

A REPORT FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DEAN  
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture  
April 2017



NJAES Executive Director **Robert M. Goodman** announced the establishment of a \$1 million endowment from The Clearing Corporation Charitable Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation of the State of Illinois, to support the development of a new agribusiness scholars program at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. Named The Clearing Corporation Charitable Foundation Agribusiness Scholars Program, the gift will enable the School to provide a select group of high-achieving students with the applied knowledge, leadership qualities, analytical skills, and experiences required for successful careers in the domestic and global agribusiness sector. The gift will create the next generation of agribusiness leaders and the first class of agribusiness scholars at the School. The program is scheduled to begin in Fall 2018. Leading this new program are associate professors **Stephen Komar**, agricultural agent for Sussex County in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and **Brian Schilling**, associate extension specialist in agricultural policy in the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. The newly endowed scholars program will integrate coursework, experiential learning, and engagement with agribusiness leaders, regulators, and government agencies in an effort to expose them to real-world experiences to better prepare them for successful careers in the field.

**Nicholi Vorsa**, research professor in the Department of Plant Biology and director of the Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research and Extension, NJAES, received an award totaling \$456,727. The project, "Targeting Cranberry Fruit Chemistry to Develop Cultivars with Novel Phytochemical Profiles for Healthier, Reduced 'Added-Sugar' Products," is supported by USDA-National Institute for Food and Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

#### In the News:

In the April, 2017, issue of *Growing Magazine*, the article "Breeding for the New Climate" addresses the challenges of shifting growing seasons, heat stress on some crops, reduced chilling hours for perennial tree crops, drought-like conditions, and increased water salinity in some areas. **Marjorie Kaplan**, associate director of the Rutgers Climate Institute, indicated that scientific research will lead to the development of more climate-resilient crops and management techniques necessary for adapting to a changing climate over the long term. The article further cites research conducted by **Nicholi Vorsa**, director of Rutgers Marucci Blueberry and Cranberry Research and Extension Center, on fruit rot resistance in cranberry and blueberry. A result of fungal infection, fruit rot has grown more prevalent with the hotter temperatures, and may be the biggest threat to the industry. **Vorsa** has spent over 15 years introducing fruit rot-resistant genes into productive lines of blueberry and cranberry and is now testing varieties that are more resistant, and have good yield and other desirable traits like insect resistance. New Jersey cranberry and blueberry growers are supporting these programs at Rutgers.

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The April, 2017, issue of *Growing Produce* reprinted an article by **Rick VanVranken**, agricultural agent for Atlantic County, from the NJAES *Plant & Pest Advisory* newsletter titled, “No Need for Hysteria over Reports of Listeria in Romaine Lettuce.” VanVranken referenced a recent press release from Purdue University titled, “Study reveals listeria bacteria can hide inside tissue of romaine lettuce – Common sanitization practices may not be sufficient in killing bacteria.” **VanVranken** pointed to similar research at Rutgers more than a decade ago that had shown lettuce could also take *E. coli* bacteria into the plant tissues from root exposure in laboratory experiments by dosing plants with high amounts of the bacteria, but that was not shown to be the case in field-grown plants. He indicated that that further study is warranted and provided observations and conclusions from extension specialist in food safety **Donald Schaffner**, Department of Food Science, to clarify risks and practices.

The March, 2017, issue of *New Jersey Farmer* reported on a series of panel discussions at the New Jersey Agricultural Convention and Trade Show that were devoted to the growing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) for agricultural purposes. At the convention, extension specialist in plant pathology **Peter Oudemans**, Department of Plant Biology, discussed using drones for pest control and fine-tuning production methods. Oudemans discussed the valuable information that drones can pick up in surveying a field, including measuring soil moisture and heat dispersion. He emphasized that in treating particular diseases, drones can provide information that would be very hard to get in any other way.

The March, 2017, issue of *Mid-Atlantic Grower* featured the work of extension specialist in ethnic crops **Albert Ayeni**, Department of Plant Biology, who is conducting research on hot peppers and other ethnic crops. The goal of the university’s Exotic Pepper Project is to produce value-added peppers that can be grown specifically in New Jersey by farmers for the state’s diverse population.

Rutgers researchers are partnering with New Jersey oyster farmers to see if surf clams can be grown in Barnegat Bay. While oysters grow during the warm summer months, the surf clam grows during the winter, which would allow farmers to keep employees year-round. Watch a Rutgers Today video that follows NJAES researchers to the bay to examine these tasty clams at [https://youtu.be/\\_joyT0trzhA](https://youtu.be/_joyT0trzhA).

**Of Interest:**

E265 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey, 2017. Oudemans, P., Besançon, T., Pavlis, G. and Rodriguez-Saona, C. [njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=e265](https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=e265)

FS1268: Ultra-Niche Crops Series: Winter Lettuce Postharvest Handling and Food Safety. Melendez, M. [njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1268](https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1268)

FS1272 Common Insect Pests in Hop Yards. Infante-Casella, M., and Bamka, W. [njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1272](https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1272)

FS1273 Ultra-Niche Crops Series: Production and Marketing of Habañero Peppers in New Jersey. Ayeni, A., Healey, H., Melendez, M., Orton, T., and Simon, J. [njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1273](https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1273)

