

December 2023

Plant Geneticist Jim Simon Wins NJFB Distinguished Service to NJ Agriculture Award

Jim Simon, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Plant Biology, was presented with the



Jim Simon is congratulated by NJFB President Allen Carter. *Photo credit: NJFB.*

[Distinguished Service to New Jersey Agriculture Award for 2023 for outstanding research contributions](#) to New Jersey's farming industry by the New Jersey Farm Bureau (NJFB) at its 105th Annual Meeting held November 13-14. This prestigious award is presented each year by NJFB, the state's largest membership organization representing farmers and the wider agricultural community. Simon was cited, in part, for his "extraordinary success as a scholar in both plant research and teaching, ... and for bringing these academic achievements into the Rutgers SEBS faculty and for the benefit of New Jersey's agricultural community."

Two Rutgers Scientists Win Edison Patent Award for Innovation in Agriculture



Andy Wyenandt and Jim Simon with 2023 Edison Patent Award. *Photo credit: Rutgers Office for Research.*

Jim Simon, Distinguished Professor, and Andy Wyenandt, extension specialist, Department of Plant Biology, were recognized on November 15 with the [Edison Patent Award, in the Agriculture Category](#). Presented by the Research and Development Council of New Jersey (RDNJ), the award honors "the most exceptional efforts of scientists and inventors, along with their organizations." Simon and Wyenandt used innovative and traditional plant breeding technologies to identify particular genes in basil that they later used to breed disease- and climate-resistant varieties, including those bred to withstand basil downy mildew. Simon and Wyenandt were awarded "Downy Mildew Resistant/Tolerant Sweet Basil Varieties"

patent (U.S. 10,159,212). View the RDNJ [tribute film](#) highlighting their award-winning basil research.

Rutgers Hosts 2023 Mid-Atlantic Vegetable Workers Conference

Rutgers Cooperative Extension agricultural agents **Meredith Melendez** (Mercer) and **Michelle Infante-Casella** (Gloucester) took the lead in reviving the Mid-Atlantic Vegetable Workers Conference following a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19 pandemic and funding constraints. For more than 40 years, this conference provided a valuable opportunity for extension specialists and agricultural agents working in the Mid-Atlantic region to meet in person each fall at the University of Delaware to share research related to vegetable crops. This year, Melendez and Infante-Casella organized the event as a virtual conference that took place on December 7 and 8 as a webinar that included 21 vegetable research presentations. A total of 38 extension specialists, agricultural agents, and program associates were

in attendance. Each participant was invited to submit a research report to be included in proceedings for the conference. Among the participating universities were the University of Delaware, University of Maryland, Virginia Tech, Penn State, West Virginia, and Cornell, and three 1890 land-grant institutions, Delaware State, Virginia State, and University of Delaware Eastern Shore. In addition to Melendez and Infante-Casella, extension specialists **Andrew Wyenandt** and **Thierry Besancon**, and agricultural agents **Peter Nitzsche** (Morris) and **William Sciarappa**, presented their vegetable research. The event was considered a success and participants provided such positive feedback that plans are underway to hold the conference again virtually in 2024.

NJAES Christmas Tree Research in Upper Deerfield and Cream Ridge

Timothy Waller, agricultural agent, RCE of Cumberland County, has been focused on [Christmas tree disease management and variety demonstrations](#) as part of his ornamental research efforts at [Rutgers Agricultural Research and Extension Center](#) (RAREC) in Upper Deerfield. As many as 15 different conifer varieties currently grown in high tunnels under irrigation, shade cloth, and with tightly managed nutrient load, will be planted in a demonstration plot at RAREC in the spring. **William Errickson**, agricultural agent, RCE of Monmouth County, has also been an integral part in the Christmas tree research efforts. Errickson plans to install similar demonstration trials in the research plots at the [Rutgers Specialty Crop Research and Extension Center](#) in Cream Ridge. Their combined efforts will ensure that more Christmas tree and nursery growers, master gardeners, and members of the public have the opportunity to see a wider range of varieties available for the next holiday season. Additional Online resources for growers and the public are available via the [Christmas Tree Edition](#) of the Rutgers Plant and Pest Advisory and the Rutgers Ask the Agent [Christmas Tree podcast](#).

Recent Hire

Gina Sideli, assistant professor in the Department of Plant Biology, [is overseeing research](#) at the nationally recognized cranberry breeding program at the [Philip E. Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research and Extension](#) in Chatsworth, NJ. Sideli took over in September for longtime Marucci Center director and professor emeritus **Nicholi Vorsa**. Seven varieties of cranberries developed at Rutgers, and grown in bogs from New Jersey to Wisconsin and Massachusetts to British Columbia, make up much of the tart fruit found in cherished Thanksgiving side dishes. Sideli, who came to Rutgers from the University of California at Davis where she worked in walnut and almond research for eight years, was drawn to the opportunity to continue her work developing new perennial crop varieties. She will also focus on modernizing the way the center monitors crops through a process called high-throughput phenotyping.

Of Interest

Douglas Zemeckis, RCE agent for Ocean, Atlantic, and Monmouth counties, partnered with members of the Collaborative Research Branch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) to execute a stakeholder workshop at the Ocean County Extension Office on November 15. This workshop focused on obtaining fishing industry input into a pilot hook-and-line survey being developed for the Northeast to monitor fisheries resources within and around future offshore windfarms.

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