Spotlight on First Season of Community Farmers Market

The first season of the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market came to an end on October 17 with a cold, rain-curtailed Harvest Moon Festival which was to feature a whole array of fall activities for the surrounding community that supported the market in its first year of operation. Instead, Jaymie Santiago, manager of the market, expressed the disappointment of the Festival organizers. “It was hardly the festival we had planned. Rather than bobbing for apples, we wished we’d had gallons of hot coffee.” However, one bright spot was the visit of members of the Rutgers Parent Association, which had highlighted the market as part of its weekend activities on campus. The members felt the market was a positive resource that parents could tap into. According to Santiago, “We are exploring the idea of creating “fresh fruit care packages” that the parents could provide for their kids who are students, living on campus.”

This is just one of the innovations that are being explored to sustain the market in the coming years. The market enjoyed some measure of success in its first year, including sponsoring a number of special events designed to attract attention in the community, like a celebration of Mexico’s Independence Day, an ice-cream day, a day honoring children’s soccer teams, and a day on which buses brought senior citizens to visit. “Overall, the community seems pleased with the market,” said Santiago. “Shoppers come and go all afternoon, and we are providing the community with fresh, quality produce, which it would otherwise not have access to. The challenge for this season has been getting the word out. Our focus, now that the market has come to a close, will be to plug-in to every community event and plan outreach activities to keep our presence fresh in the minds of the community.” The market steadily increased its visibility in the community as the month wore on, and this was evident in the sales, which have more than tripled since opening day on July 10, said Santiago.

Operated by Rutgers, in partnership with Johnson & Johnson and the city of New Brunswick, the market was established to provide a convenient location for area residents to purchase fresh produce and to have access to nutritional information, cooking demonstrations, and other community services.

Photos of the market during the summer of 2009!
Spotlight on Coastal Exploration & Amazing Cranberries Tours

The series of Discovery Initiative tours launched this fall by Executive Dean of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Robert M. Goodman, continued during the month of October, with two special tours: Coastal Exploration and Amazing Cranberries!

The second of the tours, “Discovery Tour Coastal Exploration,” was held on October 3 and began at the Jacques Cousteau Coastal Education Center in Tuckerton, which is managed by the Rutgers Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences. The center is a state-of-the-art facility designed primarily to conduct research on the site estuaries and neighboring watersheds.

Next stop was a visit to the Rutgers Marine Field Station in Tuckerton, where Director Ken Able provided an overview of the research being conducted there. Guests were treated to wonderful views of the Little Egg Inlet in the Mullica River-Great Bay estuary, one of the most pristine estuaries on the east coast. The Coastal Exploration tour included a visit to the Surf City Yacht Club on Long Beach Island, which houses one of the many upwellers in which thousands of clams and oysters are being raised for eventual release into the bay and which are maintained by the ReClam the Bay Project.

The third in the series of the fall Discovery tours, “Discovery Tour Amazing Cranberries!” included a visit to the Lee Cranberry Farms in Chatsworth on October 15. Visitors learned about Integrity Propagation, a joint project with Abbott Lee, founder, and Nicholi Vorsa, director of the Rutgers Philip E. Marucci Cranberry and Blueberry Research and Extension Center. Lee and Vorsa talked about the importance of “pure” breeding and planting to ensure crop sustainability and profitability. Tour goers then donned their rain gear to head out to the bogs to see a “wet” cranberry harvest.

During lunch, guests listened to an engaging presentation by Amy Howell, Rutgers research scientist at the Cranberry and Blueberry Research and Extension Center, who explained how cranberries are beneficial and can improve bad cholesterol as well as reduce inflammation.

The tour ended at the Ocean Spray Processing Facility where farmers deliver their fresh-picked cranberries by truck. The cranberries are washed several times and then loaded into wooden crates and immediately shipped to other Ocean Spray processing facilities.
Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments

Stacy Bonos (Plant Biology and Pathology) received the multi-state Plant Breeding Coordinating Committee (PBCC) inaugural Early Career Excellence in Plant Breeding Award this year. As the award recipient, she has been invited to present her research and anchor a round table discussion for graduate students at the 2010 PBCC meeting. For a young scientist, Bonos has a remarkable record. She has developed 14 new plant varieties, mentored many graduate and undergraduate students, written numerous extension and popular publications about how to use the new varieties, and published 36 scientific articles. Read more.

