RUTGERS NEW BRUNSWICK

A REPORT FROM THE
EXECUTIVE DEAN
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

October 2024

Agrivoltaics Research and Demonstration Project Unveiled at Rutgers

Cows graze amidst solar panels installed at Rutgers Animal Farm in New-Brunswick. Photo: Lori Nardoza.

On September 30, federal, state, and university officials inaugurated an Agrivoltaics research and demonstration project at Rutgers University-New Brunswick with the purpose of advancing a technology that could produce renewable energy while making farms more sustainable. The project, part of a $7.4 million effort, consists of 378 vertical bifacial solar panels that can generate electricity whether the sun hits the front or the back of each panel. This design is more suited for fields with livestock. Installed on a three-acre grassy field at the **Rutgers University Animal Farm** at the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS), the system will enable researchers to test whether modern farming and livestock practices can be combined with generating solar energy. The vertical bifacial solar array is the first such installation in New Jersey.

Rutgers Announces Healthy Harvest Initiative

Laura Lawson, executive dean of SEBS and executive director of NJAES, unveiled the Healthy Harvest Initiative, which will establish a hub for community food security at 178 Jones Avenue in New Brunswick. The site is adjacent to the Cook Campus where the **New Brunswick Community Farmers Market** is now held on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Lawson, who made the announcement at Suydam Farms in Somerset on September 19, said the redeveloped site will provide a direct impact on students' experience at Rutgers while also serving surrounding neighbors and working with partnering organizations to address critical food and nutrition needs.

Veterinary Learning and Preparation Program Launched with USDA NIFA Support

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to make strides to diversify the agricultural workforce, and the Rutgers **Department of Animal Sciences** continues to answer the call. **Aparna Zama**, undergraduate program director, is the principal investigator on a five-year $250,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program grant for the Rutgers University Veterinary Learning and Preparation program (RU-VETLEAP). RU-VETLEAP is designed to increase the number of Animal Science students from underrepresented communities accepted into DVM programs and those entering careers in USDA mission-critical areas of food, agriculture, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences. Rutgers was one of five 2024 grant awardees to share in NIFA's $1.1M investment by the Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program to support 30 undergraduate students in animal science, nutrition and dietetics, food science, agribusiness, and other FANH disciplines.

Of Interest

The following new fact sheets are available on NJAES Publications:

FS038: The Basics of Equine Nutrition
Williams, C.
FS370: Trail Riding Etiquette for Horse Enthusiasts
Williams, C. and **Elsishans, J.**
FS525: The Basics of Equine Behavior
Williams, C.
FS656: Are You 'Stressing Out' Your Horse?
Williams, C.
FS1065: Antioxidants and Your Horse
Williams, C.

A study conducted by researchers at the **Rutgers Equine Science Center** has shown that military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), who participated in a program caring for horses, experienced an improved mental outlook and easing of symptoms. Reporting results of the study in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, researchers said the insights could open the door to a new approach in PPTSD and mental health treatment for veterans, as many currently drop out of conventional therapy programs even though they have been shown to be effective.

Recent Honors

Elisabeth Sikes, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Marine and Coasts Sciences, was elected as an AGU Fellow, joining a select group of 54 individuals in the 2024 Class of Fellows. AGU, the world's largest Earth and space science association, bestows this honor annually to a select number of individuals who have made exceptional contributions. AGU Fellows are recognized for their scientific eminence, demonstrated through breakthroughs, discoveries, or innovations that advance the Earth and space sciences.

Karen Ensle, educator and department head, Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS), Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Union County, was inducted into the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) Hall of Fame in Tucson, Arizona, on September 19. She was recognized with the 2024 NEAFCS Hall of Fame Award—the most prestigious honor for Extension Family and Consumer Science professionals nationwide. For nearly 40 years, Ensle has exemplified unparalleled dedication, expertise, and innovation in the field of family and consumer sciences, making significant contributions that have positively impacted individuals, families, and communities.

Grants

Janice McDonnell, 4-H Youth Development STEM agent, is a collaborating partner of the Center for Advancing Research Impact in Society (ARIS), which was awarded $1.1 million of a $9.1 million grant from the National Science Foundation to build capacity in supporting research impact. McDonnell led a Rutgers team that built the ARIS Broader Impacts Toolkit, which provides researchers a roadmap to define how their investigation engages communities and advances community benefits.