Using Demographic Information to Identify Specialty Crop Markets

RUTGERS New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

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INTRODUCTION

New Jersey is an extremely unique state with very intense agricultural production systems, among an extremely diverse and concentrated population. The U.S. Census Bureau reports the population of New Jersey to be 8,944,469 in 2016, making the State the most densely populated in the Nation with 1,210 persons per square mile. In addition, more than 1 in 4 New Jerseyans identify as either Latino or Asian. The U.S. census data also reveals that 21.7% of persons living in New Jersey are foreign born. Moreover, according to the American Immigration Council, in 2014 the purchasing power of New Jersey's Latino and Asian populations was $46 billion and $46.3 billion respectively. Besides cultural diversity, New Jerseyans also earn some of the highest per capita incomes in the nation. It is an obvious strategy to market directly to consumers in a state that is the most densely populated in the U.S., with high diversity and wealth, and with farmers who recognize there are opportunities to market ethnic specialty crops for a price premium in the state. It is not so obvious, however, to a vast majority of farmers or agricultural service providers, about where specifically to market and what crops to grow for this extremely diverse population.

An educational program and on-line resources were developed by a team at Rutgers Cooperative Extension to identify demographic areas in the State of New Jersey where demands of specialty produce would be in high demand due to ethnic food preferences. The goal was to teach agricultural service providers and Extension personnel how to use population demographics information and market analysis strategies to improve education for farmers. In addition, identifying specialty and ethnic crops for farmers to grow in New Jersey was important. Therefore, the "World Crops" website was incorporated as a partnering tool for the demographics website. The World Crops website was established to provide information on sustainable production practices for farmers to grow vegetables that were popular among the large and growing immigrant populations in the Northeastern U.S.

http://sare.rutgers.edu/market-research.html
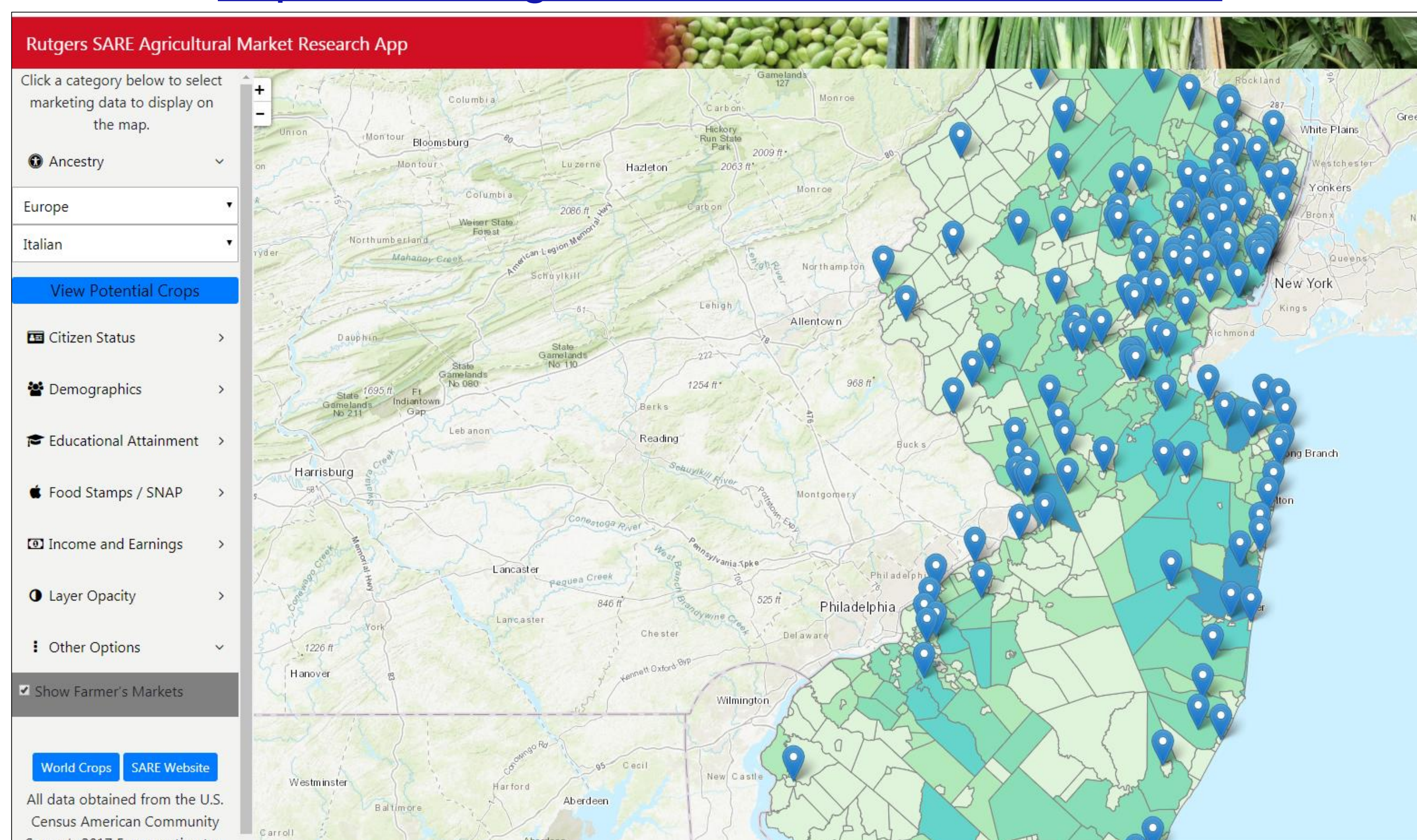
Interactive map showing concentrations of persons identifying with Italian ancestry in New Jersey and pinned locations of community farmers markets in the state.

