Faculty and Staff Activities and Accomplishments

The Rutgers NJAES Environmental Stewards program has been unanimously selected as the winner of the 2008 Governors Environmental Excellence Award in the environmental education category. The award will be presented at a reception at the governor’s mansion on November 29, with Bruce Barbour, program leader, accepting on behalf of the Environmental Stewards. Among those who work with the Environmental Stewards program are Jan Zientek (Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension of Essex County), Mary Cummings (Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County), Chris Obropta (assistant extension specialist), Joe Ponessa (extension specialist), Mary Powers Nikola (Leadership and Organizational Development), Stephanie Murphy (Soil Testing Laboratory), Lisa Evard (NJAES), Dave Robinson (Geography), Dave Specca (EcoComplex), Joe Paulin (extension specialist), Rebecca Jordan (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources), and Paul Gottleib (Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics).

Steven Handel (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources) was awarded the Members Award at the California Society for Ecological Restoration Annual Conference on October 25 in San Diego. Handel and the Great Park Design Studio Ecologists received this honor for their submission of a poster titled “Orange County Great Park: A Model for Large-Scale Ecological Restoration in an Urban Setting.” Handel is a member of the consulting team designing the Orange County Great Park located in the City of Irvine. Handel has also been elected an honorary member of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). He will receive this award at ASLA’s annual meeting next fall in Philadelphia. Handel was cited for his work to mesh modern ecological restoration science with landscape design. This year, 13 people were cited for honorary membership, including New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, William McDonough, and Robert Redford.

Barbara Zilinskas (Plant Biology and Pathology) has been elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The official award will be made at the annual meeting of the AAAS to be held February 14–18, 2008, in Boston, MA. In addition to Zilinskas, the following School of Environmental and Biological Sciences faculty are also AAAS fellows: Jim Ammerman (IMCS), Joan Bennett (Plant Biology and Pathology), David and Joan Ehrenfeld (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources), Hans Fisher (Nutritional Sciences), Reed Funk (Plant Biology and Pathology), Randy Gaugler (Entomology), Robert M. Goodman (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources), Judy Grassle (IMCS), Steven Handel (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources), Bonnie McCoy (Human Ecology), Peter Morin (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources), Tom Rudel (Human Ecology), Dipak Sarkar (Animal Sciences), Jim White (Plant Biology and Pathology), Lily Young (Environmental Sciences), and Gerben Zylstra (Biochemistry and Microbiology).

Ted Chase (Biochemistry and Microbiology) has been awarded the Peter Homack Award of the New Jersey section of American Water Resources Association. The award recognizes “persons who have made outstanding contributions toward a multidisciplinary understanding or management of water resources in New Jersey.”
Packaging Strategies magazine is naming Rutgers as one of the Most Influential Organizations in packaging in 2007, mainly for the innovative packaging research done by Kit Yam and others in the Department of Food Science. The magazine is featuring the university’s accomplishments in packaging in a special issue.

Kathleen Morgan (Family and Community Health Sciences) received the American Dietetic Association Foundation’s Ross Award in Women’s Health. This award is given to recognize dietitians who make a significant contribution in the area of nutrition and women’s health. The award was presented at the American Dietetic Association Foundation gala event in Philadelphia on October 1.

Barbara O’Neill (specialist in financial resource management) received the National Program Excellence Through Research Award from the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences in St. Paul, MN as part of a team award with three out-of-state colleagues. At the same event, Marilou Rochford (Cape May County family and community health sciences educator) received the 2007 Distinguished Service Award for dynamic leadership and creative implementation of Extension programs.

Lisa Rothenburger (Somerset County 4-H agent) received the Northeast Region Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP) Visionary Leadership Award, presented at the ESP Conference in September.

The Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve recently celebrated 10 years of excellence in coastal research, education, and stewardship. In honor of this milestone, a sweetbay magnolia tree was planted at the Cousteau Center in Tuckerton at a ceremony held on September 13 with JC NERR staff and state and federal partners. Also at the ceremony, Kate Barba, deputy director of NOAA’s Estuarine Reserve Division, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resources Management, recognized Josephine Kozic (IMCS) as a recipient of the 2007 NOAA Environmental Hero Award. Sandy Condit, district director and Jeff Sagnip, communications director for Congressman Saxton, presented Josephine with an American flag that flew over the United States Capitol.

Mukund Karwe (Food Science) has been appointed as honorary professor in the Institute of Chemical Technology in Mumbai, India. This was done to recognize his achievements and reputation as a leading expert in food extrusion systems.

Harriet Worobey (Nutritional Sciences) was featured in the NY Times article “Picky Eaters? They Get It From You.”

Alan Robock (Environmental Sciences) was interviewed at Yellowstone Park for a program on climate change called “A Global Warning?” which aired on the History Channel, Sunday, Nov. 11. Robock was also co-author of an opinion column in the Bergen Record on climate change.

