

A REPORT FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DEAN  
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Report to the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture  
May 2020



Asian giant hornet.

Although media reports have triggered panic over the Asian giant hornet (*Vespa mandarinia*), there are no reports this pest is present anywhere else in North America besides the Pacific Northwest. Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) personnel in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources have received inquiries to identify hornets found by the public. In New Jersey, RCE county offices have not identified any submitted specimens to be the Asian Giant Hornet, which has only had confirmed sightings in Washington State and British Columbia, Canada. To quell public fear, agricultural agents **Michelle Infante-Casella** (Gloucester) and **Bill Bamka** (Burlington) developed the following information, [“Killer” Hornet NOT Found in the Northeastern U.S.](#), quoting **Dina Fonseca**, director of the Center for Vector Biology. In addition to being picked up by various local media outlets, the post on NJAES Newsroom generated close to 11,000 views.

On-Farm Direct Marketing in 2020 webinars were held every Tuesday night in May. Topics included Maintaining Social Distancing and Safe Food Handling Practices: Guidance for Farm Markets; Sales and Distribution Strategies; U-Pick Operation Guidelines under COVID-19; and Farmer Panel – Strategies We Are Using. The webinars were hosted by agricultural agents **Wes Kline** (Cumberland), **Meredith Melendez** (Mercer), **Bill Bamka** (Burlington), **Michelle Infante-Casella** (Gloucester), and **Steve Komar** (Sussex) and can be viewed on the [archive page](#).

With the upsurge in interest in gardening, NJAES has expanded its [Home, Lawn & Garden](#) resources with an extensive and comprehensive website filled with information related to gardening, including nutrition and wellness, harvesting, cooking and preserving, gardening with children, and more. In addition, under the guidance of **Andy Wyenandt**, extension specialist in vegetable pathology, a new Instagram account has been launched for the *Plant and Pest Advisory* (#rutgers\_plant\_and\_pest\_adv) with an emphasis towards home owners/home gardeners to help drive these stakeholders to the NJAES website.

A virtual statewide winegrape meeting was held on May 20 and was organized by agricultural agents **Hemant Gohil** (Gloucester) and **Megan Muehlbauer** (Hunterdon) and [New Jersey Center for Wine Research and Education](#).

While NJAES personnel have been unfaltering in producing and conducting online outreach during the COVID-19 lockdown, they also have been proactive in improving their knowledge and skills to better serve their stakeholders. “Train the trainer” webinars were held in May on Digital Photography for Plant



Identification and Problem Diagnosis, hosted by **Lena Struwe**, professor in the Departments of Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources, and Plant Biology and agricultural agent **Pete Nitzsche** (Morris). “Lunch and Learn” webinars in May included agricultural agent **Timothy Waller** (Cumberland) discussing “Recognizing Patterns in Biology to Increase Our Bottom Line,” while “The Spotted Lanternfly in New Jersey,” was covered by extension specialists in entomology **Anne Nielsen** and extension specialist in pest management **George Hamilton**, who discussed: Introduction and spread in the US; Biology and Management in commercial production; and Management in landscapes and forest situations.

Maintaining optimal health is key, especially during a pandemic. “[Wellness on Wednesday](#)” webinars with **Family & Community Health Sciences** (FCHS) focus on a variety of topics related to food, nutrition, and healthy lifestyles. This series walks New Jersey residents through the easy steps to adding positive health behaviors into your day. From reducing the amount of food waste you produce in your home to understanding how to read the new nutrition facts label, the FCHS webinars aim to highlight the small changes that can have a large impact in improving health.

#### **In Memoriam:**

Rutgers NJAES lost three esteemed retired faculty this past month. [John L. Gerwig](#), longest serving director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, passed away on April 24. After serving as extension specialist in agronomy, he was appointed in 1962 as dean and director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a position he held until his retirement in 1992. At the time of his retirement, Gerwig was the longest serving director of extension in the U.S.

[John \(Jack\) Kupcho](#), former Essex County agricultural agent and chair of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources passed away on May 11. Kupcho began his career as the Essex County agricultural agent in 1963, a time of great change and development in the North Jersey agriculture industry. For his 51 years of service to teaching, advising, and improving New Jersey agriculture, Kupcho received the 2015 New Jersey State Board of Agriculture’s Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award. [William J. \(Bill\) Roberts](#) passed away on May 21. Roberts retired from Rutgers in 1999 after a distinguished 41-year career as an extension specialist in bioresource engineering. His work and passion, to this day, leaves an indelible imprint across the globe in the form of the air-inflated, double-layer polyethylene greenhouse (AIDLPG). This innovation revolutionized the greenhouse industry and in 2004, the American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineering dedicated the site of Roberts’ first prototype AIDLPG as an ASABE Historic Landmark. In 2010, the New Jersey agricultural industry awarded Roberts its highest honor, the New Jersey Agricultural Society’s Gold Medallion.

#### **Of Interest:**

The following new fact sheet is now available on [NJAES Publications](#):

FS1319 Getting Started with Online Farm Sales During Times of Social Distancing. **Errickson, L., Hlubik, W., Nitzsche, P. and VanVranken, R.** <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1319>

