

# 2016 NACD Urban Agriculture Conservation Initiative Grant



**Rutgers University Veterans Environmental Technology and Solutions (VETS) Program & Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District (NJ)**



Rutgers Veteran Environmental and Technology Solutions (V.E.T.S.) is a 10-month, 40-hour per week, intensive certificate program, which trains participants in Sustainable Landscaping, Horticulture, and Entrepreneurship. Participants receive a paid educational stipend, over 1,000 hours of classroom instruction from Rutgers faculty and staff, along with supplemental hands-on training, field trips, and networking with local industry leaders.



**The Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District was awarded \$50,000 through the NACD grant for urban agriculture in NJ and is working with the existing Rutgers VETS Program through Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Essex County.**

The Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District (HEPSCD) in Northern NJ is a public subdivision of the State of NJ operating under the NJ Department of Agriculture. The USDA-NRCS, Rutgers University Cooperative Extension, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and the NJ Association of Conservation Districts are active partners.

The district serves nearly 2 million residents or 22% of New Jersey's population.

The national average for population density is **12 people per square mile**. The NJ average is **1200 people per square mile**. NJ's largest city Newark's is **12,000 people per square mile**.

11 of the 30 most populated cities in New Jersey are located within the HEPSCD area and **6 of the top 10 most densely populated cities in the U.S. are served by HEPSCD.**

There is an overwhelming population growth in the urban core areas where open space is scarce and there is a growing desire for urban agriculture within those areas.



The Rutgers (VETS) program's mission is to improve the lives of unemployed veterans in Newark, NJ, as well as other urban towns in the area, by providing training in urban agriculture.



**The VETS program provides local veterans with urban agriculture training and new green job skills.**



**The veterans also receive entrepreneurship training through a partnership with the Rutgers University Business School so they can be prepared to start their own businesses after the program concludes.**

The veterans have implemented the nation's first-ever fish exchange, a groundbreaking initiative. Fish caught in the historically contaminated Lower Passaic River can be exchanged for clean fish raised by the trainees.



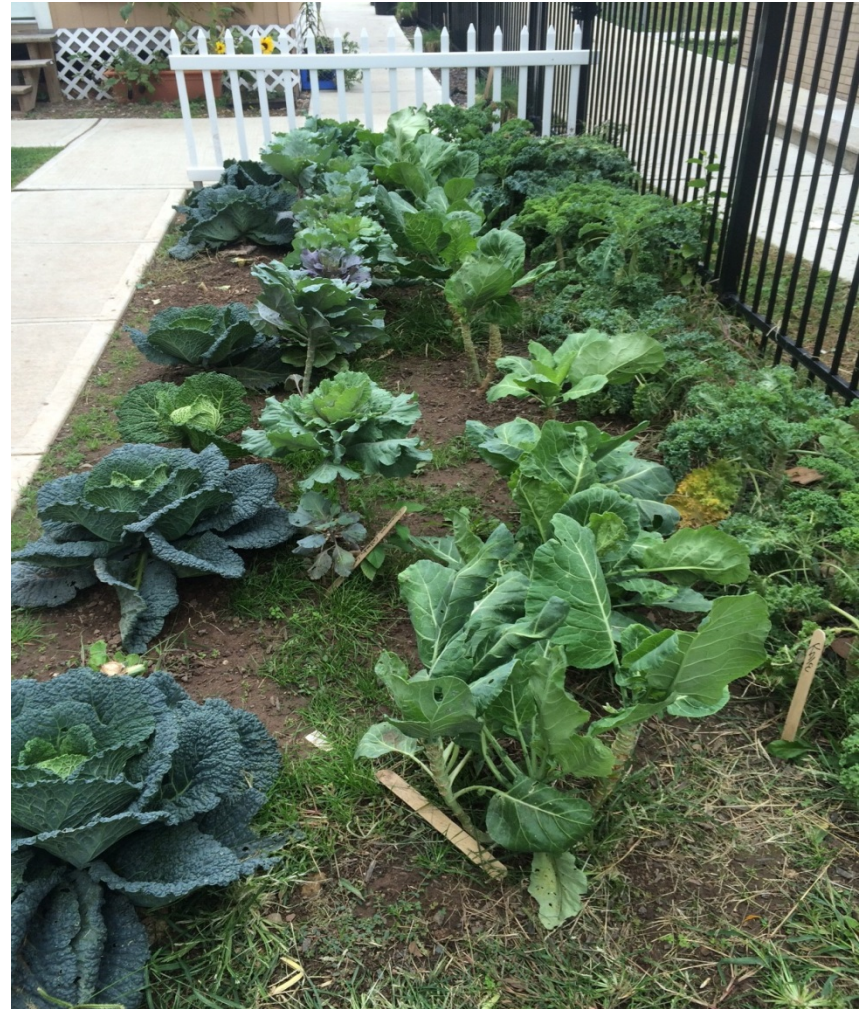
**The farmed fish waste is used as fertilizer in the adjacent vegetable beds.**

