Executive Dean of Agriculture and Natural Resources Robert M. Goodman hosted USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan during a visit to New Jersey on October 14. Merrigan was accompanied by New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher, as she toured New Jersey and visited the Rutgers G. H Cook Campus. She spoke to faculty and staff of the School of Biological and Environmental Sciences about “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food,” a new USDA initiative that is designed to connect people to their local and regional food systems.

The Deputy Secretary noted the current high consumer interest and demand for locally grown fresh food as providing the ideal opportunity “to bridge the disconnect between agriculture and the public.” Merrigan added, “Not every family needs an accountant, not every family needs a lawyer, but every family needs a farmer.” She detailed several components of the program including investing in rural farms and communities; promoting direct marketing; supporting local and regional farmers; and promoting healthy eating, including USDA’s own efforts to serve healthier meals at its cafeterias. The Deputy Secretary stressed the need for continuing the national dialogue on “the future of American agriculture, not only its problems, but also its opportunities.” The USDA launched the [www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer](http://www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer) website to promote the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food,” initiative on September 24.

Prior to coming to the USDA, Merrigan served in high level administrative and policy-making roles in agriculture, in both government and the private sector. She is a former assistant professor and director of the Agriculture, Food, and Environment M.S. and Ph.D. Program in the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University.
**Spotlight on Promising Grass Pellet Biofuel Project**

An innovative and promising grass pellet biofuel project was undertaken this summer by Rutgers NJAES faculty and several New Jersey cooperators. Rodger Jany (Mercer County Rutgers Cooperative Extension agricultural assistant), and Zane Helsel (extension specialist in agriculture energy), worked alongside New Jersey hay producers, Joseph DeSandre, Jr. of Cranbury and Paul Hlubik of Chesterfield, who were solicited by a startup bio-energy company to produce sudangrass for biofuel production.

According to Jany, “The producers planted the sudangrass but just prior to harvest, they were informed that the company could not take delivery of the sudangrass. What then transpired is what we, at Rutgers Cooperative Extension, do on a daily basis – work alongside our varied constituents to find creative solutions to issues within their communities, be it agriculture-related or otherwise.”

A small group was quickly put together to assess the feasibility of making some form of pelletized product from the sudangrass already nearing harvest. Key cooperators in this phase of the project were Mike and Dave Weatherholtz of Notie Corporation in Allentown, NJ. They own a pellet mill typically used to produce hardwood pellets that are sold to the heating market. However, production of hardwood pellets at Notie Corporation has been severely impacted by shrinking sources of sawdust due to the downturn in the economy. In spite of being faced with the unknown regarding whether its mill would actually be able to make pellets from sudangrass, a vastly different product, Notie Corporation nevertheless jumped at the chance to conduct a test run.

But first, the sudangrass needed to be ground to a consistency that could be accepted by the pellet mill. The search for a suitable grinder turned up Dave Forsyth of Wrightstown, NJ. Forsyth is a small New Jersey beef producer who owns a feed grinder...
that was transported by tractor to the Notie Corporation. The sudangrass was successfully ground in the feed grinder and developed into a pelletized product, samples of which were sent to a lab to obtain the heat value and ash content. According to Helsel, “The data showed that the heating value (BTU values) per pound of the pelletized product was very close to what we expected – about 90% that of the wood pellets Notie Corporation has been making – though the ash content was higher than expected.”

In addition to grinding the sudangrass, the collaborative team also attempted to test the suitability of mulch straw to make pellets, since there was an abundant supply of wet and moldy hay, due to the excessive rain this summer. The mulch straw did not adequately bind unless a good amount of sawdust was added. Despite this setback, the collaborators felt that with minor changes, like adding steam, this product might later become suitable for producing pellets.

Of the sudangrass pellet project, Jany indicated that the collaborative team is in the process of locating a tub grinder with the capacity to produce the pellets in commercial quantities. He expressed optimism about the sudangrass and other ag-biomass sourced pellets being a successful biofuel. “We feel that we can make the pellets in the near future under slightly different conditions, based on what we learned in the initial test run and based on conversations with other individuals in the bioheat industry.”
Outreach Efforts: Public/Community Service

Small Farm Equipment Demonstration at the Snyder Farm

On October 12, the Snyder Research and Extension Farm in Pittstown conducted a small farm equipment demonstration for beginning, first-generation, and part-time farmers. The intense, one-day training offered participants an opportunity to gain hands-on knowledge from farm staff, who conducted demonstrations of a variety of equipment used in successful farming operations. According to Jack Rabin, (associate director, Farm Programs at Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Extension Station and Rutgers Cooperative Extension), “One of the important nuances of this program was using our NJAES farming staff team, and not necessarily our faculty, as primary instructors in this outreach effort. Farmers educating farmers is among the most effective ways of learning farming equipment practices.”

Another benefit to the equipment demonstration was that participants were given “the tools to help them make more informed decisions about selecting and investing in equipment necessary to enter profitable smaller-scale or part-time farming in New Jersey,” added Rabin. Practical equipment considerations like cost, value, safety, and convenience, all especially important to small-scale, part-time farmers with limited resources, were highlighted during the equipment demonstration session.
Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments

Mark Robson (Dean of Agricultural and Urban Programs) was selected by the National FFA Organization, formerly known as Future Farmers of America, to receive the Honorary American FFA Degree. The award is given to those who “advance agricultural education and the FFA through outstanding personal commitment.” Robson received the award at the 82nd National FFA Convention held October 21–24 in Indianapolis, IN. The National FFA Organization, which works to advance the lives of youth through agricultural education, has 507,763 student members who are preparing for leadership and careers in science, business, and technology of agriculture. In 1998, the National FFA Organization changed to its current name in recognition of the growth and diversity of agriculture and agricultural education.

Jerome Frecon (Gloucester County agricultural agent and RCE department head) published “The New Jersey Peach Buyers Guide for 2009,” produced in cooperation with the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council. Over 1,400 copies were mailed and distributed to food writers, buyers and all involved in the marketing of New Jersey peaches. The directory of growers, shippers and other peach promotional and marketing information were used to update the New Jersey peach website www.jerseypeaches.com and to print point-of-sale materials for potential buyers.

Jack Rabin (associate director, Farm Programs at Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Extension Station and Rutgers Cooperative Extension) was awarded $35,940 from USDA North East–Sustainable Agriculture Research Education for “Sustaining New Jersey Urban Fringe Agriculture.” The popular website Sustaining Farming on the Urban Fringe provides practical insights for farmers, communities, and policy makers looking to maintain thriving, healthy, durable farms in New Jersey’s densely packed urban fringe. You may visit this extensive, online resource at http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/urbanfringe/.

Mark Your Calendars!

Vegetation Identification for Wetland Delineation
WHEN: November 12–13, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
WHERE: Hort Farm No. 2 - Laws House, 102 Ryders Lane, G. H. Cook campus, New Brunswick
WHAT: Classroom and field course to identify variety of upland and wetland plant species
MORE INFO: Contact Kristyn Saunders 732-932-9271, ext. 643, saunders@njaes.rutgers.edu.

HACCP: A Basic Concept for Food Protection
WHEN: November 18–20, 9: a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
WHERE: Hort Farm No. 2 - Laws House, 102 Ryders Lane, G. H. Cook campus, New Brunswick
WHAT: Workshop on USDA’s Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) program of food inspections
MORE INFO: Contact Kristyn Saunders 732-932-9271, ext. 643, saunders@njaes.rutgers.edu.

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.