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Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship Receives USDA Secretary's Annual Honor Award

By Kelvin Tan

GENEVA, NY-The Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship (NECFE) in Geneva, NY, has received a Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary's Honor Award in the category "Supporting Increased Economic Opportunities and Improved Quality of Life in Rural Areas."

Olga Padilla-Zakour, assistant professor of food science and technology at Cornell University and director of NECFE, accepted the award on behalf of NECFE during the 58th award ceremony held in the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center on Friday, June 25, 2003, in Washington, D.C.

"The Honor Awards highlight the dedication and talents of USDA employees who contribute in so many ways to improving the world around us," said Ann M. Veneman, the 2004 Secretary of Agriculture. "Each of these honorees is to be commended for their accomplishments in public service."

The Secretary's Honor Awards acknowledge outstanding contributions to agriculture, the consumers of agricultural products, and the American public, and are the most significant awards bestowed by the USDA. The honorees were nominated by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). The Honor Awards Program was created in 1947.

NECFE was cited for "development of a highly productive center which provides comprehensive assistance to beginning and established food entrepreneurs that resulted in sustainable economic development of rural communities." Cited were Olga Padilla-Zakour, group leader; Judy L. Anderson, Donald L. Downing, Thomas A. Gibson, Cheryl A. Leach, Chang Y. Lee, Sarah J. Lincoln, Kawaljit S. Tandon, Robert J. Weybright, from the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Cornell University in Geneva. Dennis E. Shaw was named from Cornell University's Ithaca campus. Catherine W. Donnelly, Susan F. Callahan, Michele R. Cranwell, Cecilia A. Golnazarian, Jane M. Kolodinsky, Todd J. Pritchard and Brian A. Norder, were named from the University of Vermont.

"This award exemplifies our department's unique mission and service to New York State and the regional food industry," said Chang Y. Lee, chairman of the department of food science and technology at Geneva. "NECFE has contributed tremendously to our local and state's economy for the last four years. Under Dr. Padilla-



Cornell food scientist Dr. Olga Padilla-Zakour displays the 2004 USDA's Secretary's Honor Award for the Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship, a joint program between Cornell University and the University of Vermont.

Zakour's leadership, her group has done an outstanding job."

NECFE was funded by a \$3.8 million, four-year grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2000. The partnership between Cornell University and the University of Vermont provides comprehensive assistance to beginning and established food entrepreneurs, helps promote sustainable economic development in rural communities, maintains the rural landscape, and protects the environment. NECFE addresses food safety and business development and marketing for small-scale food processing through one-on-one assistance, workshops and conferences.

Since its inception, NECFE has worked with over 500 entrepreneurs who needed food safety evaluations and regulatory compliance for over 1500 new products. More than 1800 food prototypes were analyzed for safety and commercial production feasibility, more than 3100 inquiries for assistance on marketing specialty foods were answered, and more than 300 entrepreneurs received direct assistance. (For more on NECFE, see <<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/necfe/index.html>>)

Padilla-Zakour joined Cornell in 1997 and became an assistant professor of food processing at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, in 1999. She has been the director of NECFE since its inception. Padilla-Zakour received her licentiate in food technology from the University of Costa Rica in 1983. She earned both her masters and doctorate in food science and technology from Cornell University in 1988 and 1991, respectively.

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