# New Jersey News

## John Melick, New Jersey's 2011 Outstanding Young Farmer and 2011 National Outstanding Young Farmer

**Lynne Richmond**
***New Jersey Department of Agriculture***

John Melick, a Hunterdon County fruit and vegetable farmer, was honored February 8 as the 2011 New Jersey Outstanding Young Farmer at the New Jersey State Agricultural Convention held in Cherry Hill. He then followed up by being named one of the four 2011 National Outstanding Young Farmers on February 19, 2011 by the United States Junior Chamber (Jaycees) at their Awards Congress in Louisville, Kentucky.

"The Melick family has a long history of being leaders in the New Jersey agricultural industry and John is carrying on that tradition," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher, who presented John Melick, 39 with the award. "John has used his talents to enhance the family's multi-faceted farming operation, which continues to grow and change to stay successful."

Melick received a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Bucknell University and is a graduate of the New Jersey Agricultural Leadership Development Program. He is a leader in his community, serving as Chief of the Oldwick Fire Company. He also is a past president of the fire company, the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture and the New Jersey Council of Farmers and Communities. He is also an active member of the New Jersey State Horticultural Society.

His farm, Melick's Town Farm, consists of pick-your-own, a cider mill, retail markets and agritourism activities. They have the largest fruit farm in Central and Northern New Jersey, with more than 10,000 apple trees and 5,000 peach trees. Melick advised others in the agricultural community that they must become active so they have a say in the future of the industry.

"Get involved with your local and state organizations so that you can help shape policy and initiatives that are beneficial to agriculture rather than just reacting to bad regulations and legislation that might be harmful or burdensome," said John Melick.

New Jersey annually recognizes the outstanding achievements of a young farmer, who is an upstanding leader, respected agriculturalist and is active in community or faith organizations. Nominees must be farm operators, deriving a minimum of two-thirds of their income from farming and must be between the ages of 21-40, not becoming 41 prior to January 1 of the year for which they are applying

A panel of judge's reviews each nominee's application based on the following criteria: progress in their agricultural; soil and water conservation practices; and contribution to his/her community, state and nation.

Secretary of Agriculture, Douglas H. Fisher: "Our young farmers go up against farmers from states known for their agriculture in this competition, and shine year after year. Their successes have helped to show what we already know – that New Jersey is a unique and diverse agriculture state that is often the trailblazer in technologies and research that advances the entire industry."

"We're all farmers and they are dealing with a lot of the similar issues that we are," said Melick of his experience in the national final competition. "There is definitely a proud sense that we're feeding not only our country, but the world."

Since the United States Jaycees presented the first award, six New Jersey farmers' names have been added to the National OYF Honor Roll. They include Abbott Lee (1985), James B. Giamarese (1989), Robert Von Thun, Jr. (2001), Jeffrey VanderGroef (2005), H. William Sytsema (2009) and Richard A. Norz (2010).

The OYF program is the oldest farmer recognition program in the United States, selecting its first group of national winners in 1955, and is administered by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce. The goals of the OYF program are to foster better urban-rural relations through the understanding of farmers' challenges, as well as the appreciation of their contributions and achievements; to bring about a greater interest in farmers/ranchers; and to help build an urban awareness of the farmers' importance and impact on America's economy. The OYF program encourages a greater interest in agriculture through the appreciation of the farmers' contributions and achievements and recognizes local citizens' contributions and encourages better urban-rural relations.

The National OYF program is sponsored by Deere & Company, supported by the Outstanding Farmers of America (OFA) Fraternity and the National Association of County Agriculture Agents (NACAA), and administered by the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce.

For more information on the state's Outstanding Young Farmer program, visit: www.nj.gov/agriculture/about/sba/cover.html.

# Kurt Alstede Awarded 2010 American Vegetable Grower's 'Grower Achievement Award'

**Rosemary O. Gordon**
***Editor, American Vegetable Grower***

Unlike most other growers, Alstede, the winner of American Vegetable Grower's 2010 Grower Achievement Award, didn't inherit his love of ag from his father. What he did learn from his father, who owned a Sunoco station that was in the family for 69 years, was a solid work ethic and how to this solid foundation that led him to pursue a farming career that began in 1982 and later honed in on an agritainment business with several marketing arms.

Kurt Alstede loves his job. As the owner of Alstede Farms in Chester, NJ, he loves everything about being a grower. You don't even have to ask him; it's written all over his face. He is excited to discuss the pepper varieties he is growing or to talk about the latest crops in his pick-your-own (PYO) operation.

Driven by consumers running a 500-acre vegetable, fruit, and flower farm along with a farm market, a PYO operation, and an agritainment business is just the tip of the iceberg for Alstede. The farm also supplies 25 farmers markets in the area and this year launched a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. In addition to those ventures, Alstede also is in the process of getting 10 acres of crops certified organic. Alstede needed a vehicle to communicate with customers regarding the activities on the farm and the latest crops available for PYO.

The best way to do that, he determined, is through the farm's website: www.alstedefarms.com. In addition, customers can now follow the farm's activities on Facebook and Twitter. Located in a very populated area of New Jersey that's about an hour from New York City, the farm has a strong customer base. To stay one step ahead and keep customers coming back, Alstede realized the importance of knowing what consumers want and presenting them with new ideas. By constantly networking, listening to customers, and attending trade shows, he is able to keep tabs on consumers' desires. As a result, the operation grows nearly 250 fresh market vegetable and fruit varieties. Of those 250, some of them aren't what you'd typically see in a grocery store, says Alstede. "This area is a hotbed of locally produced food and people are looking for oddball things," he explains. "When our seed salesmen come calling, they tell us about the exciting things they are offering." For example, the operation not only offers red beets, it also produces orange ones. "It's an opportunity to present the vegetable in a different way," says Alstede. In addition to offering orange beets, customers can find purple string beans along with traditional string beans, wax beans, and lima beans. It is a similar situation with tomatoes and peppers. "We are always experimenting," he adds. "Everything we do is consumer driven."

For the complete story see the September 2010 issue of American Vegetable Grower, and online at http://growingproduce.com/americanvegetablegrower/?storyid=4311

Editors Note: Kurt has been an active member of the NJ State Horticultural Society serving on the Board of Directors and is currently serving on the NJ Small Fruits Council Board of Directors.

***American Vegetable Grower magazine's Grower Achievement Award is proudly sponsored by yngenta, in cooperation with United Fresh Produce Association.***