New Jersey News

Dr. Mel Henninger Honored for Distinguished Service to Agriculture

(TRENTON) – Long-time Rutgers professor and extension Specialist Dr. Mel Henninger was recognized with a Distinguished Service to Agriculture Citation by the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture during the virtual New Jersey State Agricultural Convention (http://www.nj.gov/agriculture), February 26, 2021.

"Mel Henninger's significant contributions to New Jersey agriculture have made major impacts on how we grow produce," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. "He is known and highly respected across the country for his in-depth knowledge of potatoes and the availability of his expertise, experience and insight to farmers here has heightened the Garden State's production and agricultural reputation."

Dr. Henninger on his personal Oliver Tractor at the Rutgers Snyder Farm

Dr. Henninger graduated from Penn State University with a degree in agronomy and he returned there to earn his Masters and Ph.D. in agronomy as well. Before being a professor emeritus for the last 10 years at Rutgers, he spent 39.5 years of his career as an extension specialist in vegetable crops at Rutgers. His career included nine years as Department Chair.

At the end of his active extension and research career, Doc began working with many other vegetable crops conducting variety trials at the Rutgers Snyder Farm. In fact, Dr. Henninger was instrumental in helping to establish the Rutgers Snyder Farm when the land was donated to Rutgers in 1988.

"Working with my fellow Rutgers staff and agents for the farmers in New Jersey has allowed me to have a very rewarding and satisfying career," Dr. Henninger said. "Receiving this honor is especially significant to me. Being recognized by my clientele and knowing so many others who have received it before me is very special to me personally and something I will always cherish."

After retirement, Docs love of farming and agriculture were put to good use, he managed research plots of numerous field crop trials for agent and professor Dave Lee at the Rutgers Snyder Farm for many years. He fooled no one, he just loved farming and operating farm equipment.

Mr. Ging Lee Passes, September 2020

Our good friend Mr. Ging Lee, fruit grower in Pittstown, NJ Hunterdon County, passed away at the end of September 2020. No obituary was written or published, but we thought our good friend in the agricultural community should be remembered.

He passed at his farm in Pittstown in a tragic farm accident, trying to jumpstart his large John Deere tractor. He leaves behind his spouse Mrs. Lee and two grown sons.

Mr. Lee was a businessman and a gentleman. He was a friend to all his neighbors and the farm community in Hunterdon County. He was an avid supporter of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the Rutgers Sndyer Farm, and the NJ State Horticultural Society. He was always eager to learn and innovate. Numerous on-farm research trials were conducted in his orchards at Pittstown Fruit Farm. In fact, because at the time he was the largest grower of Asian pears in NJ, we did the pioneering work on his trees that enabled us to chemically thin Asian pears with plant growth regulators and obtain a label for 6-Ba.

Mr. Lee was a man with a solid conviction to family, life, others around him. Any and all success that he accomplished was due to his open-mindedness that allowed him to be willing to always to accept new ideas and concepts. He would continually evaluate what he was doing, and if headed in an unsuitable direction he was always willing to make changes to be better.

Mr. Lee upon retirement from his successful restaurant business career, moved on to farming at an age when most would have rested on their past and current successes. He purchased land in Hunterdon County, NJ which became Pittstown Fruit Farms. What he brought to his farming enterprise was his business experience and a willingness to look for and accept help and new ideas and concepts.

He also brought his marketing expertise to bear and was to establish direct market sales of his fruit and vegetables at the NYC Green Market at Union Square and later at the Morristown farmers market. Mr. Lee was not only a successful grower, but he was able to market his high-quality produce at a premium price. He was a true innovator in what he did. He was way ahead of most local producers with his growing practices and marketing techniques. He was always willing to share with other growers, clientele, Extension Agents and anyone who would ask what he was doing and share his production knowledge.

Once established, the operation was for the most part a two-person operation. Mr. Lee did almost all of the outside work. As crops were harvested, he and Mrs. Lee graded, sorted and packed all fruit and vegetables themselves and took them to market twice a week for retail sales.

To visit the packing shed was a true lesson in marketing. He was very specific in what he offered at each market (pricing and product excellence) based on the clientele base. His theory was to offer people a high-quality product at a level they could afford.

One of his most lucrative production practices was the use of double poly greenhouses with supplemental forced air heat via propane to grow fresh tomatoes and produce. This let him start tomatoes earlier than anyone else in north Jersey and obtain fresh high-quality tomatoes for the NY market 5-6 weeks before others, commanding a premium price. He grew directly in field soils under the greenhouses covered and carefully managed the nutrition for minor nutrients. The ends of the greenhouses were removable so the majority of soil preparation could be with a tractor and implements. Trickle Irrigation on timing systems and fertigation with leaf analysis to determine nutrient programs was also implemented. These concepts allowed him to harvest and market such crops as tomatoes, peppers, snap peas, leafy greens, carrots and many other fresh vegetables extremely early before most producers were even thinking of planting their annual crops.

Mr. Lee proudly hosted the NJ Secretary of Agriculture, Art Brown, at his farm early on. Secretary Brown was amazed at his high-density orchards of apples and Asian Pears and high-tunnel tomato production.