METHODS
Resources and Education

An interactive website was developed for users to research demographic information throughout the State of New Jersey for the following categories: ancestry, citizen status, sex/race/age demographics, educational attainment, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipient status, and income/earning information. For the ancestry category 4 continents were represented: Africa with 6 countries, Asia with 6 countries, the Americas with 9 countries and Europe with 6 countries. Countries represented were selected based on the highest populations of each ancestral group living in the state. Also included on the interactive map was community farmers market locations. Along with the user-friendly demographics map, the "World Crops" website was connected for users to select specialty and ethnic crops to produce for identified populations near established markets.

Three educational events in June 2019, September 2019 and February 2020 included presentations about the interactive website and identified populations of significant ethnic groups in the state as potential marketing audiences. Ag service providers and Extension personnel were provided the necessary information to assist farmers in growing and marketing new high value crops for an ethnically diverse population in NJ.

World Crops website developed by Frank Mangan, University of Massachusetts and Richard VanVranken, Rutgers University.
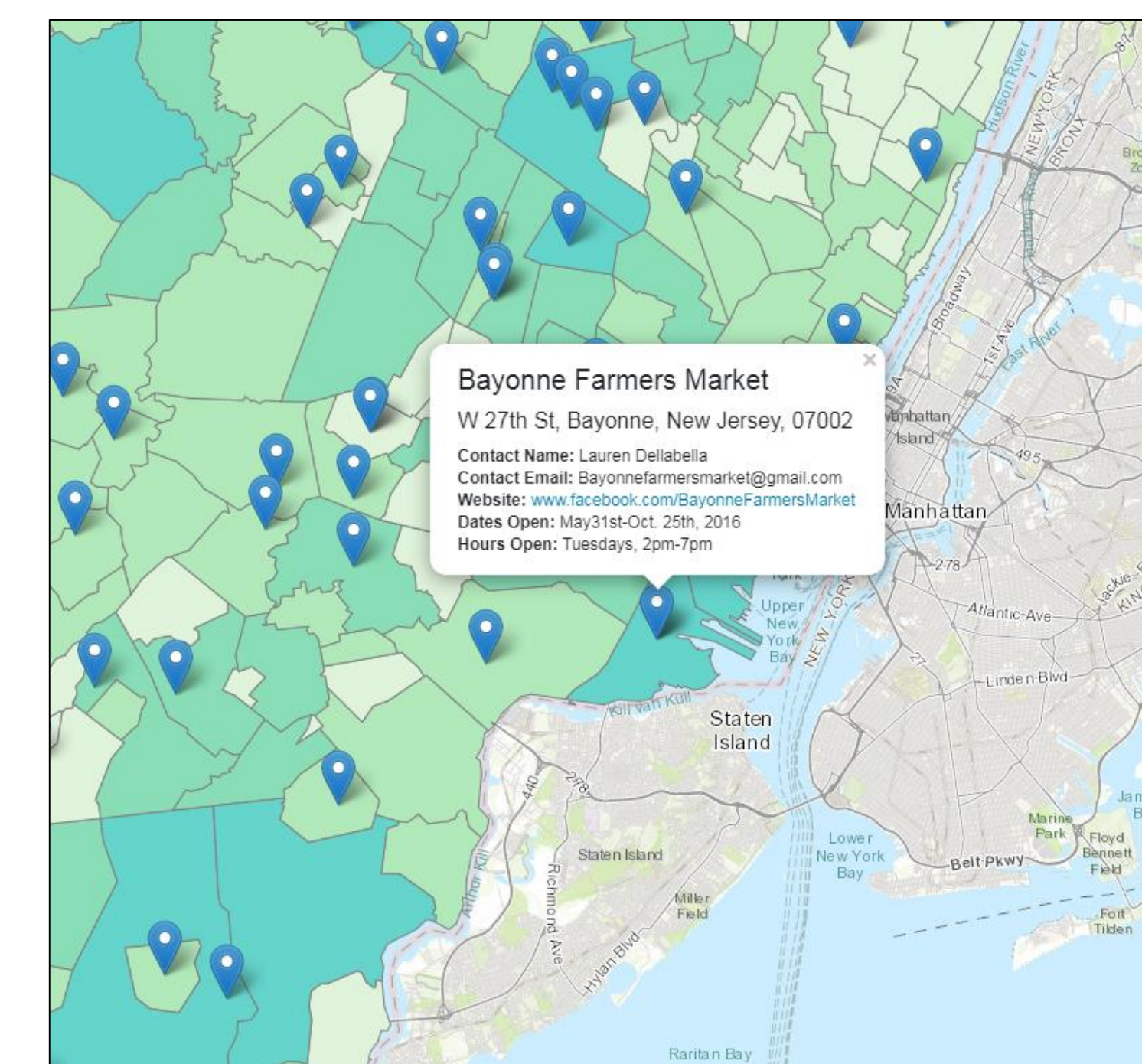
Interactive map showing community farmers markets locations and information for the Bayonne Farmers Market.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Information taught and provided on-line, identified expanded locations for farm products to be marketed based on population demographic information about ethnic population concentrations, in specific areas of the state, and listed retail markets established for selling local farm products. Agricultural service providers and Extension personnel now have tools to assist farmers in finding new markets for specialty crops. Both farmers and customers benefit from having locally-grown specialty produce.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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