Spotlights

Rutgers Plant Breeders Are Hall of Fame Inductees

**William Meyer** (professor and director of the Rutgers Turfgrass Breeding Project) was presented with the 2009 New Jersey Turfgrass Association Hall of Fame Award on December 9 in recognition of an outstanding career that has included more than 20 years as a corporate president and head of the world’s largest private turfgrass breeding program in Oregon. For the past 15 years, Meyer has led the Rutgers turfgrass breeding program, releasing more than 300 turfgrass cultivars that are grown world-wide. **Elwin Orton** (professor emeritus, Plant Biology and Pathology) was inducted into the 2009 New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association Hall of Fame on December 3, recognizing his storied career as a breeder of woody ornamental trees. Among his many inventions and successes are the world renowned Stellar series of dogwoods, the recently released award-winning Venus dogwood, and the Red Beauty holly. Orton is a revered educator who has had an almost 50-year career with Rutgers University.


Atlantic Coast Agricultural Convention and Trade Show

The New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station continued its long association with the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey, which held its 55th annual meeting in Atlantic City on January 12–14, in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. The convention featured 26 educational sessions covering topics from traditional crops such as peppers, tomatoes, sweet corn, vine crops, and leafy greens to sessions on agritourism, bioenergy, and specialty potato production. Two new farmer sessions introduced growers to different state, federal, and nonprofit agencies and their roles in assisting farmers who are looking to develop a successful business. This year’s convention was also expanded to include tree fruits and bedding plants, with plans to incorporate a wider array of crops and subjects in next year’s meeting. The Atlantic Coast Convention and Trade Show is the second largest annual fruit and vegetable event in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. It brings together growers and support industries from all along the east coast to exchange ideas and learn about new technologies to improve profitability.
Outreach Efforts: Public/Community Service

The New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) has been a critical link for the delivery of agricultural education and research, as well as an engine of economic growth and job creation in the agricultural, food, and environmental sectors of the New Jersey economy. The experiment station is simultaneously meeting the needs of existing commercial farmers while also providing valuable educational pathways for prospective farmers. NJAES offers a range of educational programs and activities throughout the year, but the winter allows growers and producers more flexibility to attend the myriad educational programs delivered by experiment station faculty and extension staff.

Impact of Fresh Produce and Floral Industry in New Jersey

According to the current Produce Marketing Association Economic Research and Impact study of the fresh produce and floral industry, New Jersey accounts for 43,168 direct full-time equivalent jobs in this sector. These direct jobs generate an additional 24,350 ancillary jobs, for a total employment of 67,519. These workers earn over $1.7 billion, with a total economic impact of close to $15 billion across the sector, encompassing production, marketing and distribution, retail, and food service. Demonstrating its importance to the sector, production alone accounted for a total employment of 3,899 with wages of more than $170 million. This translates into a value added effect of more than $238 million and a total output value of over $798 million. The fresh produce and floral industry is a strong economic driver in New Jersey and is a potent force of economic sustainability across the agricultural industry.

NJAES provides multiple avenues and educational programs to support the fresh produce and floral industry, including the select winter educational offerings highlighted below.

Role of Pepper Advisory Committee in Directing Vegetable Research and Extension

Fresh market tomatoes and peppers are cultivated on approximately 6,000 acres in New Jersey annually and represent the highest value of all vegetables grown in the state, with a value of more than $59.5 million. NJAES educational program providers and representatives from the industry meet annually to provide input on ways to improve research and extension activities. One such mechanism is the Pepper Advisory Committee, which last year recommended that new varieties of peppers resistant to race 4 of bacterial leaf spot be evaluated for yield and fruit quality in 2009. This disease was first identified in New Jersey during 2008, and since variety resistance is the main control measure for this disease, it became the critical focus of NJAES research efforts. Eighteen pepper varieties were evaluated in the field and two were selected for inclusion in the 2010 Commercial Vegetable Production Recommendations. One variety included in the recommended list has the added benefit of being tolerant to phytophthora blight, which is the most serious disease affecting pepper production in New Jersey.
Tomato Grower Advisory Committee Meeting

Fresh market tomatoes are grown on 2,900 acres and valued at over $26 million in New Jersey. This important crop ranks second only to bell peppers in value of production in the garden state and ranks 8th nationally. To address the needs of this valuable industry, Peter Nitzsche (Morris County agricultural agent) facilitated and moderated a meeting of New Jersey tomato growers and industry representatives with NJAES faculty and staff on December 16. The tomato farmers presented their experiences during the 2009 growing season while agents, specialists, and staff presented their 2009 research findings and extension education efforts in fresh market tomatoes. The main challenges during last year’s growing season were late blight and other fungal diseases that threatened the crop. Extension Vegetable Pathologist Andy Wyenandt discussed the robust efforts of NJAES in educating growers about these diseases and the management recommendations that were dispersed to affected growers. NJAES alerts were issued through the Plant and Pest Advisory newsletter. In addition, close tracking of the late blight disease in the field was done through the Vegetable Integrated Pest Management Program by Coordinator Joseph Ingersson-Mahar and Vegetable IPM Research Project Coordinator Kristian Holmstrom. Another issue discussed at the meeting was the difficulties in producing and wholesale marketing of round, red fresh market tomatoes. NJAES is attempting to address this issue through a project titled “Rediscovering the New Jersey Tomato.” Under this project, a team of NJAES faculty and staff are working to revitalize the market for New Jersey tomatoes by focusing on flavor in variety trials, tomato breeding, and production and marketing practices. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the 2010 research and extension efforts planned to address the production and marketing needs of the tomato industry.

