New Jersey News

Gene Rizio Retiring

Dean Polk, Statewide Fruit IPM Agent

Gene soil sampling blueberries. Photo credit Dean Polk.

Eugene (Gene) Rizio, Fruit IPM Program Associate stationed in Atlantic County and member of the Department of Agricultural and Resource Management Agents, will be retiring from Rutgers Cooperative Extension effective February 1, 2014.

Gene has been an integral part of fruit integrated pest management (IPM) programming since 1988. Gene's career at Rutgers started as an IPM technician, working on one of the first Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grants in the northeast on IPM with disease resistant apples. In 1995 Gene took a position as Fruit IPM Program Associate in Atlantic County, handling both tree fruit and blueberries. As the blueberry industry and the demand for IPM programming grew, Gene's position became 100% devoted to the blueberry industry. During the last few seasons Gene has worked with over 40 direct IPM subscribers on acreage producing over $50 million of fruit. His efforts have impacted the entire blueberry industry, now the most highly valued food crop produced in New Jersey. He has been a trusted source in the blueberry grower community, and many growers relied upon his leadership. His work has impacted the entire NJ industry, training growers and IPM scouts, providing advice and recommendations, gathering data for research projects, and cooperating with colleagues. As we enter into the new era of **spotted wing drosophila – SWD**, Gene's IPM skills will be missed.

Gene demonstrating an insect beating tray from a SARE funded workshop in Pennsylvania. Photo credit Dean Polk.

Joe Nichols Receives the 2014 'Outstanding Fruit Grower Award' from the New Jersey State Horticultural Society

Dave Schmitt, NJAES

At the South Jersey Fruit meeting of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, February 14, 2014, Joe Nichols was presented the award by Dave Duffield, president of the New Jersey State Horticultural Society.

Joe Nichols, along with his wife Vicki farm 50 acres of wholesale peaches, apples and pears in Franklinville, Gloucester County. Nichols Orchards has a reputation for producing consistently high quality fancy fruit for the wholesale market. Most of Joe's loyal customer base retails his product at roadside stands or famer's markets. Buyers often remark that the fruit is large and highly colored and there is no waste.

At the South Jersey Fruit meeting of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, February 14, 2014, Joe Nichols was presented the award by Dave Duffield, president of the New Jersey State Horticultural Society. Photo Credit Dave Schmitt.

Joe is a fourth generation farmer whose family line was traced back to passengers on the Mayflower. His great grandfather came to New Jersey from Massachusetts and established an orchard around the turn of the century at a site very close to where the farm resides today. Joe graduated from Rutgers in 1981 with a degree in Horticulture and took over orchard operations from his Uncle Chet in 1985. In the years since, Joe has worked to convert the apple production systems from seedling and semi-dwarf rootstocks to fully dwarfing high density plantings that produce high yields. He currently grows 12 varieties of apples on 18 acres, starting the season in August with Ginger Gold and ending in November with Fuji and Granny Smith. Nichols Orchards main crop are their 36 varieties of yellow and white fleshed peaches and nectarines on 31 acres. Their season starts in mid-July with PF 5B and ends in September with Snow Giant and Laurol. The operation is state of the art. Because the site is often the coldest in the county wind machines are employed to protect the orchards from spring frosts. Joe recently expanded his peach acreage and added cold storage. Meticulous pruning, thinning, and crop protection, enable Joe and his small crew to produce consistent high yields of fancy fruit.

Joe's innovative production techniques, careful variety selection, and smart investment have enabled Nichols Orchards to become a highly productive and profitable venture. He has been a long time cooperator with the Rutgers Fruit IPM Program and regularly attends educational meetings held by Rutgers Cooperative Extension and has hosted twilight meetings on his farm. In recognition of Joe's hard work and example of how to run a state of the art profitable orchard operation, he is awarded this year's Outstanding Fruit Grower Award.

Mitchel Jones Awarded 2014 Outstanding Young Farmer Award

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

Mitchell Jones, a first-generation farmer from Warren County, was honored February 5 as the 2014 New Jersey Outstanding Young Farmer at the New Jersey State Agricultural Convention held in Atlantic City.

"Mitchell Jones is an innovative and hard-working farmer who has been an active participant in the agriculture community," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. "He is a great example for other young people who are interested in starting careers in agriculture."

As a teenager, Jones worked on local farms and was a member of FFA, gaining hands-on experience about production agriculture. After graduating from Penn State with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy in 1998, Jones began renting farmland. Over time he has expanded his rental properties and now owns a small farm.

Jones is a hay and grain farmer who readily adapts to his hay customers' needs by providing diverse sizes of hay bales. Over the years, he has increased his volume of production and transitioned to larger bale sizes, which reduces his labor needs and increases his profit margins. He is an avid proponent of using Finpack Software to assist in making farm-management decisions.

Jones, whose father worked for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, takes to heart the need to preserve and conserve natural resources. Conservation practices are applied to all acreage he owns and rents. He utilizes cover crops to control erosion and increase organic matter; uses minimal till or no till; has installed lined waterways, underground outlets and erosion control measures; has lands enrolled in a Conservation Stewardship Program; implemented Intensive Nutrient Management on farmland; and works with the NRCS in conjunction with the Audubon Society.

Contribution to agriculture and service to his community is of the utmost importance to Jones. He has served or is serving in the following capacities: soil judging coach to Belvidere High Schools FFA program; Warren County Board of Agriculture President, Vice President and Treasurer; Secretary and Treasurer on the Rutgers University Board of Managers; NJ Farm Bureau Convention and State Agriculture Convention delegate; Warren and Warren Pomona Grange member; and is a voting member of the Warren County Economic Development Advisory Committee.

Left to right, NJ Secretary of Agriculture, Doug Fisher, Mitchell Jones and State Board of Agriculture President Robert Swanekamp.

"I'm very honored they chose me for the recognition," said Jones. "It is important to keep agriculture vibrant and have new ideas and new blood coming along. FFA and 4-H are good places to start to learn leadership."

Jones' wife Lauren is a Certified Nursing Assistant at the Intensive Critical Care Unit of St. Lukes Hospital. She helps with the farms' daily chores, handles bookkeeping and financial planning for the farm and is active in several Warren Grange activities.

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 judges 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.

Since the United States Jaycees presented the first award, eight 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), Richard A. Norz (2010), John Melick (2011), and Paul "Duce" Tallamy (2012).

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 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.

Jim and Sue Giamarese, Awarded the 2014 Neil Robson Farmers Against Hunger Award

Photo, left to right: Kristina Guttadora, Executive Director of the New Jersey Agricultural Society, Sue and James Giamarese.

James and Sue Giamarese were the 2014 recipients of the Neil Robson Farmers Against Hunger Award on Wednesday, February 5 at the New Jersey State Agricultural Convention in Atlantic City. They have dedicated their lives to the New Jersey Agricultural Society's Farmers Against Hunger program since 1996. Through the years, Jim and Sue Giamarese have hosted hundreds of gleaning volunteers, often planting crops specifically for donation to the program. They also host regular fundraisers at their farm and help raise awareness for the program, which transports donated produce from farmers' fields to those in need.

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