

Sustaining Farming on the Urban Fringe



Monthly Highlights from the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

September, 2006

From our field research – to NJ farmers – fast.

The Plant & Pest Advisory Newsletter “puts knowledge to work.”

Jack Rabin, Associate Director for Farm Services and Cindy Rovins, Agricultural Communications Editor

The Plant & Pest Advisory is our flagship seasonal communication to leading professional farmers, landscapers, grounds maintenance, turf managers, and agri-business industry product suppliers.

We surveyed our 700+ subscribing readers to assure we stay focused on their needs. 360 readers responded to a questionnaire—greater than a 50% response rate—indicating they really care about our Extension delivery. Here we share some impacts and the tremendous satisfaction our readers expressed.

88% Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Adoption.

A remarkable 88% of reader respondents “Always,” or “Sometimes” use IPM practices researched and delivered by Rutgers NJAES and Extension. 82% tell us our outreach assists them in using IPM. Wow!

At a time of increased public concern for environmental quality, food safety and health, it is rewarding to recognize our long-term IPM research and extension changed behavior at such a sustained high level. It is important for growers to communicate to policy makers how extensively IPM is adopted.

We define IPM as users who practice at least two of the following three tactics: 1) Monitoring plants and pest populations; 2) Adherence to treatment thresholds; and 3) Using alternative pest management strategies like crop rotation, resistant varieties, biological control, and selective pesticide applications.

Changing Business Practices and Reducing Costs.

55% told us our information changed their business practices and 52% reported the Plant & Pest Advisory helped their business reduce costs, saving chemical or fertilizer applications. Many responding



At a field meeting, Tom Buganski, Cape May County grower and roadside market operator, shows samples and receives crop advising from Andy Wyenandt, Extension Vegetable Pathologist. Together they review control options in the Rutgers NJAES Commercial Vegetable Recommendations.

readers enthusiastically provided testimonials like, “...We’re saving customers’ plants from destruction, thus saving them replacement costs and saving our reputation.”

Saved “...\$5,000-\$10,000 forecasting and identifying disease problems.”

“...Less Spraying and Timely Spraying equals thousand dollars saved.”

Avoiding “...One unnecessary spray can save up to \$6,000.”

Seasonal Information Must be Timely to be Useful! 96% of our respondents indicated information is “Very

Continued on next page



Blacklight trap monitoring, field scouting, & pheromone trapping; 3 vital components of practicing IPM. These are performed by Rutgers NJAES and reported to Plant & Pest Advisory readers.

Useful” or “Somewhat Useful.”

99% told us our information was “Timely.”

98% indicated our articles were the right length.

95% said our “Technical Level” was about right.

No more than 1-2% told us Rutgers Cooperative Extension Plant & Pest Advisory did not meet their expectations for Usefulness, Timeliness, Content Length, or Technical Level. That’s something to be proud of.

Timeliness from research and extension to New Jersey’s fruit and vegetable farmers, managers, landscapers, and others must be important because 54% told us they read our information as soon as they receive it, 38% share it with others in their family, and 43% share our information with their employees. 23% provide the information to their customers.

How do Respondents Rank the Usefulness of Extension Methods?

How do responding readers rank the useful importance of Rutgers Cooperative Extension educational delivery methods? Not surprisingly, Direct Advising from County Agents and Specialists, Recommendations Manuals, the Plant & Pest Advisory Newsletter, Fact Sheets and Bulletins, the Research Farms, and Educational Events are ranked “Very Useful” by responding readers. One surprising result is the low ranking of our

Website and Advisory Groups as most useful educational methods among the readers.

What Additional Educational Topics do you want?

It is no a surprise landscape industry readers felt energy alternatives were less needed while fruit and vegetable growers ranked energy alternatives much higher. The most popular highly ranked additional education topics included Wildlife Damage, i.e., managing conflicts between the needs of humans and needs of wildlife; Good Agricultural Practices including worker sanitation, food safety, and providing retailers with safe food with a traceable record from fields to consumers’ tables; Organic Practices; Alternative Energy; and Selling and Marketing Skills.

Value of Information to Readers

291 subscribers ranked their “willingness to pay,” reporting a willingness to continue paying for the Plant & Pest Advisory. 54% of respondents reported willingness to pay \$20-\$30 for their subscription. 17% reported willingness to pay \$40-\$50, while 10% wanted to pay only \$10.

Subscribe, and tell your Agri-business Colleagues about Plant & Pest Advisory.

The Plant & Pest Advisory consolidates our timely NJAES expertise and reports weekly from 30-40 investigators and field staff. We get field observations from our faculty and staff in the morning and it is published and delivered to you the same day. This swiftness, sophistication, and our infrastructure of research farms, IPM staff, investigators, Extension agents, and technology depends on a publicly well-supported NJAES budget. Your expectations for NJAES to do better, to do more, and do it faster, depend on broad legislative funding support to NJAES.

If you want to keep your relationship to NJAES and Extension strong, become a subscriber. Visit us on the web, and check out past issues at:

<http://www.rcrc.rutgers.edu/pubs/plantandpestadvisory/>.