

Our mission is to increase awareness and understanding of agriculture among New Jersey educators and students. You can learn more on our website

[newjersey.agclassroom.org](http://newjersey.agclassroom.org)

[Click to subscribe](#)



## June is the Month for Strawberries!

New Jersey's first fruit harvest of the year is officially underway - it's strawberry time! Farmers markets, grocery stores, and u-pick farms are full of these red, delicious berries.

Consider taking your students to a farm to pick strawberries, or grow some strawberries at school, in the ground or in containers. These perennial plants are easy to grow and will provide you with berries for years to come.

---

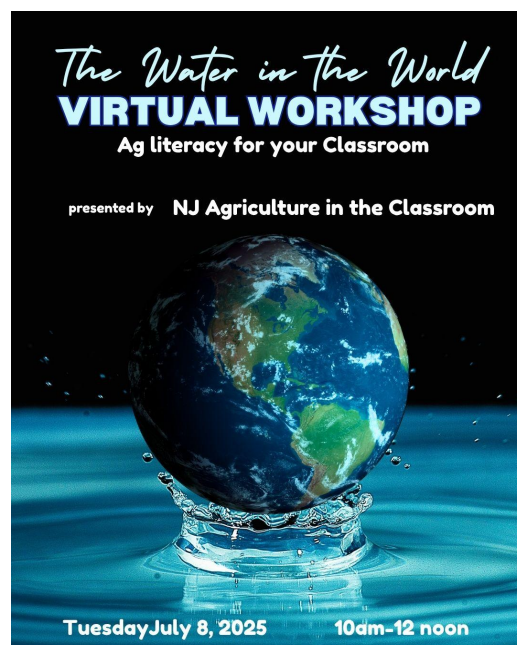
*Our next newsletter will come out in September. Be sure to check out our website for activities for summer programs. We wish all of you a happy summer!*

---

### *Register for Our Summer Workshop* **The Water In The World**

Join us for a virtual water ride as we show you how to bring agriculture into your PreK-5 classroom with lessons about our greatest natural resource - water!

Learn how to teach the water cycle and the role of plants in it. Find out how to measure rain with a homemade gauge. See how to build a simple hydroponics system with dollar-store materials. And explore how climate change is impacting New Jersey's rainfall and sea levels, and find out what farmers are doing to adjust.



This free workshop will be held via Zoom on Tuesday, July 8 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Attendees will earn two professional development credits.

Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

---

## Meet Our 2025 Teacher of the Year **Jenn Hill** of Maurice River Elementary School

New Jersey Agriculture in the Classroom is proud to announce that Jennifer Hill, agriculture teacher for Maurice River Elementary School, has been selected as our 2025 Teacher of the Year.

Jenn will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the National Agriculture in the Classroom annual conference, being held this year from June 23-26 in Minneapolis.



Jenn has been the agriculture teacher for grades K-8 at the Maurice River Elementary School in Port Elizabeth, Cumberland County, for the past three years.

"My motivation for teaching agriculture in the classroom stems from working with young students who were less than eager to get their hands dirty, to the students with the misconception that agriculture is only about getting your hands dirty," Jenn said.

"I want to develop a curriculum that flows from kindergarten to eighth grade. I want students to understand the importance and impact that agriculture has for their futures and all of the careers that fall under the category of agriculture. Exposure to agriculture will help lead the way to our future."

"I have never heard a student say, 'I want to be a food scientist when I grow up.'"

---

## Lessons of the Month



### **Bunches of Berries** Grades 3-5

Students investigate a variety of berries, discover how and where they are grown, and explore their nutritional benefits. Click [here](#) for the lesson.



### **Strawberry Genetics** Grades 6-12

Students learn about the strawberry breeding process and extract DNA from a strawberry. For the grades 6-8 lesson, click [here](#). For the grades 9-12 lesson, click [here](#).

### **Freshest Fruits** Grades K-2



Students determine where fruits grow and their nutritional value by completing an activity to observe the size, shape, texture, and seeds of various fruits.

Click [here](#) for the lesson.

---

## Library Corner



### **I Love Strawberries** by Shannon Anderson *Grades K-4*

Through a young girl's comical scrapbook-style journal entries, readers will learn how she convinces the “old people” (aka her parents) to let her grow her own strawberries.

Creating a garden calendar and notebook, how strawberries grow, what pests to look out for in a garden, why ladybugs are helpful, and how a good gardener takes care of strawberry plants are all explained in this fun and educational story.

---

## Meet a New Jersey Farmer

**Gary DeFelice of Cedar Hill Farm and Nursery**

***Cedar Hill Farm and Nursery in Middletown, Monmouth County  
grows pick-your-own strawberries.***



### ***Tell us your farm story.***

While growing up on my mother's family's farm, I got to see my uncles grow apples, peaches, and strawberries, along with asparagus. I remember falling asleep with the windows open in the summer, hearing the irrigation guns hitting the leaves of the peach trees during dry periods.

There was nothing better than being able to drive a tractor from time to time. I had my first vegetable garden when I was seven, and my hands have been in the soil ever since.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, the farm operation ceased, the land became overgrown, and many of the fruit trees left unattended began dying. My father was a successful car dealer with his dad and brother, so I wasn't raised to be a farmer. But, I went through high school mowing open ground on the property just to help keep the land from getting completely overgrown.

I went to Delaware Valley College to study ornamental horticulture. After graduating, I immediately married my college sweetheart and took a job as a landscape foreman with a large commercial landscape firm. But my heart wanted to go home to cleanup the farm and get the land back into some kind of production. So after three years in the landscape field, I did exactly that.



While tackling the daunting task of reviving the old Middletown farm, I began growing mums and pumpkins along with vegetables, and strawberries, which became our staple crop. I also grew hay and straw with the support of a neighboring farmer.

I still needed to generate additional income to pay the bills and eventually buy a home and start a family. I was employed with what is now the NJ Turnpike Authority. The job's hours allowed me to continue to farm part-time, (if you can ever call farming part-time).

During my 34 years working full-time, I continued to farm the family property, even adding Christmas trees for a cut-your-own operation. I retired in 2020 from the Turnpike Authority, and I continue to farm the family property today on a much smaller basis.



### ***What is the most important thing you want the students to know, that you learned on the farm?***

First thing – farming is a true commitment; it is not always a 9 to 5 job. There are times when the weather and seasons command your schedule. Sometimes your social schedule has to be adjusted to accommodate your farming operation. Your work ethic will dictate the success of your farm operation.

Second – like any business, your customers are your business's financial lifeline. Even on the days when you are tired, hot, and not at your best, they are still important to you and you must treat them that way. Most customers respect your hard work and are happy to support you.

### ***What is your favorite part of your job?***

My favorite part of my job is being my own boss and working outdoors with the soil, where I am able to produce something from seed to harvest. I also like seeing the excitement it brings to your customers, especially families.

Also, operating a tractor sometimes has its perks.

### ***What is your biggest challenge on your family farm?***

With farming, you are faced with many challenges – weather, and insect and disease pressures on the crop.

My siblings and I weren't raised to be farmers. Although some of my family members help out at certain times, I am basically the only manager of the farm operation. The property is owned by a family trust, so it is difficult to use the equity in the land to try to finance the operation. Also, not knowing if and when the property could be forced to be sold has always been hanging over my head.

Overall, given these challenges, I still wouldn't have changed my decision to bring the family property back into production.

[\*Follow us on Facebook\*](#)

*Newsletter Edition 19, June 2025*

New Jersey Agriculture in the Classroom | 168 W State St. | Trenton, NJ 08608 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!