

Mickel Retires as Hunterdon Agricultural Agent

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Bob Mickel shows his Distinguished Service Award from the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture. With him are (from left) daughters Carrie Tagliaferro and Dana Castellana and his wife, Evelyn. *Credits: courtesy photo*

RARITAN TWP., NJ - After 31 years with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Robert C. “Bob” Mickel has retired from that organization but will continue working with farmers.

He began his career with Rutgers in 1987, serving as acting 4-H agent for Mercer County and held several position since then, most recently as a Hunterdon County agricultural agent based at the Extension Center here. He was Extension department head for the past six years.

The Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture honored him with its Distinguished Service Award at its recent annual dinner meeting. It was in recognition of his years of outstanding service to the board and the region’s farmers as a county agent and regional livestock agent. He was a tenured faculty member with Rutgers University and its School of Environmental and Biological and Sciences (formerly Cook College).

Mickel, 70, has been involved in agriculture most of his life. He grew up on a beef farm that his father managed near Washington's Crossing in Mercer County. He raised steers and sheep as 4-H projects and majored in animal science at Delaware Valley College, then with his brother managed a large beef farm. He later managed large beef feedlot and grain operations in Virginia and North Carolina before returning to New Jersey.

After the Mercer 4-H post and receiving his master's degree in vocational-technical education from Rutgers in 1989, he was hired as the first regional livestock agent, serving Somerset, Hunterdon and Mercer counties. In 1995 Mickel moved to the Sussex County Extension office, adding Sussex to his regional coverage. Then three years later he became a Hunterdon County agent.

Over the years he designed and delivered many educational programs for farmers. As a Rutgers faculty member, Mickel developed livestock research projects and collaborated with colleagues on projects involving field crops, pastures and forages, equine, small farm management and alternative livestock species. He received numerous state, regional, and national awards for his programming and research from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents and presented many posters and invited lectures at its meetings. In New Jersey he designed programs for the 4-H youth development program, with the Lamb Carcass Evaluation program held annually for 30 years.

Mickel has worked extensively with the New Jersey Beef Industry Council (serving as its only executive director) after being instrumental in its formation. He helped develop and deliver the state's Beef Quality Assurance Training Program.

Mickel has lived on a small farm in Lebanon Township since 1990, moving from Tewksbury. He said he will continue working with the council and plans to pursue beef projects that he's "had on the back burner" such as a community support agriculture program (CSA) for beef. And he looks forward to more time with his wife of 43 years, Evelyn, and their four grandchildren.

In one of the first regional extension-based programs, Mickel worked with colleagues at Rutgers and Penn State to develop the Penn-Jersey Extension Partnership, in which five agents from Pennsylvania and New Jersey on the neighboring sides of the Delaware River for more than 15 years conducted winter meetings, field days, twilight meetings and demonstrations with support of ag specialists in both states. The Partnership created the Crop Master six-week training program and website for farmers and crop consultants featuring information for forages, soybeans, corn, and small grains.

Mickel was instrumental with the group in developing the Northeast Small Farm Expo and Trade Show, an effort between Rutgers, Penn State and Cornell, creating an annual two-day educational program for growers. Mickel and colleagues were named as "Educators of the Year" for 2017 in recognition of their long-standing contributions to the Junior Breeder's Livestock Symposium.

"It has been my pleasure to work for and with the growers and producers across both the counties I served and across the entire state," he said. Providing extension

programs, training and educational guidance for farmers of all types “has been extremely rewarding for me,” since he can witness their successes. And he spoke of the “utmost pride, and enjoyment that comes when we see the light of knowledge go on in both our youth and adult students.”