Funding cut to impact Haskin Lab

By JEAN JONES
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President Bush is proposing to cut all base funding for Rutgers University's agricultural experiment stations by 2007, including the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and the proposed Food Innovation Center in Bridgeton, the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory in Bivalve and its aquaculture facility in Cape May County.

The funding comes through the Hatch Act, the McIntire-Stennis Act and the Animal Health and Disease Program, all of which would be phased out in two years.

Bush proposes to cut funding by 50 percent in 2006 and eliminate it entirely in 2007.

Those funds pay for salaries for faculty, staff and buildings.

"I don't know the exact percentage, but it's the majority of our funding," said Keith Cooper, executive dean of agriculture and natural resources at Rutgers. "And it will have a domino effect. It is a baseline support that can be built upon. Without that base support, you lose all your infrastructure."

Cooper said Rutgers is part of a land grant consortium that includes the University of Delaware, the University of Maryland and the University of Virginia.

"If the base funding is lost, the consortium would fall apart," he said.

Bush proposes to divert the money to the Department of Agriculture National Research Initiative, which would use it for a competitive grants program.

"That's fine if you want to do (See HASKIN, Page A-5)

Haskin

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A grant for three years, or five years. We can be very competitive, but you can't go beyond that. You can't do any long-range planning. The reason the Haskin lab is one of the leaders in research on shellfish diseases is because of the experiment station support.

"If we don't have long-term support, we won't be able to hire people. I don't disagree with competitive grants, but if they take away our infrastructure support, there won't be anything there to support those grants," Cooper said.

The immediate result of the funding loss would be the loss of about 75 staff members, Cooper said.

"The president proposes, but the Senate and House ultimately decide on the finance side. It's important to let our legislators know how important this is and to get them working for us," Cooper said.

"Any loss of federal base funds would destroy the long-term stability of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Stations," he said. "Without faculty, buildings or staff, the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Stations will not exist."