

A REPORT FROM THE
EXECUTIVE DEAN
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
July 2021



Albert Ayeni

Albert Ayeni, ethnic crop research specialist in the Department of Plant Biology, retired on July 1. Ayeni received his doctoral degree in weed science from Cornell and joined Rutgers in 1995 as research associate in weed science at Rutgers Agricultural Research and Extension Center (RAREC) in Bridgeton, and later served there as interim weed extension specialist in turf and ornamentals. He relocated to Cook Campus in 2002 as assistant director of International Programs. He expanded the reach of SEBS International Programs in Africa by connecting the school to 14 universities in 11 countries as associate director of the acclaimed Global Institute for BioExploration (GIBEX), which focused on the discovery of plant-based biotherapeutics. He worked with Professor **Ilya Raskin**, founder and leader of GIBEX, to transfer the Screens-to-Nature kit to African universities to facilitate rapid discovery of plant-based therapeutics. In 2008 Ayeni became an instructor in the Department of Plant Biology. He developed several courses and promoted hands-on agricultural programs that gave students the opportunity to earn credit for the SEBS Experience-based Education in Production Agriculture and Food. Ayeni's research focused on ethnic crop development for integration into New Jersey's food basket. He worked with Professor **Tom Orton** and Distinguished Professor **Jim Simon** to release Rutgers Pumpkin Habanero™ and the Rutgers Rosebell RedHabanero™ peppers.

A Rutgers program called Veggie Rx is providing healthy fruits and vegetables to New Brunswick's poor and low-income residents and helping to create awareness about the connections between food and health. Established in 2018, Veggie Rx represents a partnership among several health-oriented community programs that serve the city's most vulnerable residents: New Brunswick Community Farmers' Market, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School's HIPHOP Promise Clinic, and Elijah's Promise community kitchen. Rutgers' Veggie Rx founders include **Cara Cuite**, assistant extension specialist for Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and Karen WeiRu Lin, professor of family medicine and community health and assistant dean of global health at the medical school, **Lauren Errickson**, coordinator of the farmers' market, in addition to former medical student Joshua Gilens. The medical students who run the Promise Clinic, which provides free primary care to patrons of Elijah's Promise, give their patients "prescriptions" (vouchers) for fruits and vegetables to "fill" (redeem) for free at the farmers' market. Veggie Rx has recently expanded so that more of the city's residents can get produce vouchers by visiting a Veggie Rx pop-up site. Read more at [Veggie Rx Promotes Connections Between Food and Health | News \(rutgers.edu\)](#).

Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) has been awarded a portion of the CDC \$9.95 million in funding to the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to support an innovative approach to community education and partnerships to advance adult immunization. The USDA-NIFA-funded RCE project, "NJ Rutgers Cooperative Extension Immunization Education and Outreach," is led by **Cara Cuite**, assistant extension specialist; **Meredith Melendez**, county agent, (Mercer); **Brian Schilling**, RCE director;



and **Rick Vanvranken**, county agent (Atlantic); and a larger team of agents and aims to promote COVID-19 vaccination among New Jersey farm workers. Read more at [RCE receives USDA-NIFA Funding to Promote Vaccine Education in Rural America : Newsroom](#).

In Memoriam

Richard G. Obal, 73, passed away on June 30. He was the agricultural and natural resources agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County for 34 years, before retiring in 2011. Obal established many important regional education programs in nursery, greenhouse, landscape, and turf management. He provided key assistance in the development of the NJAES Cream Ridge Station as a statewide research and demonstration facility for ornamental plants. During his 34-year career with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Obal educated thousands of homeowners, farmers, nursery owners, landscapers, and residents. He trained municipal, county, state, and federal employees and was an advisor for the County Board of Agriculture and the curriculum committee of Brookdale Community College. [In Memoriam: Rich Obal, Former Monmouth County Agricultural Agent : Newsroom](#).

Of Interest

The Rutgers On-Farm Food Safety program has available food safety signs and posters. Handwashing and visitor signs need to be posted in English and in the language of the workers. For example, if you have a mixture of Spanish and Creole speakers, you will need signs in three languages. Food safety signs and posters are available in English and Spanish, while "Please Wash Your Hands Often!" signs are available in English, Spanish, Creole, Chinese, Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Vietnamese. They can be downloaded at [GAP Signage - Rutgers On-Farm Food Safety](#) or can be picked up from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension offices of [Cumberland County](#) or [Mercer County](#).

In the News

A July 14 *New York Times* article, [What's Wrong With Your Tomatoes?](#), quoted extension specialist **Andy Wyenandt** and IPM research project coordinator **Kris Holmstrom**, with images courtesy of agricultural agent **Pete Nitzsche** (Morris).

The June 29 issue of *Morning Ag Clips* posted [Equine Science Center honored by N.J. Equine Advisory Board](#), noting it is also the Center's 20th anniversary.

Events

Vegetable Twilight Meeting and Research Tour, Thursday, August 19, 2021, 4:00 pm
Rutgers Agricultural Research & Extension Center, 121 Northville Rd., Bridgeton, NJ (Upper Deerfield) (meet at the shelter near the parking lot). PESTICIDE CREDITS: PP2 (Private Applicator)=9 credits, Category 1A=9 credits, Category 10=9 credits. Contact Cooperative Extension of Cumberland County at 856-451-2800.

NJ 4-H State Horse Show Clinic, August 21 -22, Dream Park, Logan Township. This educational weekend allows beginner and experienced 4-H horse project members to gain knowledge in many riding and non-riding topics. [NJ State 4-H Horse Show Clinic: Horses: Rutgers New Jersey 4-H](#)

