

A REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE DEAN OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
April 2021



With the average age of farmers in New Jersey approaching 60 years old, there has never been a more important time to develop and support the next generation of farmers. To this end, Rutgers Cooperative Extension has launched a statewide beginner farmer training program, “RU Ready to Farm.” This program is made possible through a USDA-NIFA Beginner Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant. The RU Ready to Farm team consists of agents and extension personnel from several counties and is led by county agents **Bill Hlubik** (Middlesex), **William Erickson** (Monmouth) and senior program administrator **Lauren Erickson**. Program coordinator is **Brendon Pearsall**, who can be reached at bp415@njaes.rutgers.edu. Core team members include county agents **Peter Nitzsche** (Morris), **Meredith Melendez** (Mercer), **Megan Muehlbauer** (Hunterdon), Agriculture & Natural Resource (ANR) Sr. Program Coordinator **Hank Bignell**, and ANR department chair **Nick Polanin** (Somerset). Several New Jersey growers are a part of the training program. The first session will be on Saturday, May 1 at 10 a.m. More information on the program can be found at <https://rubeginnerfarmer.rutgers.edu>. Register at: <https://go.rutgers.edu/db88up1r>.

Ramu Govindasamy, extension specialist in marketing and chair of the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, is the Rutgers lead investigator in a regional multistate project, “Southern Region Specialty Crops and Food Systems: Exploring Markets, Supply Chains and Policy Dimensions,” which involves a number of land-grant and other universities. The multi-year (2020-2025) project won the 2020 Food and Agricultural Sciences Excellence in College and University Awards Program Regional Excellence in Multistate Research Award from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Of Interest:

As part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension On-Farm Food Safety team are again collaborating to offer an On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR) to any operation that has taken the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) training. The PSA training is required for fresh produce operations with sales over \$25,000 to be in compliance with FSMA. Approximately 100 OFRRs have been conducted over the last two years. The OFRR is a walkthrough of the farm operation to assess where it may need to make changes to comply with FSMA prior to an inspection. Generally, two individuals will be on the assessment team—one from Extension and one from the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. These reviews take approximately two hours



and are scheduled to fit into the grower's time. To schedule a review, email Charlotte Muetter at charlotte.muetter@ag.nj.gov.

The 30th Anniversary Rutgers Turfgrass Symposium was held on March 18 and live streamed as a virtual event. The theme for this year's symposium was "Advances in Turfgrass Science: Looking to the Future." The Turfgrass Symposium, which was founded on the principles of sharing ideas and engaging in discussions pertaining to current and future research, is an annual event but the 2021 session is the first offered in an online format. This year's symposium was an overwhelming success, bringing together great speakers, discussions, and interactions. It attracted 374 participants from 18 countries and 34 states from within the U.S. All oral and poster presentations were recorded and are available on the [Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science website](#).

New Jersey has set ambitious renewable energy goals that will be difficult to meet without using existing farmland for solar energy. Agrivoltaics (also called dual-use solar on farmland) offers the potential to both create sustainable renewable energy and keep the precious farmland below it productive and profitable. Properly designed agrivoltaic systems have the potential to be built so that the photovoltaic panels allow for farm equipment operation and minimal impact on crop productivity. On March 24, a webinar, titled "Agrivoltaics – Combined Solar Power and Farming in NJ," was organized by the NJAES Agrivoltaic Committee. The webinar covered examples of Agrivoltaic systems from other parts of the world and detailed the work that has been done by the UMass Clean Energy Extension. The recorded session can be viewed at [Agrivoltaics – Combined Solar Power and Farming in NJ - Zoom](#).

The following updated bulletin is now available on [NJAES Publications: E625 Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey, 2021](#). **Besancon, T., Oudemans, P., Pavlis, G., Polk, D. and Rodriguez-Saona, C.**

In the News

Lisa Calvo, marine scientist and aquaculture extension program coordinator at the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, was featured in Philadelphia Magazine, "[Halfway Between Philadelphia and the Shore, an Oyster Destination](#)."

Events

The Rutgers NJAES Tree Fruit Extension Team is altering the meeting format this year by putting on pause the annual day-long North and South Jersey Tree Fruit meetings and instead, holding one-hour "Ask the Expert Series Orchard Edition" talk/discussions, which began on March 9. The team will be hosting one-hour virtual discussions on timely topics, with growers encouraged to ask the experts questions. Zoom meeting links will be posted to the *Plant and Pest Advisory* and e-mailed to Tree Fruit Growers on Rutgers listserv one week prior to each meeting. Recordings of the previous sessions are available on the [Plant & Pest Advisory fruit crops edition](#). [Upcoming sessions](#) are May 5, May 19, June 2, July 14, August 4.

