



RUTGERS

New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Food Innovation Center

# Five Members Appointed to Advisory Board

## Rutgers Food Innovation Program Appoints Five Advisory Board Members

New Brunswick, NJ, December 6, 2022 (FI NEWSWIRE) – The Rutgers University Food Innovation Center (FIC), an award-winning program in food business incubation, acceleration, and economic development, has announced the creation of an Advisory Board consisting of globally-recognized leaders in the food industry.



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## Advisory Board Members



**Lou Cooperhouse**  
President & CEO  
BlueNalu



**Andrew Gellert**  
President  
Gellert Global Group



**Takis Solomos**  
Partner  
Elikonos Capital Partners



**Brian Choi**  
Managing Partner  
The Food Institute



**Peggy Brennan-Tonetta**  
Sr. Associate Director  
Rutgers NJAES

The FIC, which has been in operation for over 20 years with extraordinary success, has identified the need to create its first formal Advisory Board to identify new strategic opportunities to better serve the food industry going forward. Each advisory board member is a leader in the food industry and brings a unique and diverse set of perspectives to the Center, and a global depth and breadth of expertise. The advisors will help provide strategic guidance to FIC's senior leadership team, including Nolan Lewin, FIC's Executive Director.

Lou Cooperhouse, President & CEO of BlueNalu, will serve as Chair of the Advisory Board and was formerly co-founder and Executive Director of the FIC. Other members of the Advisory Board include: Andrew Gellert, President of Gellert Global Group; Takis Solomos, Partner of Elikonos Capital Partners; Brian Choi, Managing Partner and CEO of The Food Institute; and Peggy Brennan-Tonetta, Sr. Associate Director, Rutgers University NJAES and co-founder and administrator-in-charge of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center.

The Rutgers FIC, with offices and facilities in New Brunswick and Bridgeton, New Jersey, has been internationally recognized for its economic development impacts, with a mission to support early-stage food entrepreneurs and established food companies in the successful development of their food and beverage products from concept to commercialization. Key services of the FIC include business mentoring, product and process development, industry training, and product manufacturing within the Center's USDA and FDA-inspected facility. The FIC began its operations in 2000 and has been recognized as the "Business Incubator of the Year" and an international "Soft Landings Program" by the International Business Innovation Association (InBIA), and as a nationwide model and "Agricultural Innovation Center Demonstration Program" by the USDA. Since its inception, the FIC has assisted over 3,000 companies and entrepreneurs, in which a great majority of its clients continue to be in business.

"Nolan and I are proud to welcome these distinguished food business leaders to the Rutgers FIC Advisory Board," Brennan-Tonetta said. "These individuals will add tremendous value to the organization as we continue to expand FIC's world-class program over the coming years."

The Advisory Board had its inaugural meeting in November of 2022 and has already identified key initiatives that it will be considering over the next 12-24 months. These include the following:

- Review, optimize, enhance and diversify the current portfolio of FIC services
- Create new initiatives to attract high-growth companies, particularly those focused on new innovations in food technology and those that provide new and valued solutions for consumers.
- Build strong partnerships and collaborations with multinational food companies, the venture capital community, industry suppliers and service providers, and other food innovation, incubation, and acceleration programs worldwide
- Revitalize the RutgersX food accelerator program, in collaboration with statewide agencies, trade associations, and the venture capital community
- Revitalize the Rutgers FIC Soft Landings program, that supports international food businesses with their market entry in the United States and creates business operations throughout New Jersey
- Continue serving the Specialty Food Association as its go-to resource for food innovation, and supporting its sofi™ Awards, that celebrate culinary excellence and creativity via their global competition for the best new companies in the specialty food industry
- Update the value proposition of the FIC, upgrade the website and marketing materials, and create an effective content platform to help strengthen the brand of the FIC

“The advisors will help us take the FIC program to the next level,” Lewin said. “I look forward to working with each of them. I’m especially excited for the guidance of the Board in the development of new programs that FIC can deliver and create even greater impacts on a local and global stage.”