Elwin Orton (Plant Biology & Pathology) was honored for his "Red Beauty Holly" that received a 2010 Gold Medal Plant Award by the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society. This award recognizes superior North American native plant cultivars. The red beauty is not only superior for its beauty but is also 100 percent deer resistant.

Ramu Govindasamy (Agricultural, Food and Resource Economics) and Jim Simon (Plant Biology & Pathology) PIs, are collaborating with multiple RCE agents, Rick VanVranken (Atlantic County agricultural agent), Bill Sciarappa (Monmouth County agricultural agent), Pete Nitzsche (Morris County agricultural agent), and Steven Komar (Sussex County agricultural agent), as well as collaborators from Florida and Massachusetts, on a $1,503,225 specialty crop grant titled “Locally Grown Ethnic Greens and Herbs: Demand assessments and production opportunities for East Coast farmers” from the USDA’s Specialty Crop Research Initiative Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

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.

Carol Byrd-Bredbenner (specialist in Nutrition) received $600,000 for a USDA National Food Safety Initiative titled “Peer Networking and Social Norms Design: Implications for food safety media and behavioral change.”
Outreach Efforts: Public/Community Service

Rabin, J., Jany, R., Schilling, B. & Marxen, L. (2009). Characterizing the modern New Jersey farm landscape: A 2009 assessment. Food Policy Institute Report. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Food Policy Institute. This report comprised the findings of a study, based on case studies by Rabin (associate director of Farm Programs, NJAES), Schilling (Food Policy Institute), Jany (agricultural resource management agent), and Marxen (Food Policy Institute), and was the culmination of a project commissioned by the State Agriculture Development Committee to understand and characterize the contemporary New Jersey farm landscape, with specific intent to measure the extent and nature of built structures and improvements that may result in levels of impervious coverage on commercial farms in various sectors of the industry.

Cesar Rodriguez-Saona (specialist in blueberry/cranberry entomology), Dean Polk (IPM agent), Faruque Zaman and Gene Rizio (Tree Fruit IPM program associates), conducted a workshop on “Blueberry IPM” on September 21 at Perry Acres Farm in Berks County, PA. The workshop was sponsored by a USDA Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant.

Luanne Hughes (Gloucester County FCHS educator), Linda Strieter (4-H agent), and Mary Cummings (agricultural program associate) reported a successful 7th season of the award-winning “Seeds to Success” youth farmstand project. Seeds to Success is Gloucester County’s youth farmstand project that prepares at-risk youth for the workforce through classroom and on-the-job training. Seeds to Success offers a variety of lessons in Bankbridge Regional and Glassboro, Paulsboro, and Woodbury High Schools. During the summer, students apply this knowledge at the Glassboro, Paulsboro and Woodbury youth farmstands, where students truly experience the many aspects of the day-to-day operations of a retail entrepreneurial enterprise. The project had four key goals: provide workforce preparation to teens in its target communities; create retail outlets that bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers; teach teens valuable life skills; and offer service learning and economic development opportunities. By the project’s end, over 200 youth had demonstrated improved skills and competencies in such areas as money management, food and nutrition knowledge and skills, customer service, safe food handling techniques, and a significant number of workplace skills. The farmstands are a unique example of economic development in at-risk communities. And, they support local farmers by offering new outlets to sell their crops at competitive, profitable prices.

Maria Young (Passaic County FCHS educator) conducted the “Passaic County Residents Eat Jersey Fresh Produce For Good Health” project that reached over 1,000 county residents over the summer. The project, intended to demonstrate how to maximize food dollars by encouraging New Jersey residents to shop for locally grown produce, was funded by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the Passaic County Board of Agriculture.

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.