The Rutgers VETS Program is housed in the Central Ward of Newark, the most populated city in NJ. An active greenhouse and community garden provide access to fresh produce in an underserved community.



**Many areas in the urban core are low income and there is little to no access to affordable herbs and fresh produce.**

Through the Rutgers VETS program, veterans are taught how to grow produce in limited spaces using creative and innovative approaches.



**Milk crates and small areas of land being used for growing vegetables and herbs.**



# Rutgers VETS Successes

- The VETS Program has been highlighted nationally on FOX News
- Graduates are starting their own landscape companies and working for commercial farms
- Local food banks are recipients of the grown produce
- Distressed neighborhoods are being revitalized

# Rutgers VETS Challenges

- Acquiring dedicated plots
- Securing plots from vandalism
- Ensuring plot longevity
- Continued financial support



# HEPSCD and NJ Farm Bureau

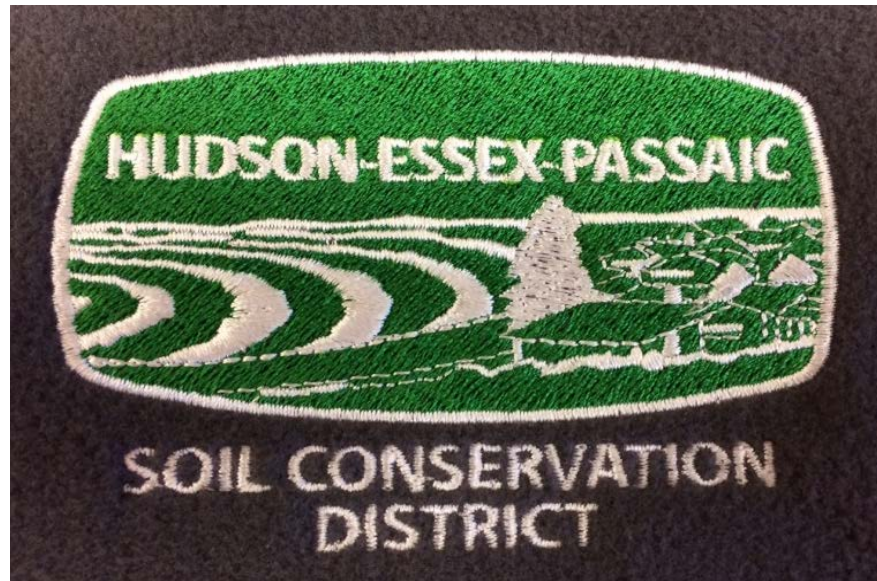


**Through a partnership with NJDA and NJFB this grant has enabled HEPSCD to obtain these team building items for the Rutgers VETS.**



**The Rutgers VETS program has already oriented 27 veterans in environmental restoration, storm water management and landscaping and are hopeful for an additional 30 graduates in the next year.**

## The Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District's role in urban areas



Besides HEPSCD's role in the VETS program, the District oversees construction projects with Soil Erosion and Sediment Control certifications.

The HEPSCD works with developers and land owners during construction to minimize offsite sediment loss pursuant to the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act of NJ.

HEPSCD's efforts help improve the quality of soil and water by minimizing stormwater pollution.



- Expand the VETS program to other urban areas
- Partner with the NRCS and NACD to offer similar training programs to other groups in need of agricultural training
- Educate urban municipalities on the importance of clean water and soil
- Encourage implementation of urban conservation practices
- Continue to administer the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act of NJ on active construction projects to minimize offsite sediment loss

## Special Thanks:

Dr. Amy Rowe, Ph. D. County Agent II (Associate Professor)  
& Jan Zientek, Senior Program Coordinator  
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Cooperative Extension of Essex and Passaic Counties

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)

United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS)

New Jersey Farm Bureau (NJFB)

New Jersey Association of Conservation Districts (NJACD)

New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA)

Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors

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