



## MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Spotlight Program Reveals New Advancements at Rutgers' EARTH Center**

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY** – For one half hour, representatives from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension EARTH Center shared recent and trending research and programs with the public, including the need for lead testing in urban gardens, the benefits of bio-energy crops and the economic downturn's role in expanding interest in new trades, specifically landscaping.

During the March 2013 broadcast of *Spotlight on Middlesex County*, these are just a fraction of the topics covered by staff members from the EARTH Center, a South Brunswick-based facility that represents Environment, Agriculture, Research, Teaching and Health.

While on camera, experts and representatives from the Riva Avenue center, map out the wide variety of ongoing and upcoming research and educational programs being conducted on the 400-acre campus. Central to that on-air discussion is *Spotlight* host, Middlesex County Freeholder Charles E. Tomaro, as are his guests: Agricultural and Resource Management Agent Bill Hlubik, Environmental Agent Michele Bakacs, and County 4-H Agent Laura Bovitz.

These center staff members promoted their interactive Butterfly House, the mobile horticultural therapy program and the ground's many themed gardens, some of which yield harvests used to assist County residents in need.

"We've been able to set-up a lot of beautiful demonstration and research gardens that directly correlate to resolving local problems in Middlesex County," Hlubik said.

The EARTH Center's newly established organic land care course, which imparts skills and best practices for sustainable and environmental land care, will be of particular interest to professional groundskeepers, landscapers and even public works employees, many of whom have already taken advantage of the four-day program.

By tuning in, viewers will also learn that this particular program was born from a joint "needs assessment" survey, conducted by Essex and Middlesex Counties and that it indirectly encourages soil health, promotes biodiversity and reduces negative impacts on home landscapes, while offering a 3-year certification test to attendees.

Additionally, this *Spotlight* episode highlights the Center's 4-H programs, a national organization that instills leadership, citizenship and life skills through animal rearing, crafts, cooking and more. While recording, Bovitz talks about EcoVenture, a week-long camp focused on ecology and the environment, where youth develop personal environmental plans of action, in addition to writing and filming public service announcements which are then distributed to various media outlets.

In his appearance, Hlubik said these programs enlist more than 600 volunteers annually, providing contact information to the public so that they too can join the ranks.

*Spotlight on Middlesex County*, a product of the Middlesex County Improvement Authority and the Middlesex County Freeholders, is in its 20<sup>th</sup> year of presenting topics of interest to Middlesex County residents.

Partly funded through the Middlesex County Freeholders, as well as Rutgers University, the Extension, itself, is part of a national network of land grant universities devoted to research and public disclosure of findings.

*Spotlight* can be viewed on most Middlesex County municipal channels, in addition to community channels provided by Comcast and Cablevision.

For more information on the *Spotlight on Middlesex County*'s viewing times and channels, the public can log onto [www.mciauth.com](http://www.mciauth.com).

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