In May, Ken McKeever (Animal Sciences) gave a seminar for the Equine Studies Program and the International Equine Institute at the University of Limerick, Ireland. The university’s Academic Council recently approved McKeever’s appointment as external examiner, which may open the door for joint opportunities for students and faculty from both universities.
**Joel Flagler** (Bergen County agricultural agent) initiated a horticultural therapy program for the Bergen County Special Services School District. The classes are held in a commercial-grade greenhouse made available by the Garfield Housing Authority. The participants, ages 14–21, are developmentally challenged. Each session focuses on specific skill sets (cognitive, social, etc.). The program serves as an approved internship option for School of Environmental and Biological Sciences undergraduates.

### Student Activities and Accomplishments

**Robert Sherrell** (IMCS) and two graduate students, **Michele LaVigne** and **Eleni Anagnostou**, left on November 25 for Punta Arenas, Chile, where they will board the Swedish icebreaker Oden as part of a U.S.–Swedish collaboration with multiple chemical/biological/physical project goals. Sherrell is the nominal U.S. co-chief scientist on the project, which aims to study the Amundsen and Ross Seas. The team will arrive at McMurdo Station around January 6, and will head back home a few days later.

**Nicholas Violand** (undergraduate in general biotechnology, minor in biochemistry, certification in technical writing) began working as a Cooperative Education editorial intern during the summer and is continuing this fall at the *Tropical Fish Hobbyist*. In November, Violand gained billing as a contributing writer at the international magazine. He wrote November’s cover story (“How to Start and Maintain a Nano Reef”) and also took all of the photos for the article.

**Tiffany Polanco** (graduate student in the Endocrinology and Animal Biosciences program) has received a prestigious three-year predoctoral Ruth L. Kirschstein fellowship from NIH, beginning January 1, 2008. Polanco works in **Wendie Cohick**’s (Animal Sciences) lab. Her research will examine the effect of alcohol exposure in utero on mammary carcinogenesis in rodents. She presented her dissertation proposal seminar on October 5.

As part of Rutgers’ annual exchange program with the University of São Paulo/Brazil, Biotechnology Center for Agriculture & the Environment director Gerben Zylstra accompanied five SEBS undergraduate students to Brazil to participate in the University of Sao Paulo’s annual undergraduate research symposium. The trip included a four-day cultural immersion excursion to Rio de Janeiro November 21–24, where the students experienced Brazilian life firsthand. On November 25, Zylstra and the five SEBS students met with Jeff Rankin and five Rutgers School of Engineering students and will spend this next week on three campuses of the University of São Paulo. Zylstra gave presentations in São Carlos and Pirassununga on SEBS biotechnology programs and on research being performed in the Biotech Center. The five undergraduate students presented posters at the two campuses on their research work, joining hundreds of University of São Paulo students who were presenting posters at the same time. The undergraduate students were **Katherine Bradbury** (Wendie Cohick lab), **Jared Ganis** (Gerben Zylstra lab), **Rotem Naftalovich** (Carol Bagnell lab), **Tom Piercey** (Brad Hillman and Don Kobayashi labs), and **Virian Serei** (Gerben Zylstra lab).

### Grants and Fundraising Efforts

**Gloria Kraft** (Burlington County 4-H agent) and **Rachel E. Lyons** (Morris County 4-H agent) received a $31,000 Operation Military Kids grant, beginning October 1.
James Simon and Qing-Li Wu (Plant Biology and Pathology; New Use Agriculture and Natural Plant Products Program) have received word that a proposal to create a Center of Excellence for Research on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (in concert with Mt. Sinai Medical School as lead institute and Purdue University) has been approved by the National Institutes of Health. The center will focus on investigating the protective roles of grape-derived polyphenols in Alzheimer’s disease. The grant provides $373,000 over a five-year period.

Biotechnology Center for Agriculture & the Environment director Gerben Zylstra along with Joan Bennett (Plant Biology and Pathology) have received $245,000 from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency for a one-year study on the feasibility of using bacteria to degrade explosive compounds in mortar shells. The Department of Defense is interested in alternative means for deactivation and disposal of unexploded ordnance. Zylstra and Bennett are part of an interdisciplinary team of academic, corporate, and Department of Defense scientists and engineers coordinated by researchers at Picatinny Arsenal.

Gloria Kraft (Burlington County 4-H agent), Rachel E. Lyons (Morris County 4-H agent) and Ellen Williams (Monmouth County 4-H agent), received a $30,000 4-H Military grant, beginning October 1.

Chris Obropta (specialist in water resources) received a $10,000 U.S. EPA People, Prosperity, and the Planet Award: A National Student Design Competition for Sustainability for “Developing a Small Business in Response to a Stormwater Utility for the New Jersey Meadowlands.”

Jeannette Rea-Keywood (Cumberland County 4-H agent) received $50,000 in funding as part of a Lawrence Township 21st Century Community Learning Center grant valued at $700,000 from the New Jersey Department of Education.

The Food Innovation Center has been awarded a USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grant, which will enable it to continue work begun with its Business Association Mentoring Program and provide NJ food businesses with a resource for marketing, distribution, purchasing, and production initiatives.

