

A REPORT FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DEAN  
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture  
November 2017



Bob Mickel

**Robert “Bob” Mickel**, agricultural and regional livestock agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) of Hunterdon County retired on November 1, after 31 years of service. Mickel began his career with Rutgers in 1987, serving as acting 4-H agent for RCE of Mercer County. In 1989, he was hired as the first regional livestock agent, serving Somerset, Hunterdon and Mercer counties, and adding Sussex County to his regional coverage in 1995. Mickel designed and delivered multiple educational programs for producers and growers across the state, including applied livestock research projects and collaborative research projects on field crops, pastures and forages, equine, small farm management, and alternative livestock species. Mickel was instrumental in the formation of the New Jersey Beef Industry Council and the development and delivery of the state’s Beef Quality Assurance Training Program. He worked with colleagues at Rutgers and Penn State to develop the Penn-Jersey Extension Partnership, where agents from the northern borders of both states conducted winter meetings, field days, twilight meetings, and demonstrations with support from specialists in both states.

**Jim Simon**, distinguished professor in the Department of Plant Biology, was awarded “The 2017 Chancellor’s Award for International Impact” at the Chancellor’s Celebration of Faculty Excellence in October. Chancellor of Rutgers–New Brunswick, **Debashish Dutta**, presented Simon with a plaque “in recognition of his more than twenty-five years of collaborative research in sub-Saharan Africa and his unrivaled contributions to international agriculture and rural development, which uses innovative and transformative approaches to provide individuals and communities with the tools to achieve economic independence.” In 1994, Simon began collaborating on multiple agricultural research projects in sub-Saharan Africa and initiated several small-scale farming initiatives that are bearing fruit today.

The American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) annual conference was held in September in Waikoloa, Hawaii, with several Rutgers faculty, staff, and students being honored. An individual award was given to **David Hlubik** (SEBS 2018), who was the first place winner in the Undergraduate Oral Competition for his presentation, “Effect of Pollen Parents on Oil Characteristics in European Hazelnut.” The Ultra-Niche Crops team was selected as the ASHS Extension Division Education Materials Award winner for “Virtual Field Trip: High Tunnel Winter Lettuce.” The Education Publication Award was given to a Rutgers team for “Comparing Conventional, Hybrid, and Distance Learning Courses in Horticulture.” Also, the conference presented a viewing of the documentary, “The Favored Strawberry,” which features the Rutgers strawberry breeding program.

The pathogenic bacteria, *Dickeya* and *Pectobacterium*, cause blackleg on stems of infected potato plants and soft rot in seed pieces and tubers resulting in the non-emergence of seedlings and tuber rot in the field and in storage. The *Dickeya* and *Pectobacterium* Summit held in Bangor, Maine, on November 9 highlighted the latest information about these important pathogens to the potato industry. **Andy Wyenandt**, extension specialist in plant pathology in the Department of Plant Biology, was invited to

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speaking on “Dickeya from a Receiver's View,” as the disease has had a detrimental impact on New Jersey potato growers. The summit, which was sponsored by University of Maine Cooperative Extension, drew an attendance of 175 people, from 22 states and four countries.

The New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association held its 2017 Landscape and Greenhouse Conference on November 8 at the Rutgers EcoComplex in Bordentown, NJ. Several NJAES faculty and staff presented at the conference, including **Rich Buckley**, director of the Plant Diagnostic Lab, who discussed “Issues on the Landscape - Diseases & Solutions,” which covered Photinia Leaf Disease, Boxwood Blight, Phytophthora/Phythium, and turf diseases, while **A.J. Both**, extension specialist in bioresource engineering in the Department of Environmental Sciences; **Steve Rettke**, IPM program associate-greenhouse; and **Dave Specca**, assistant director for bioenergy technologies and controlled environment agriculture at the EcoComplex, presented greenhouse-related topics at the conference.

In October, NJDEP's Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC) held an Urban Agriculture Symposium in Trenton. County agents **Michele Bakacs** (Middlesex/Union) and **Amy Rowe** (Essex/Passaic), and **Dave Specca** participated in the facilitated discussion while dean of agriculture and urban programs **Laura Lawson** (Department of Landscape Architecture) served as a keynote speaker. The symposium convened New Jersey's grassroots practitioners, local, state, and federal government personnel and members of academia to discuss resources, existing constraints, and strategies for improving urban agriculture.



*Stephanie Murphy discusses soil analysis. Photo by Joe Heckman*

On November 10, undergraduate students took part in an experiential learning field trip to the Rutgers Soil Testing Laboratory (STL). Students from soil fertility specialist **Joseph Heckman's** (Department of Plant Biology) Soil Fertility class and STL director **Stephanie Murphy's** Soil and Society class observed laboratory procedures and instrumentation for soil analysis. In addition to being a state-of-the-art analysis lab for New Jersey residents and the commercial agriculture industry, the STL is used to teach students about scientific theory and laboratory procedures involved in soil analysis.

#### Events:

The Rutgers On-Farm Food Safety Team is holding six training sessions across the state starting November 29 and 30 at the Rutgers Snyder Research Farm in Pittstown, NJ, and concluding March 14 at Rutgers Marucci Center in Chatsworth, NJ. The one and two-day trainings will cover all the information required to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. To register or for more information, visit [rutgersonfarmfoodsafety.eventbrite.com](http://rutgersonfarmfoodsafety.eventbrite.com).

The eighth class in the Ultra-Niche Crop educational series for farmers seeking new crop opportunities, will be “Farming Asparagus,” to be held on December 12 from 5:30 to 8 p.m., simultaneously broadcast in Bordentown, Bridgeton, and Bridgewater, NJ. To register, go to Eventbrite: [www.eventbrite.com/e/ultra-niche-crops-beach-plums-tickets-38005972888](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/ultra-niche-crops-beach-plums-tickets-38005972888).

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