

Sustaining Farming on the Urban Fringe



Monthly Highlights from Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

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New Jersey Women in Agriculture

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No, it's not a swimsuit calendar, it's a reality! At first glance, one might not know what to think of such a title. Take the 2001 "Regional Women in Agriculture" Conference, for example. When I first saw the announcement a few years ago I guess I was a bit leery. "Why would women need to meet to talk about farming, what's the difference?" I asked myself. Six years later and hopefully a bit wiser I realize there's a *lot* of difference, agriculturally, I mean.

Women are not necessarily entering the same aspects of agriculture that men succeed in. We're certainly not interested (collectively at least) in taking over the industry. The majority of women farmers in New Jersey are in animal production or ornamental crops, their farms are typically smaller and more commonly cater to niche markets (derived from 2002 NASS Census data). These are just a few of the many differences between men farmers and women farmers. We may have similar occupations but people of converse genders still tend to have different interests or ideas on how to make their operations successful.

Hence, the 2008 Regional Women in Agriculture Conference is designed to address the educational needs and interests of women in agriculture. We'll have sessions for equine, poultry and grain producers, strategies for direct marketing and topics on wine-grape production, organic production and many other pertinent issues. The Women in Ag conference is not about being a feminist, elitist or anything else exclusionary. Rather it generates a forum, celebrates our common interests and encourages us to have dreams as unique as our personalities.

Regardless of our individualities, we typically have at least one binding-tie. Most women in New Jer-



Jenny Carleo (right) and farmer Jenny Gleason (left) will be speaking on "Sunflowers for Farm Market Enhancement" at the Women in Ag Conference.

sey who are in the agricultural field are here because we *want* to be. I doubt any of our fathers pressured us to get all sweaty and muddy working in the sun. For whatever reason, we actually like it! The number of women farmers in New Jersey is increasing. According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, New Jersey had 1,992 women who were the principle operators of farms. That's 321 more than 5 years prior. The conference gives women a tangible sense that they are part of something larger than themselves.

"The best reason to come to the conference is discussing ideas and interacting with other women farmers", said Nancy (Brill) Maxwell, who farmed for Springdale Farm Market while growing up in Cherry Hill. Maxwell is now a Field Researcher for Rutgers and stated "Each time I've gone to the Women in Ag Conference I really enjoyed the keynote speaker... and the food! Go for the networking, we always come home with great marketing ideas."

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Participants in the 2006 Regional Women in Agriculture conference in Dover, DE

In 2008 the keynote speaker is Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator of Farm Loan Programs for the USDA in Washington D.C. “Every time I’ve met her I have been so impressed by her”, said Jenny Rhodes, Extension Educator for Maryland Cooperative Extension. Ms. Cooksie’s program assists established farmers who have suffered financial setbacks from natural disasters, or whose resources are too limited to maintain profitable farming operations. On Thursday night, the featured speaker is Linda MacDonald, a horse owner, breeder, trainer and harness racing driver. Her motivating speech will be held at the reception overlooking the racetrack. Afterwards, everyone can watch and enjoy the harness racing together.

The conference will be on January 24-25th at the Dover Downs Conference Center in Dover, Delaware. “Aggies”, mark your calendars and plan to attend! Better yet, send your wives! She’ll come back smarter and in a great mood, plus, you won’t have to worry about the male-female ratio. You can finally catch a break from the “honey-do list” and who knows, she might even miss you! More information can be found by contacting Laurie Wolinski at 302-831-2538 or lgw@udel.edu.

Visit the Women in Agriculture website at:

<http://ag.udel.edu/extension/kent/womeninag.htm>.

The 2008 Women in Agriculture Conference will be presented by the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension in collaboration with the Cooperative

Extension Services of University of Maryland, Rutgers the State University of New Jersey, and Delaware State University. It is sponsored by the Northeast Center for Risk Management and Education & Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).



Our work benefiting farming sustainability and quality of life in New Jersey depends on gifts from people sharing our Rutgers NJAES vision for a vibrant, healthy, profitable urban fringe farming community. We invite you to join us. Please contact Jack Rabin at 732-932-5000 ext. 610 or rabin@njaes.rutgers.edu.