



RU Ready to Farm

Getting Rooted in the Garden State



RUTGERS

New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Project Team

- Program Director: William Hlubik
County Agent I/Professor
- Co-Director: William Errickson
County Agent III/Assistant Professor
- Co-Director: Dr. Lauren Errickson
Director of Rutgers Gardens & Campus Stewardship
- Senior Program Coordinator: Brendon Pearsall
- Farm Coach: Alex Sawatzky
Rutgers Student Farm Manager
- Program Assistant/Videographer: Linnea Eberly



Program Background

- In New Jersey, the average age of farmers is approaching 60 years old
- There is a critical need for a next generation of local farmers to secure our local food system and ensure sustainable food access.
- In September 2020, Rutgers Cooperative Extension was awarded a grant from the USDA NIFA Beginner Farmer and Rancher Development Program



Program Structure

Phase 1: Fundamental Farm Skills (2021)

- Online courses
- Farm tours
- Office hours

Phase 2: CSA Training Program (2022)

- NJAES research farm
- Hands-on
- Cooperative management

Phase 3: Farm Placement & Incubator Sites (2023)

- Individually managed
- Shared equipment and infrastructure



Phase 1 – Farm Business Fundamentals

- 15 2-hour recorded sessions
- Bi-Weekly office hours with program staff
- Reading assignments, quizzes, discussion boards
- Focus on small-scale, low-input agriculture
- Business, marketing, economics, budgets
- Field trips



86 students have completed the phase 1 program so far (48 in 2021; 38 in 2022). 22 more currently on waiting list for next year,

Farm Tours and Work Days



Local Knowledge

- **17 local farmers** served as panelists and lecturers
- **6 local farms** hosted field tours for experiential learning







Phase 2 – On Farm Training

- 12 participants from the first year's class.
- Hosted at the Rutgers Specialty Crop Research and Extension Center in Cream Ridge.
- Produced a 10-week CSA style farm share for 46 paying customers.
- Each participant was responsible for managing 3 crops, a mix of cool and warm season.
- In addition to crop production, the participants also learned other hands-on skills such as:
 - Basic carpentry – Building greenhouse benches and shelves
 - Building a wash station
 - Setting up caterpillar tunnels





Building



Delivering



Donating

- Following the completion of the 10-week CSA, remaining crops were gleaned and donated.
- Nearly 1,000 lbs of production to Replenish and other local food banks.
- Modeling behaviors to reduce food waste.
- Incubator Farmers will donate a portion of their produce in lieu of payment.





Phase 3 – Farming and Incubator

- For 2023 and beyond the goal is to transition students from CSA training into productive agricultural work.
- This will include:
 - Facilitating placement as a farm worker, intern, or apprentice.
 - Assisting with land acquisition by helping to evaluate sites and providing guidance on lease and purchase agreements.
 - Helping those with land plan and execute their farm business.
 - Creating a farm business incubator to allow graduates to begin farming on their own in a lower-risk environment with equipment and infrastructure already in place.
- Working with municipalities and private landowners to open up opportunities for program graduates.



Building Community

- More than about education and business planning, to have a chance of succeeding our beginner farmers will need a strong network and support.
- It's about connections, the connection between farmers and customers, extension experts, and other farmers.
- Not all will go on to own farms, but many will develop into skilled and reliable farm workers and farm managers.



Thank you to our beginner farmer community!





Special thanks to all of our collaborators!

- James Klett – Fairgrown Farms
- Steven Specca – Specca Farms
- Tim VonThun – VonThun Farms
- Larry Kuser – Fernbrook Farms
- Jim Giamarese – Giamarese Farm
- Allison Akbay – Snapping Turtle Farm
- Candice Howard – Duchess Farms
- Leah Ducey – Spring Wind Farm
- Alex Stein – Good Earth Nursery
- Rebecca Kutzer-Rice – Moonshot Farm
- Justine Gray – Dryer Farms/Taste Profit
- Rose Robson – Robson’s Farm
- Mike Hlubik – Hlubik Farms
- Ray Hlubik – Hlubik Farms
- Fred and Kim Cattani – Cattani Farms
- Jen LaMonaca – Walking Bird Farm
- Alex Sawatzky – Rutgers Student Farm
- Kate Brown – RCE Burlington
- Meredith Melendez – RCE County Agent Mercer
- Pete Nitzsche – Snyder Farm, RCE County Agent Morris
- Megan Muehlbauer – RCE County Agent, Hunterdon
- David Specca – Specca Farms/Rutgers EcoComplex
- Kris Holmstrom – NJAES Vegetable IPM
- Dr. Andrew Wyenandt – Extension Specialist in Vegetable Pathology
- Hank Bignell – RCE Warren
- Ashley Pierce – Cornell Extension
- Robin Brumfield – Extension Specialist in Farm Management
- Madeline Flahive DiNardo – RCE Union
- Dean Polk – Director of Rutgers Specialty Crop Research and Extension Center/Fruit IPM Program
- Dr. Joseph Goffreda – Rutgers Fruit Tree Breeding Expert
- Thierry Besancon – Extension Specialist in Weed Science

Thank you!

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