the Early Career Development Committee of NACAA.
Outreach Efforts: Public/Community Service

Land Application of Organic Wastes

Uta Krogmann (extension specialist for solid waste management) has been working with extension agents, NJDEP, NJDA, municipalities, and academia in New Jersey and around the region, to provide recent information about land application of biosolids and local organic wastes such as cranberry skins. Krogman and various collaborators have developed agricultural guidelines for the Northeast with its unique soil conditions, farming practices, and demographic factors. For example, an assessment of chemical, physical, and biological soil properties showed that careful evaluation of the application rate of novel organic wastes is necessary before being used due to their potential environmental and plant impacts.

Osprey Restoration Project

Richard Mohr (Ocean County agricultural agent) partnered with Project Urban Suburban Environments (Project USE) to facilitate an osprey restoration project as a training experience for eight new Project USE instructors. The training included having the instructors construct and place a new nesting platform on municipal property in Point Pleasant, NJ, in cooperation with the local environmental commission and the city council. Gratifyingly, a pair of osprey took up housekeeping within two weeks of the project.

Communicating Tree Value

Nicholas Polanin (Somerset County agricultural agent) facilitated “Tree Inventory: Communicating Tree Value,” a seminar and workshop at the RCE of Burlington County in Westampton, NJ. Partnering with the NJ Community Forestry Program and the NJ Tree Foundation, this full day seminar presented several topics, including the need for a municipal and county street and park tree inventory, the tools and data needed to complete an inventory, working with volunteers, seeking funding assistance and sources, why do an inventory, and an outdoor lab to experience data collection and tree assessment.

Mark Your Calendar!

County Fairs

It’s that time of year! County Fairs will be blanketing the state during the months of July and August. For summer fun and excitement, take part in a County Fair near you!

Animal Waste Management Training Workshops

WHEN: July through August
WHERE: Various county locations
WHAT: These workshops are designed to assist livestock owners and manure handlers to comply with the newly enacted Animal Waste Law.
MORE INFO: The Animal Waste Management website has specific dates and county locations.

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.