

A REPORT FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DEAN  
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture  
April 2020

Across the globe, COVID-19 has imposed significant challenges to the ways business is conducted and services are offered for most industries. Rutgers NJAES is no exception, responding to the challenges by putting in place online resources to serve the residents and businesses of New Jersey. Following are some of the initiatives by Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) county office faculty and staff and extension specialists. As circumstances are changing on a regular basis, we encourage you to visit the websites of these services and programs for new information. At this time, all in-person events, classes, programs, club meetings, camps, and other group activities organized by or under the auspices of RCE are suspended through at least August 14. This is subject to change based on future university, state or federal direction. This month's report summarizes the development of remote program delivery and instruction, with several new and innovative programs coming on stream.

The [Rutgers NJAES COVID-19 Resource webpage](#) has a wealth of resources pertaining to commercial ag; food and allied industries; farm markets; nutrition, health, and wellness; home, lawn, and garden; personal finance; and youth and family.

Rutgers **Soil Testing Lab** (STL) and **Plant Diagnostic Lab** (PDL) have temporarily closed to comply with COVID-19 social distancing directives. PDL staff is providing diagnostic services remotely on a limited basis. See the [PDL website](#) for current instructions for submitting samples. Check the [STL website](#) for updates and guides for *Soil Fertility and Planting Decisions in Absence of a Current Soil Test Report* for commercial growers and home gardeners. The guides are for use in the interim, until testing is re-established at the Lab.

**Agriculture and Natural Resources:** While the RCE county offices are temporarily closed, growers can still reach [county agents](#) who are working remotely. The **Rutgers On-Farm Food Safety** website has a resource page, [COVID-19 Information for Growers, Food Workers & the Agriculture Industry](#), with regularly updated information. [Marketing Tip: Consider Pre-Bagging Produce at Farm Markets](#) is available on the Plant & Pest Advisory blog. A farmer video conference/call-in forum, [Ask the Ag Agent](#) with weekly one-hour sessions, is available on Wednesdays. The online conferencing/call-in events begin at 7 p.m. with an open forum to discuss ag-related questions about production, marketing, regulations, and any other topic. The New Jersey Statewide Tree Fruit Growers Twilight Meeting was held as a webinar on April 15.

The **Equine Science Center** has created a webpage, [Covid-19 Equine Related Resources for New Jersey](#), with resources from NJDA, NJFB, American Association of Equine Practitioners, Equine Disease Communication Center, American Horse Council, and the CDC. The RCE **Animal Ag/Field and Forage Working Group** presented three [pasture management webinars](#) in April on basic pasture management; horse pasture management; and livestock pasture management.

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The video, [Turf Management During COVID-19](#), featuring extension specialists in turf management, diseases, insects, and weeds, was developed in collaboration with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of NJ. The video guides golf course superintendents on how to manage turf during the COVID-19 pandemic with best practices and strategies to manage the course with minimal labor, reduced budgets, and no play.

**Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS):** The **Master Food Preserver Training Program** launched a hybrid delivery format, with 14 new trainees from across New Jersey participating in a series of eight web-based educational sessions. Topics include an overview of food safety, water bath and pressure canning, freezing, and dehydrating. Once they complete the training, the Master Food Preservers will work with local FCHS Department members to provide public education. The FCHS **Get Moving-Get Healthy Workforce Wellness** 12-week program is offered online with a variety of evidence-based resources. The goal is to live a longer, healthier life by understanding how eating nutritious foods can contribute to a healthy lifestyle; strategies for changing eating and exercise habits; and practical tips for adapting your lifestyle, all from the comforts of your home. In addition, Somerset County FCHS is offering [Facebook Live homecooking demonstrations](#).

**4-H Youth Development:** [4-H from Home](#) webinars offer interactive lessons on topics such as healthy living, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, civic engagement, the arts and other subjects. Webinars happen Tuesdays and Thursday using Zoom video conferencing for middle schoolers.

Rutgers **Office of Continuing Professional Education** launched a new online course, [Leading a Virtual Team](#).

Supply chain and food industry personnel can take required courses online for the next several months via **Rutgers Food Innovation Center South**. [Food safety certificate courses](#), including Preventive Controls Qualified Individual and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, are now available via interactive, virtual training, including face-to-face video conferencing. As many food companies are hiring more workers, this is an opportunity for employees to get the training they need before they start working in the facilities.

#### **Of Interest:**

The 2020 update to the [NJ Commercial Tree Fruit Production Guide](#) is available, with updated pesticide tables to include new products, pesticide safety, and efficacy.

#### **Events:**

As part of the Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration Program, RCE is hosting its annual [Coastal Stewardship course](#), with May and June classes held via webinar.

