



RUTGERS
THE STATE UNIVERSITY
OF NEW JERSEY

A REPORT FROM THE
EXECUTIVE DEAN
OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Rutgers Partners with NJBPU in Dual-Use Solar Energy Pilot Program



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Rutgers Agrivoltaics Program (RAP) and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) [have entered an agreement to develop and implement a Dual-Use Solar Energy Pilot Program](#), which is designed to demonstrate and study the compatibility of agricultural or horticultural production with solar photovoltaic infrastructure on the same property. RAP, a multidisciplinary team of 15 Rutgers personnel, faculty, and Rutgers Cooperative Extension agents, is investigating the scientific merit of this emerging technology to be installed at the Rutgers Animal Farm, Rutgers Agricultural Research and Extension Center, and the Clifford E. & Melda C. Snyder

Research and Extension Farm. RAP will provide public research and technical assistance through the Rutgers EcoComplex, Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS), Rutgers Cooperative Extension and other applicable schools and units within the university.

Rutgers EcoComplex Announces New Campus Composting System

Rutgers Cook Campus has received a [new state-of-the-art composting system](#) with the capacity to automatically process up to 30,000 pounds of compostable materials, including food and animal waste, each month. This will reduce the environmental impact and financial cost of hauling waste to landfills, while creating compost to enrich campus landscapes, gardens, and greenhouses. Part of an R&D project led by **Serpil Guran**, director of the Rutgers EcoComplex, this approach to managing food waste is a first for Rutgers as outlined in the video, [Food Waste Composting at Rutgers University](#). The project is funded by a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection grant and includes multiple collaborators at SEBS, including **Gal Hochman** (DAFRE), **Ethan Schoolman** (Human Ecology), **Daniel Gimenez** (Environmental Science), and **Stephanie Murphy**, director of the Soil Testing Lab.

Three Plant Biology Faculty Ranked “Best Plant Science and Agronomy Scientists”

Three faculty members in the Department of Plant Biology [have been ranked “Best Plant Science and Agronomy Scientists”](#) by Research.com. Distinguished Professor **Bingru Huang** focuses her research on understanding mechanisms of plant tolerance to abiotic stress tolerance, including heat, drought, and salinity for grass species, with emphasis on cool-season turfgrass species. Distinguished Professor **James Simon** leads the research portfolio of the New Use Agriculture and Natural Plant Products group, which focuses on the development of new crops, the identification of new bioactive compounds, new uses of plants and plant products and the botanical standardization of phytomedicines. Professor **James White** studies plant microbiomes and how plants use microbiome as sources of nutrients and defense. His lab’s ultimate goal is to develop new and effective ways to protect plants from biotic and abiotic stresses, and enhance the nutritional status of crops.

Recent Hires

Ming-Yi Chou, [assistant extension specialist in the Department of Plant Biology](#), with expertise in turfgrass pathology, focuses on evaluating and developing efficient cool-season turfgrass disease management measures, including cultural practices, disease prediction models, synthetic fungicides, and biorational agents.

Jean Epiphan, [agricultural agent, RCE of Morris County, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources](#), focuses on commercial nursery production and sustainable landscape management, assisting with the Rutgers Master Gardener and Environmental Stewards programs.

Kaitlin Quinn, North Jersey Tree Fruit IPM program associate housed at RCE of Hunterdon County, is responsible for regional implementation of the Tree Fruit IPM Program, including grower engagement, recruitment, and coordination, and general program support for commercial tree fruit, grape, and other fruit growers.

Melissa Bright, [4-H agent, RCE of Somerset County, Department of 4-H Youth Development](#), focuses on 4-H agri-science with a concentration in dairy and livestock. She will also oversee the Somerset County 4-H program, including club management and volunteer recruitment and development.

Abigail Kesely, [senior 4-H program coordinator, Department of 4-H Youth Development](#), moved into a new statewide role overseeing the 4-H civic engagement programs and marketing and communications for New Jersey 4-H. Prior to this role, Abigail led the Bergen County 4-H program.

Jennifer Salt Taylor [is the FCHS Educator in Passaic County](#). A longtime professional who has focused on community nutrition and increasing access to healthy foods, her FCHS role is to support equitable and sustainable community food systems in the county.

Of Interest

Despite the rain, thousands attended [Rutgers Day](#), including **Ag Field Day**, on April 29, to learn more about the university's environmental and agriculture-related programs. The celebration featured student animal handling and fitting exhibitions of beef cattle, sheep, goats, horses and pigs, arts and crafts, plant and flower sales, and student club activities. On May 15, the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) held its **Convocation**. View [video](#) and [photos](#) of the ceremony that celebrated 770 graduates in the Class of 2023, and welcomed families and friends to the lawns of Passion Puddle, for the first time in four years.

Hemant Gohil, agricultural agent, RCE of Gloucester County, organized and conducted a [South Jersey Wine Grape Twilight Meeting](#), a pesticide credit-bearing event that attracted 42 attendees on May 11 at the Auburn Road Vineyard in Pilesgrove, NJ. The meeting featured presentations from Aaron Guikema, state director, USDA – APHIS Wildlife Services, and several NJAES researchers.

For the past 10 years, the **Rutgers NJAES Plant & Pest Advisory (PPA)** has utilized a web-based blog posting system to communicate critical and time-sensitive crop and pest alerts to commercial farmers. Ag agents, specialists, and staff utilize one or more of the editions of the PPA e-newsletter to reach their constituents. There are currently more than 1,100 subscribers to the ornamentals editions and 1,300 subscribers to the vegetable and/or fruit editions. Users can browse current and archived posts, and subscribe to receive new posts, including observations from the field and real-time recommendations, overnight to their inboxes. Learn more at <https://plant-pest-advisory.rutgers.edu/>.

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