

## History of the Long Island Horticultural Research & Extension Center

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### Introduction

Cornell University's Long Island Horticultural Research & Extension Center (LIHREC) is located in Riverhead, New York. The mission of the Center is to serve the research and extension needs of the horticultural industries of Long Island. The goals of the staff at the LIHREC are to help members of the horticultural industry to increase crop yields, improve crop quality, decrease production and marketing costs, increase production and marketing efficiency, and preserve and enhance the quality of the environment.

The LIHREC is a unique facility in that it houses faculty and staff from Cornell's Departments of Horticulture and Plant Pathology, as well as members of the Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. The facilities at the Center are available and are used by numerous individuals stationed at Ithaca and Geneva to carry out programs important to Long Island. Unique to the program is the strong support by the agricultural industry of Long Island. Advisory boards for each of the commodity groups are a valuable part of the Center's operation.

### History

The LIHREC began as the result of an anonymous question in the question box at the Riverhead farmer's institute which asked: "*Why should we not have a branch of the New York Experiment Station located on Long Island?*" The Rural New Yorker published this in an article in 1888 and agreed that there is a need for a research facility on Long Island. Support grew rapidly because it was recognized that Long Island soils, climate, pest problems and markets differed significantly from those of upstate New York. The article continued to say: "*There is no farming section in the State where such a farm would be more highly appreciated.*"

In 1894 and 1895, two scientists from the Geneva Experiment Station, F. A. Serrine, an entomologist, and F. C. Stewart, a plant pathologist, were appointed to work on Long Island in Jamaica, New York. Their early efforts yielded significant contributions, one of which was the discovery of a bacterial wilt of corn. The disease is now commonly referred to as Stewart's wilt.

As pressure continued from the agricultural leaders to have a facility on Long Island to deal with local problems, legislation was enacted on April 1, 1922 to provide for the acquisition of land and equipment on Long Island for the study of soil fertility and disease and insect control. Later that year, a committee headed by H.R. Talmage selected a 30-acre farm, the current site of the LIHREC, to purchase; it was identified as the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm. The farm operation was administered by the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva that employed the scientists and supplied the equipment.

In 1931, facilities at the center were increased by the addition of a two-story office and research laboratory building. In 1946, the administration for the research farm shifted from the New York State Experiment Station in Geneva to the College of Agriculture at Cornell in Ithaca. The management of the farm was then coordinated by the Vegetable Crops Department at Ithaca. As programs expanded, so did the facilities. In 1952, experimental potato storage units were added. About this time, the first Cornell Recommends for Florist Crops was published; this was produced by staff from Nassau Extension and the Horticultural Laboratory at Farmingdale. In 1956, twenty additional acres of land were purchased and plant pathology research moved from Southampton to Riverhead. The facilities and the number of staff at the Center did not change significantly between 1956 and the mid-1970's. During this period, Extension staff members became more specialized and were able to assist in the planning and conducting of the applied research on potatoes and vegetables at the station. Then, in 1974, a decision was made to consolidate the Ornamentals Laboratory at Farmingdale, New York with the Riverhead complex to form the Long Island Horticultural Research Laboratory (LIHRL). In that same year, vinifera grape research was initiated at the facility.

In 1977, a modern laboratory/office building was constructed and dedicated to serve the total agricultural community on Long Island. Funds were raised by the agricultural industry for this building to match funds from Cornell University. John Talmage was Chairman of the Fund Drive Committee, W. Keith Kennedy was Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences and G.W. Selleck was Superintendent of the LIHRL. At that time, staff from Cornell's Department of Entomology, Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, Plant Pathology, and Vegetable Crops was located at the facility.

In 1985, a weed science specialist hired by Suffolk County Cooperative Extension was added to the LIHREC staff. In 1986, an additional 18 acres of land were purchased to accommodate the increased programs. An IPM specialist, a research support specialist responsible for grapes, and a position dealing with alternate Colorado potato beetle management strategies were added to the staff. The viticulture position was transferred to Suffolk County Cooperative Extension in 1990. The IPM specialist position was established in 1987, and a Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County entomologist joined the staff in 1995.

In 1997, a new state-of-the-art, 13,000 sq. ft. greenhouse complex was constructed at the LIHREC. Along with the older greenhouse, there are now approximately 18,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse research space. The formal opening of the research greenhouse took place on July 28, 1998.

In 1999, Cornell University approved a name change for the Riverhead facility. From 1975 to 1999 the facility was known as the Long Island Horticultural Research Laboratory (LIHRL). Prior to that it was the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm. The new name, the Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center (LIHREC) more accurately reflects the activities at the facility.

### **Current status and future of the LIHREC**

In January 2002, a change in focus occurred in the leadership at the LIHREC as a result of the retirement of Joseph Sieczka in December 2000. As a result of changes in the agricultural emphasis on the Island, the LIHREC Advisory Council and the LIHREC staff recommended that the new director have expertise in ornamental crops since that component of Long Island Agriculture was expanding. The new Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University, Dr. Susan Henry, and the faculty of the Department of Horticulture hired Dr. Mark Bridgen as the new Director of the Center, whose specialty was in greenhouse crops and plant breeding.

Margery Daughtrey and Meg McGrath, plant pathologists, Dan Gilrein, entomologist, and Andy Senesac, weed specialist and their teams are vital parts to the LIHREC. They assist all commodity groups with their disease, insect and weed problems, respectively. Alice Wise, the grape (viticulture) extension specialist addresses the needs of grape growers and wineries. In concert with the efforts of Mark Bridgen, the ornamental horticulture program includes Jillanne Burns, who replaced Ralph Freeman as extension greenhouse specialist, and Scott Clark, nursery extension specialist. Dale Moyer, Agriculture Program Director of Suffolk County Extension Center and extension vegetable specialist conducts research on vegetable cultural practices and Colorado potato beetle management. Joe Sieczka is involved in an interim downsized potato program as final plans are developed for the vegetable program.

As programs evolve on Long Island, there will continue to be changes at the LIHREC. A new plant tissue culture laboratory was constructed in 2003. In addition, the construction of a conference center, which would be large enough to have meetings and workshops for 300 people and house a wine-tasting facility, is being discussed and planned. Although the plans for this new building and its fund-raising are in their infancy, the hope is that this new building will be constructed soon. The staff at the LIHREC continues to respond to the needs of horticulturalists on Long Island and continues to educate the growers with practical information generated by the Cornell faculty and extension staff.