Mr. Lee's most memorable attribute was his genuine positive attitude and his contagious and effervescent smile. No matter who you were, or what you needed and/or discussed, that unique and sincere smile would win you over immediately, and you knew that you just met a new friend for life.

Mr. Lee was a man who expected no more from others than he expected of himself. He was honest, forthright and willing to do what was needed to be done. He never rested on his laurels. He was always looking to improve and be a better producer so that he could supply to his clientele a product that was highly acceptable for their families and households. He will be missed.

The above prepared from thoughts from Jon Repair and Win Cowgill.

Deborah Ann Post Passes, January 30, 2021

Deborah Ann Post, proprietor of Riamede Farm in Chester, NJ, and of Manhattan, NY, passed away peacefully on Saturday, January 30, 2021. Debbie ran Riamede, a pick-your-own apple farm, for over 20 years and oversaw two generations of children enjoy nature and learn about the growing cycle.

Like her mother before her, Debbie was a pioneer of the pick-your-own model in New Jersey. Jeanette Post first opened Riamede's gates to the public in 1974, and Riamede is thought to be NJ's first pick-your-own orchard. Debbie was proud to continue the tradition of welcoming the public to the orchard for an authentic, no-frills experience. One of her passions was maintaining the farm's old-time appeal, which includes the large seedling apple trees planted over a half century ago. While she could have replaced them with more productive modern varieties, Debbie viewed their history and unique beauty as marketable assets that set her farm apart.

As a member of the Farm Bureau and Morris County Board of Agriculture, Debbie actively promoted the interests of farmers as development threatened their way of life. She was a member of the NJSHS and supported Rutgers Cooperative Extension Programs. Debbie grew up just down the road from Riamede, graduating from West Morris High School. However, prior to returning to Chester as an adult and embracing her life as a farmer, Debbie was a trailblazer both in her educational achievements and her career on Wall Street. After spending her freshman year at Smith College, she transferred to Yale as one of the first women to be admitted as undergraduates in 1969. She received a BA magna cum laude in Philosophy from Yale College in 1972. She went on to receive an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1976. After college, Debbie worked as an investment banker at The Chase Manhattan Bank, Lehman Brothers, Brown Brothers Harriman, Oppenheimer and Prudential Bache. She was among the first women hired in Corporate Finance at Lehman Brothers. Although Debbie was a pro at analyzing a balance sheet, outside of work, her interests were diverse and surprising. She loved making pottery and her bowls and vases were treasured gifts. She kept a dressmaker's mannequin in her Riverside Drive apartment to help her make her own patterns and clothing and loved fashion, especially the fashions of the late 60's and early 70's.

Debbie was an enthusiastic do-it-yourselfer. She loved to refinish furniture, choose her own investments, and do her own taxes. She was also intrepid and backpacked through Asia and Africa, often traveling solo. When apple season was over, Debbie decamped to Aspen, Colorado where she would indulge in her love of skiing and where she formed a tight circle of friends. Debbie had spent summers as a child on the Jersey shore and never lost her love of the ocean, especially the Jersey shore. Debbie was an openhearted, generous and loyal friend, someone one could turn to with a problem. She made friends at every stage in her life; took great care to maintain her friendships; and loved to introduce a college friend to a work friend to an Aspen friend to a farm friend.

Nothing daunted Debbie. When diagnosed with brain cancer, she eagerly sought out clinical trials and took a great interest in the science behind the treatments, deriving satisfaction in knowing that she could be advancing medical knowledge. It was Debbie's ardent wish that Riamede continue as a pick-your-own apple farm after her death. For those of you who look forward to a fall outing at Riamede, rest assured that you'll still find her trusted farm manager, Jamie Bourgeois, driving the hay wagon, and her cousin Sally tending the cash register in the store. Neighbors Chris and Ashley Asdal O'Keefe will be joining them in running the farm.

Debbie is survived by her sister Sarah Post of Oregon; her stepdaughters Karen Morison of California and Dale Morison of Idaho; her step-granddaughter Andie Ramos; her aunt Helen Mackay Musler; and her cousins Sally L. York, Judy M. Fogarty and Gary Musler all of Barrington, New Hampshire; and scores of friends from every walk of her life, from Hong Kong to Colorado to Chester, NJ. Debbie was predeceased by her husband, Robert Morison, and her parents Janet Mackay Post and John F Post. A memorial gathering will be held in Debbie's honor when it is safe for her friends and family to mingle. If you wish to make a donation in Debbie's honor, there are three charities which reflect Debbie's life. Alzheimer's ran in the Post family, and Debbie had been participating in Columbia Presbyterian's Taub Centers research in this cruel disease. https://www.givenow.columbia.edu/?_sa=10584&_sd=523#.

Debbie spent most of her life in Chester and was a strong believer in a liberal arts education. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the Festival of Trees, a Chester event supporting the Senior Resource Center, which provides help to seniors and their caretakers (https://srcnj.org/events/), or to a scholarship for female transfer students established by the 156 women in the Yale class of 1972 https://giving.yale.edu/ways-to-give/how-to-gif Please be sure to specify Class of 1972 Women's Scholarship.

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