

A REPORT FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DEAN  
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture  
December 2020



*Thomas Headlee*

In 1917, Prof. Thomas Headlee, entomologist for NJAES and the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture, was asked to investigate an infestation of psychoda flies at the trickling filters of the Plainfield, NJ, sewage plant. Fly infestations were one of many problems associated with wastewater treatment. In 1920, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law authorizing an investigation of the biology of sewage disposal to implement more effective methods of sewage purification in the state. This law led to the formation at NJAES of the first multidisciplinary organization in the country directed towards the solution of water pollution problems through the application of sewage purification techniques—what today is the Rutgers **Department of**

**Environmental Sciences** (DES), which is celebrating its centennial anniversary this year. The department today includes aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem function; air pollution; meteorology and atmospheric sciences; site remediation; environmental health, and noise pollution, among other areas of focus. DES is the winner of the Environmental Education (Educator-Led) 2020 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Award, presented during the virtual awards ceremony on December 14.

Another winner of the 2020 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Award is extension specialist in entomology **Changlu Wang** and his Urban Entomology Lab, which received the award for Healthy and Sustainable Communities for their work in urban pest management.

#### **Of Interest**

New Jersey’s agricultural and food production, processing, and distribution industries support the continued accessibility to food for the state’s 8.9 million residents. The importance of New Jersey’s food system extends well beyond the state’s borders, directly serving the needs of consumers in New York City, Philadelphia, and other major metropolitan centers along the East Coast. New Jersey’s food system also facilitates the production and trade of food items destined for other regions of the nation and world. [The Economic Importance of New Jersey’s Food System in 2017](#) is now available on NJAES Publications. The report was co-authored by **Kevin Sullivan**, assistant director of statistical analysis, and **Brian Schilling**, NJAES senior associate director and director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension.



A webinar conducted on Nov. 17, “Emergency Preparation & Dealing with COVID-19 on Farms: Alternative Marketing Strategies to Stay in Business,” was part of a series addressing common problems most farmers are facing, and how extension programs can assist farmers through this difficult time. Moderated by Delaware State University Cooperative Extension and USDA Northeast Climate Hub, the webinar featured RCE county agents **Rick VanVranken** (Atlantic), **Steve Komar** (Sussex), and **Bill Bamka** (Burlington).

The New Jersey Nursery & Landscape Association hosted county agent **Timothy Waller** (Cumberland) on December 9 for a webinar on propagation and other cool-season pests and diseases, and covering their management through chemical, cultural, IPM, and exclusion practices. Understanding the factors responsible for plant pests and pathogens typically leads to more ecological and financially-sound decision-making in ornamental crop production and is broadly applicable to multiple green industries.

“Managing Basil Under Increasingly Challenging Conditions,” a virtual workshop, was held Dec. 10 and 11. Hosted by University of Massachusetts in collaboration with Rutgers NJAES and the University of Florida as part of our USDA/SCRI/NIFA-supported Sweet Basil Research Initiative, distinguished professor in plant biology, **Jim Simon**, and extension specialist in vegetable pathology, **Andy Wyenandt**, coordinated the educational program for growers, Extension workers, researchers, and industry reps.

### In the News

**Rick VanVranken** summarized the experience he and county agent **Pete Nitzsche** (Morris) had with grower trials marketing yacon, a South American plant grown for its sweet-tasting tuber, in [“Look Before Jumping into a New Vegetable Crop,”](#) published in the Dec. 9 issue of *Growing Produce*.

### Events

Food Safety Training 2021: As a result of the need to socially distance amid restrictions on the number of individuals allowed at a meeting, the **NJAES On-Farm Food Safety Program** will be conducting food safety trainings online for Spring 2021. The schedule and registration are available at [Rutgers Cooperative Extension Events | Eventbrite](#)

The 2021 NJ Agricultural Convention & Trade Show will be held virtually from Feb 22-25. The educational session schedule and registration will be available at: [Schedule — VGANJ](#)

**BEST WISHES TO ALL FOR A HAPPY AND HEALTHY HOLIDAY SEASON**



School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station  
[SEBS.RUTGERS.EDU](http://SEBS.RUTGERS.EDU) • [EXECDEANAGRICULTURE.RUTGERS.EDU](http://EXECDEANAGRICULTURE.RUTGERS.EDU) • [NJAES.RUTGERS.EDU](http://NJAES.RUTGERS.EDU)