

A REPORT FROM THE
EXECUTIVE DEAN
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
November 2021



Honoree Laura Lawson is pictured with Artha Jonassaint, National FFA Southern Region Vice President.

Laura Lawson, interim executive dean of agriculture and natural resources at Rutgers University, was awarded an Honorary American FFA Degree during the 94th National FFA Convention & Expo, in Indianapolis, Ind., on Oct. 29. [Lawson, along with her fellow honorary degree recipients](#) were recognized as “individuals who have provided exceptional service on a national level to agriculture, agricultural education, or FFA.” Each awardee received a plaque and medal, as well as the honor of having their names permanently recorded as recipients of the highest FFA honor.

Rutgers University, which has operated a weather station since 1896 as part of the [Cooperative Observer Program](#) (COOP), was honored by [NOAA's National Weather Service](#) with a 2021 Honored Institution Award for 125-Years' Service. Over the years, many students, staff, and faculty have contributed to the effort of recording weather and climate at New Brunswick by taking the daily readings, which requires an 8 a.m. trek out to the station. The station has been in its current location at the Rutgers Gardens since 1978, but a station has been maintained by Rutgers in different locations on its campus since January 1, 1896. The Rutgers station on the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus is managed by the Department of Environmental Sciences and, in earlier years, the Department of Meteorology and Physical Oceanography.



The NJAES Vision 2025 Initiative is well underway with strategic investments in infrastructure, IT, and equipment at NJAES farms, marine stations, business incubators, and centers. The goal is for these facilities to become national models for program delivery and to build greater capacity at NJAES to address current and future needs of New Jersey and the broader society. NJAES senior associate director **Margaret Brennan-Tonetta** reports, “Major investments have been made at the Aquaculture Innovation Center in Cape May and Hort Farm III in New Brunswick, along with much needed equipment purchases for all the farms. The focus for this year is the Specialty Crop Research and Extension Center in Cream Ridge with the dam replacement and renovation of the buildings kicking off this month! We are also working on soil improvements and program development for this farm as well.” Updates on the progress at Cream Ridge can be found on the Vision 2025 website: [Vision 2025 \(Rutgers NJAES\)](#).

Each year, the [Equine Science Center](#) at Rutgers University hosts its annual “Evening of Science & Celebration.” This event celebrates the year’s achievements, showcases current research, and awards members of the equine community for their accomplishments. Hosted this year on November 11, Veterans Day, doctoral candidate, **Ellen Rankins**, presented on her large-scale research project focusing on Equine Assisted Services (EAS) for veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Rankins, a



graduate student in the endocrinology and animal biosciences program in the Department of Animal Sciences at Rutgers, is conducting this project as her doctoral research. Rankins is still seeking participants for the study: males between the ages of 18-75 and can include non-veterans and veterans with or without PTSD. This year's award recipients are Assemblyman Ronald S. Dancer from the New Jersey's 12th Legislative District for the 2022 "Spirit of the Horse" award, and 2021 winner of the Gold Medal Horse Farm award is Topline Farm in Alexandria Township, N.J.

Of Interest

A "Fall and Winter Management of Ruminants" meeting was held on Nov. 8, hosted by extension specialist in livestock **Mike Westendorf** and Rutgers Cooperative Extension senior program coordinator **Hank Bignell** (Warren County.) The topics included forage management for sheep flocks; winter feeding and management of ruminants; and parasite management in small ruminants.

Recent published material for Department of Plant Biology faculty include:

Besancon, T.E., M.H. Wasacz, and **J.R. Heckman**. 2021. Weed Suppression, Nitrogen Availability, and Cabbage Production Following Sunn Hemp or Sorghum-sudangrass. *HortTechnology*.

Rabinovich, A., **J.R. Heckman**, B. Lew, A. Rouff. 2021. Magnesium supplementation for improved struvite recovery from dairy lagoon wastewater. *Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering*.

In the News

The *Growing Produce* article, "[There's a New Horizon In the Making for Hazelnut Growers,](#)" discusses hybrid cultivars for the Upper Midwest and mentions four new European hazelnut cultivars with resistance to Eastern filbert blight that were recently released by Rutgers: 'Raritan', 'Monmouth', 'Hunterdon', and 'Somerset.' These cultivars are recommended for USDA hardiness zones 6 and 7 and have not yet been trialed in the Upper Midwest. However, the author noted, "Rutgers hazelnut breeder **Tom Molnar** is testing selections from colder European regions, so we expect better hardiness in some of his future releases."

Events

The next seminar as a part of the Marine Extension Program Seminar Series (MEPSS) through Rutgers Cooperative Extension will be held on November 29 from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Featured speaker Judith Weis, professor emerita - Rutgers University-Newark, will present, "Status and Future of New Jersey Tidal Marshes in the Face of Sea Level Rise." To register for the free webinar, go to:

<http://go.rutgers.edu/eatjnrfn>

The RCE Homesteading Academy webinar, "What to Do to Get Started Keeping Bees on Your Property," will be held on December 14, from noon – 1 p.m. The featured speaker is Tim Schuler, owner of Schuler's Bees and the former state apiarist for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Registration is free at: [Event Information \(Rutgers NJAES\)](#)

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