## **ADVISOR BIOS**

### **Lou Cooperhouse, President & CEO of BlueNalu**

Lou Cooperhouse is co-founder, President and CEO of BlueNalu, a global leader in providing cell-cultured seafood products. Cooperhouse has extensive leadership experience in food innovation and technology commercialization, forged during his 35+ year career in the food industry. Lou previously served as co-founder and Executive Director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, where he led the program for approximately 15 years. During this time, he also served as President of the New Jersey Business Incubation Network; Executive Director and President of the New Jersey Food Processors Association; and on the Board of Directors of the International Business Innovation Association. His previous roles included serving as President of Food Spectrum, President & COO of F&S Produce; and as Co-Founder, President and CEO of MenuDirect Corporation. Earlier in his career, he served in leadership roles at Campbell’s Soup, ConAgra and Nestle-funded Culinary Brands. He received his MS in Food Science and BS in Microbiology, both from Rutgers University.

### **Andy Gellert, President of Gellert Global Group**

Andrew M. Gellert is the President of Gellert Global Group headquartered in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The Gellert Global Group bring a broad variety of imported food products to all aspects of the food industry. The combined revenues of the Group exceed \$1 billion. Andy is an active member of the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He is on the Board of Directors of the Association of Food Industries Incorporated (AFI). He is a member of the Young Presidents Organization (YPO) New York Metro Chapter, and is a graduate of Cornell University with a degree in food marketing.

### **Takis Solomos, Partner of Elikonos Capital Partners SA**

Takis Solomos is a co-founder and a partner of Elikonos Capital Partners, a Luxembourg based Private equity/Venture Capital Manager and has more than 20+ years of experience in PE/VC investments. Takis has initiated, structured and developed numerous food and food related investments in Europe and the USA and serves in the board of several food companies that operate in the areas of meat processing, fish farming, fish processing, fresh produce, ready-made meals, breakfast items production, olive oil and condiments production. Takis is also co-founder of Megas Yeeros Group, one of the largest Mediterranean recipe meat and plant based meat analogues producer with operations in Europe and the USA. He has cooperated with the FIC for a number of years, introducing European food companies to their highly effective Soft Landings program that assists international food producers in their entrance to the North American market. Takis started his career in the UK with an international Accountancy Firm and has a BSc on Management and Organizational behavior from the American College of Greece (Deree College) and an MBA in International Business and Finance from the Sheffield Business School in the UK.

**Brian Choi, Managing Partner & CEO of The Food Institute**

Brian Choi is Managing Partner & CEO of The Food Institute, the leading source for food industry news, data, and market trends. The Food Institute is the “Bloomberg of the food industry” offering the very best of B2B multimedia content including news, podcasts, digital video, webinars, reports, and live programming. Brian is also an experienced financial executive in the Food & Agricultural industry. Earlier in his career, Brian served as VP of Finance & Business Development at Woerner Holdings, LP, a single-family investment office focused on private equity investments in the food, beverage, and agricultural industries. Previous to Woerner Holdings, Brian worked at Ernst & Young, Lehman Brothers and Goldman Sachs. He is a CFA Charterholder and holds a Finance degree from the University of British Columbia.

**Dr. Peggy Brennan-Tonetta, Director, Resource and Economic Development of Rutgers NJAES**

Dr. Peggy Brennan-Tonetta is Senior Associate Director for the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) and Director, Resource and Economic Development at Rutgers University. In this role, she is responsible for all NJAES off-campus facilities including research farms, marine research stations, service labs and business incubators. She is also the co-founder and administrator-in-charge of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, an internationally recognized food business incubation program. Peggy has a distinguished record of developing and leading economic development initiatives at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Rutgers University, and the state. She is an economist with expertise in economic development strategies and impact assessment. She received a B.S. in Economics, M.S. in Agricultural Economics and a Ph.D. in Public Policy all from Rutgers.

**About Rutgers Food Innovation Center**

The Food Innovation Center at Rutgers University is a unique food business incubator and accelerator that is a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES). The Center supports established early-stage entrepreneurs and existing food companies from concept to commercialization. Combining years of industry expertise and the advanced technologies offered by Rutgers, we provide business, marketing, food safety, product design and scale up expertise within FDA and USDA certified facilities to help companies successfully build and grow their business. More information can be found at

<https://foodinnovation.rutgers.edu>

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