Tomato Disease Workshops and Hot Water Seed Treatment Instruction

To help stem the severe losses from diseases affecting tomato production in the state, NJAES extension agents and specialists have been particularly focused on educating growers on managing the diseases and minimize crop loss. The devastation from late blight, Phytophthora infestans, for tomato growers in the state has resulted in the experiment station hosting several winter educational events to specifically target late blight and other tomato diseases that plague tomato growers. On February 11, Agricultural Agent Michelle Casella will host a seminar in Gloucester County and on February 16, Agricultural Agent Wesley Kline will host a similar seminar for tomato growers in Cumberland County. Extension
Vegetable Pathologist Andy Wyenandt will provide instruction to growers about the identification of tomato production diseases, prevention and control methods, and rotation of fungicides to prevent host resistance. Vegetable IPM Program Associate Kris Holmstrom will share how cultural practices have led to increased bacterial diseases of tomatoes along with his research efforts in combating tomato diseases. At the conclusion of each seminar, growers will be instructed on how to hot water treat their tomato seed to prevent diseases that may be seed-borne. Hot water baths will be set up and will be available to growers who bring their seed to the educational program. Growers who have participated in previous such programs have indicated that bacterial diseases have shown a marked decrease in their field production and have attributed that decline to the practices they learned at NJAES extension tomato workshops.

Promoting Food Safety in the New Jersey Produce Industry
A collaborative project between NJAES and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture led to a multi-pronged approach to raise food safety awareness among the industry; to train growers, buyers and shippers to develop their own food safety plans; and to prepare for a third party audit. This multi-pronged approach included developing manuals and plans that could be used directly by the industry; creating a website for online versions of the instructional materials on food safety; writing food safety articles in various industry newsletters; conducting workshops and one-on-one visits to producers. A series of ten workshops and ten presentations, ranging from two to five hours, were conducted statewide last year, with a total of 923 individuals trained in food safety and how to prepare for a third party audit. Upon completion of the workshops, each participant was offered the chance to have a second party audit carried out at their operation. Second party audits are one-on-one consultations conducted by an individual who is not involved in the actual third party audit. The second party audit includes a review of all materials developed for the grower’s food safety plan, reviewing all questions that will be on the third party audit, and a physical evaluation of the premises. A total of twenty-three operations requested the second party audit, with all but one eventually successfully passing the third party audit. The successful training efforts in this joint, multi-pronged approach to food safety led to a 104% increase in the number of agricultural enterprises passing a USDA audit. On February 25, the next installment in this joint educational food safety training program will be conducted at the Cumberland County Extension Center.

For more information on the select programs highlighted in this report and many other educational offerings from Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension, visit http://events.rutgers.edu/njaes.

Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments
At the 2009 National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Annual Meeting held in Portland, OR, Rutgers Agricultural Resource Management Agents (ARMA) received a number of awards for their outstanding work and were recognized for the great number of presenters who gave invited lectures across various subject matters. ARMA agents were regional finalists in ten of the fourteen divisions under the Communications Award category, for both individual and team entries. Among the lead authors were Nick Polanin (Somerset County) in the Published Photo and Caption and the Feature Story divisions; Bill Sciarappa (Monmouth County) in the Computer
Generated Graphics and the Individual Newsletter divisions: **Bob Mickel** (Hunterdon County) in the Program Promotional Piece division; **Gary Pavlis** (Atlantic County) in the Personal Column division; **Bill Bamka** (Burlington County) in the Team Newsletter division; **Stephen Komar** (Sussex County) in the Video division; **Bill Hlubik** (Middlesex County) in the Fact Sheet division; and **Dan Kluchinski** (ARMA chair) in the Publication division. In addition, **Jenny Carleo** (Cape May County) was awarded the Achievement Award from New Jersey, while **Peter Nitzsche** (Morris County) was chosen as the 2009 New Jersey Distinguished Service Award winner. **Bob Mickel** (Hunterdon County) and **Stephen Komar** (Sussex County) took first place honors for their “Meat Goat Production School, Marketing Project and Consumer & Producer Survey.” They won the national award competing against twenty three other national entries in the Search for Excellence in Livestock division at the 2009 NACAA annual meeting.

**Future Leaders for the Equine Industry Winter Short Course**

The Rutgers University Equine Science Center and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station recently conducted the popular short course titled “Developing future leaders for the equine industry.” The course was a tremendous success as 12 undergraduate, graduate, and industry students actively engaged in two full-day sessions designed to develop leadership skills. **Mary Nikola** (director, Leadership and Organizational Development, Rutgers Cooperative Extension) and **Karyn Malinowski** (director, Rutgers Equine Science Center) joined forces as co-facilitators. Students also had the opportunity to learn from notable guest speakers representing state government agencies, other agriculture industries, and, of course, the equine industry. Guest lecturers included Senator Jennifer Beck (R-12); Barbara DeMarco, lobbyist, New Jersey Thoroughbred Horseman’s Association; Mike Egenton, vice president for Environment and Transportation, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce; Douglas Fisher, secretary of Agriculture, New Jersey Department of Agriculture; Peter Furey, executive director, New Jersey Farm Bureau; Jack Gallagher, former chief of operations, New Jersey Department of Agriculture; Leo McNamara, executive administrator, Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association of NJ; and Liz Thompson, policy information director, New Jersey Farm Bureau. Seventy-five percent of the students stated in a post-session survey that the class exceeded expectations and all participants expressed the desire to extend the class beyond the two days.