

A REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE DEAN OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture
May 2015



Pete Nitzsche displaying strawberry trial plot with Prof. Jelenkovic's selections.

For twenty years, now-retired Professor of Plant Biology **Gojko Jelenkovic** conducted strawberry breeding trials by crossing hundreds of varieties to develop better tasting strawberries that would perform well in New Jersey. Over the last ten years, Agricultural Agents **Pete Nitzsche** and **Bill Hlubik** have worked to run field trials on **Jelenkovic's** top selections, as well as conduct hundreds of formal and informal taste tests. This year marks the release of the first selection from the program, the 'Rutgers Scarlet' Strawberry (a trademarked name). The Rutgers Scarlet Strawberry is available on a limited basis this season at test plots at more than a dozen farms around New Jersey and through Rutgers annual plant sale events for home gardeners. The Rutgers Scarlet Strawberry was selected for further

development because it was considered one of the best in **Jelenkovic's** program, with its solid balance of sweetness and acidity setting it apart in flavor.

Production trials of Rutgers Scarlet Lettuce (RSL) have begun, with seed distributed to NJAES research farms and commercial farms in North, Central, and South Jersey. Monmouth County Agricultural Agent **Bill Sciarappa** reports that the first Central Jersey plantings were done in late April. The trials involve two RSL cultivars, red leaf and red romaine cultivars. Six Central Jersey growers have seeds for spring testing on both plasticulture and bareground, one against six standard varieties, two hydroponics, and one commercial aeroponics system. As this innovative nutraceutical product was developed through tissue culture and grown in the nutritional breeding laboratory of Rutgers Distinguished Professor **Ilya Raskin**, Department of Plant Science and Pathology, there is no information on how the lettuce will actually grow in New Jersey. The trials will evaluate bolting, packaging, as well as shelf-life and appearance. The results of the Rutgers production trials will assist New Jersey growers who are interested in growing RSL and will benefit from the information gleaned from the trials before committing to production.



Gef Flimlin showing baby clams to a sustainable ag student.

A growing number of New Jersey farms are offering community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), as a direct marketing strategy. An effort to apply this same strategy to boost an allied industry, Jersey Seafood, has been in development since 2012. In a coordinated effort between Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County and New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium, a community supported fishery (CSF) was launched as a part of Sea Salt CSA at B&B Farms in Galloway Township (owned by former NJ Secretary of Agriculture **Art Brown**). The CSA is run by Jennifer Lamonaca, who worked with marine extension agent **Gef Flimlin** of RCE of Ocean County. What distinguishes the New Jersey-model CSF from others around the U.S., is rather than have pick-up at a particular boat or dock that would limit the number of species offered, Flimlin arranged to work with a variety of fishing docks and shellfish farmers to diversify the offerings. The

Atlantic County CSF has spawned several new CSFs this year, with one in Ocean County at Beach View CSA, one at Heirloom Kitchens in Old Bridge (a culinary boutique), and one at the Rutgers Gardens community farm market. Plans are in the works for others.

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Arend-Jan Both, associate extension specialist in bioresource engineering in the Department of Environmental Sciences, is the principal investigator of an award totaling \$252,452. The project, titled *Optimizing Protected Culture Environments for Berry Crops*, is being supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Of Interest:

In the May 15 issue of *Bloomberg Business*, "Betting on Nature to Solve the Bee Crisis," Associate Professor in Entomology **Rachael Winfree** was quoted on the significant role native pollinator's play with the decline in honeybees. The article reports that with at least \$15 billion in U.S. crops dependent on commercially raised honeybees, the government has allocated about \$40 million a year to study the insects and other pollinators such as birds and bats. The article indicated that entomologists have found that growers of some orchard and vine crops may not need commercial bee services; moreover, research shows that if given a chance, native pollinators can keep many crops such as apples and squash going just as well as commercially raised honeybees. **Winfree** stated, "We have real good evidence that native bees are more effective for some crops. But they get no credit. No one raises them. They live on the margins."

Cumberland County Agricultural Agent **Wes Kline** and Mercer County Senior Program Coordinator **Meredith Melendez** advise growers who schedule a USDA GAP or Harmonized audit this year to be prepared for an unannounced verification visit later in the growing season. In the *Plant & Pest Advisory*, **Kline** and **Melendez** explain that these unannounced visits, which they discussed during their on-farm food safety educational sessions, had previously been limited due to a lack of state auditors. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture Commodity Inspection and Grading Division now has enough staff to conduct these unannounced visits, which will take place after the initial scheduled audit is completed. These visits are used to verify that the farm is operating in a manner that is consistent with the written requirements of the food safety plan and the USDA audit requirements. Growers cannot schedule these visits and will not know specifically when the auditor will arrive to perform the audit. The auditor may ask to see documentation during this visit, but will mostly focus on conformance to audit standards and the food safety plan through visual inspection.

Events:

Cranberry Growers Twilight Meeting

Thursday, June 18, 2015, 5:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Location: Integrity Propagation, Route 563, Speedwell, NJ, just south of Chatsworth.

Contact: Phillip E. Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research, 609-726-1590

Rutgers NJAES Board of Managers Meeting

July 14, 2015, 5:30 p.m.

Rutgers Fruit & Ornamental Research Extension Center

283 Route 539

Cream Ridge, NJ 08514-9634



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