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Rutgers News

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April 23 dedication of EcoComplex to bolster environmental business development and education in New Jersey

EDITOR'S NOTE: Acting Gov. Donald DiFrancesco is planning to attend this event. If you plan to send a reporter or camera crew, contact Michele Hujber at 732-932-9000 x555.

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ--The nation's first statewide environmental research/technology development center is being dedicated at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, April 23, in Columbus, New Jersey. The facility is a 32,000-square-foot research and education facility that will promote economic development in southern New Jersey. The new center was initiated through a joint venture between Rutgers' New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES), Stevens Institute of Technology and the Burlington County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Dedication speakers will include Donald DiFrancesco, acting governor; Robert Shinn, commissioner, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection; Arthur Brown, secretary, New Jersey Department of Agriculture; Dr. Bruce C. Carlton, executive dean agriculture and natural resources; Dr. Adesoji Adelaja, dean and director of research, Cook College and NJAES; and Dr. Harry Janes, director of the New Jersey EcoComplex.

"The New Jersey EcoComplex will accelerate the greening of the state's educational and industrial portfolio," says Francis L. Lawrence, president of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. "By combining environmental concerns with education and economic development, the center will address such issues as developing the manufacturing abilities of small- and medium-sized New Jersey agricultural and environmental firms, creating new jobs, maintaining the state's competitive edge in the agricultural and environmental industries, and improving the skills of workers. These applications will reinforce the University's commitment to tapping its own intellectual capital to become more productively involved with improving the quality of life for all New Jersey residents."

"As the first statewide environmental research/technology development center in the nation, the EcoComplex reflects the commitment of Rutgers and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station to find solutions to environmental issues. Through creative research and outreach, our goal is to turn environmental problems into economic opportunities, as in the utilization of landfill gases and other wastes in productive enterprises that create new business opportunities while eliminating or minimizing environmental pollutants," notes Executive Dean Carlton.

The economic development component of the New Jersey EcoComplex revolves around environmental technology demonstrations. "The EcoComplex conducts scale-up demonstrations

for new environmental processes and showcases New Jersey's cutting-edge environmental research and technologies," says Janes. The New Jersey EcoComplex, which has been in existence as a "soft-walled" research center since 1996, is involved in research of all aspects related to using landfill gas as an energy source. This renewable energy source can be used for heat production and electrical generation for homes and businesses. "Reusing landfill methane means greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere are reduced, which is a good thing for our environment," says Janes.

This technology is already being demonstrated at the Burlington County Research and Demonstration Greenhouse. "The demonstration project closely mimics the challenges that producers will face. So we've not only come up with the technology, but we also provide a detailed analysis of costs and revenues involved in running a similar operation," says Janes. Tours of the greenhouse facility will follow the ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony.

Now a "brick and mortar" center, the New Jersey EcoComplex is poised to expand its services to entrepreneurs in the area of agricultural and environmental business plan development. The facility will provide access to laboratories, research personnel, office space, and other means of assistance. A few of the many areas of expertise available at the center include environmental remediation and restoration, pollution prevention and industrial ecology, solid waste and packaging management, and controlled environment agriculture.

"The EcoComplex is a major step for the NJAES. Through it, we are extending the Land-Grant concept of mission-oriented research and outreach to pressing issues in the important area of the environment. By developing new environmental technologies, the EcoComplex will solve important environmental problems while attracting new environmental businesses to New Jersey. By offering services and resources to entrepreneurs that are not available anywhere else, we will establish New Jersey as "the place to go" for environmental firms in terms of access to environmental technology and entrepreneurial know-how," says Dean Adelaja.

In addition to economic development, the New Jersey EcoComplex provides a statewide focal point for environmental education. "There will be programs for people of all age groups, from kindergarten through graduate students and professionals," says Janes.

The building houses a conference center with a 200-seat auditorium that is equipped with distance learning technology, which is available for agribusiness and environmental education programs. "Our programs focus on explaining the intricacies of the environment and how environmental technology works to remediate and maintain our precious habitat for future generations," says Janes.

The building was designed by Nadaskay Kopelson Architects of Morristown, a firm that specializes in designing "green buildings. Environmentally-sensitive features of the building include beams that have been constructed with recycled metal, paint that is free of volatile organic compounds, and sun panels and tiles that provide natural heating and light.