Publications and Editorships

Ramu Govindasamy, Richard VanVranken, William Sciarappa, Albert Ayeni, Venkata Puduri, Kim Pappas, James Simon, Frank Mangan, Mary Lamberts, and Gene McAvoy have just published a new report titled “Demographics and the Marketing of Asian and Hispanic Produce in the Eastern Coastal U.S.A.” The report, which was supported by the National Research Initiative of USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, documents and quantifies the ethnic produce market from a demographic perspective.

Dawn Brasaemle (Nutritional Sciences) has a review article entitled “The Perilipin Family of Structural Lipid Droplet Proteins: Stabilization of Lipid Droplets and Control of Lipolysis” published in the December 2007 issue of the Journal of Lipid Research as part of the journal’s thematic review series on adipocyte biology.
Conferences, Seminars, and Other Events

The City of Elizabeth, Union County Freeholders, and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, along with the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in Elizabeth, supported bringing fresh produce to the 2nd Street–Peterstown area of Elizabeth. Several members of Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension of Union County served on the steering committee: Madeline DiNardo (agricultural agent), Janet Brun (program associate, FSNEP), and Jeri Beaumont (project coordinator of the Senior Meals Program). For the past six years, seniors in Union County have enjoyed the farmers’ market program, which provides seniors with New Jersey fruits and vegetables and offers nutrition education regarding the health benefits of increased fruit and vegetable consumption. The Farmers’ Market Program in Union County in FY2006 distributed $35,000 worth of vouchers to seniors through the Union County Senior Nutrition program. Farmers from three different towns participated in the weekly program.

Several youth in the 4-H Horse Program have been selected to move from this year’s statewide competitions to the Eastern National 4-H Horse Round Up competition in Louisville, KY. This year, 29 youth from 11 counties participated in the state competition in equine science presentations, and a team of four youth members was selected to represent New Jersey at the Eastern Nationals. A four-member team from the Horse Bowl quiz competition was also selected to represent New Jersey at the Eastern National competition, as was a four-member team in horse judging.

Dawn Brasaemle (Nutritional Sciences) co-organized a very successful Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology Summer Research Conference, “Lipid Droplets: Metabolic Consequences of Stored Neutral Lipids,” with Rosalind Coleman, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. The conference, held July 28–August 2 at Vermont Academy, was the first ever convened to discuss diverse aspects of the biology of lipid droplets. Both Ariel Igal and Judith Storch (both of Nutritional Sciences) presented talks at this year’s conference, as did Gil-Soo Han, a research associate working with George Carman (both of Food Science).

Approximately 60 people attended the Food Innovation Center’s (FIC) fifth and final “Growing Your Business” seminar, which was held on November 14. At the conclusion of the event, 23 entrepreneurs from the food and agriculture industry in New Jersey, who had attended at least four FIC seminars, received a graduation certificate from Mark Robson, director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station; Lou Cooperhouse, director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center; and Ned Lipman, director of the Rutgers Office for Continuing Professional Education. This fifth seminar, entitled “Business and Marketing Plans,” featured presentations from Joe Mollineaux of the NJ Small Business Development Center, Steve Marakevich of First Pioneer Farm Credit, and Adam Borden of Bradmer Foods. The panel was moderated by Mike Marandola of Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension of Salem County. (Photo: Mark Robson, director of NJAES, presided over the awards ceremony; courtesy FIC.)
Dean’s Corner

Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics

Joan Bennett (Plant Biology and Pathology), head of Rutgers Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics, and Catherine Duckett, associate director of the office, have put together a new website dedicated to archiving and showcasing the stories of Rutgers women in science, engineering, and mathematics. Almost two dozen women from the university have recounted what prompted their career choices and the steps they took along the way. As the website notes, “Our Stories is a collection of personal biographies from Rutgers women faculty in science, engineering, and mathematics. Hailing from diverse backgrounds, our faculty share their pioneering experiences in becoming the professionals that they are, many having traveled unique career paths.” Among those showcased are Dina Fonseca (Entomology), Lisa Rodenburg (née Totten; Environmental Sciences), Sarah Ralston (Animal Sciences), Elizabeth Sikes (IMCS), and Lena Struwe (Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources).

The Marigold Project

A community garden near the Rutgers campus is demonstrating how Mexican communities in the United States can reconnect with their cultural and agricultural roots, while at the same time improving residents’ health and the economic vitality of their neighborhoods. Lazos America Unida, a nonprofit community group, initially created a community garden to grow marigolds for Day of the Dead celebrations, an important cultural event for the Mexican community. The project became a rallying point for local Mexican and other Spanish-speaking immigrants to create a cohesive sense of community.

In partnership with Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, the program promotes economic development, urban gardening, job training, and education. These elements are creating intergenerational and intercommunity links, making the project a successful model for mutual respect, agricultural microenterprise, and community health. Goals for expanding the program in the near future include job and business training opportunities for local residents; health, nutrition, and cooking classes; and increasing exposure to Rutgers to enhance access to higher education for the children of Mexican immigrants.

The School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and Terra Momo Restaurant Group recently hosted a fundraiser at Nova Terra in New Brunswick to support the Marigold Project. The event raised $3,500. (Photo: An arch of marigolds created for the Day of the Dead.)