Cornell Cooperative Extension

Central New York Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops

Serving Chenango, Fulton, Herkimer, Madison, Montgomery, Otsego, Saratoga and Schoharie Counties

Fall 2020

Happy fall, all!

What amazing weather we have had to get crops harvested and put up for winter. I cannot remember a fall as picture perfect as this in recent memory. The CNYDLFC team hopes you had the ability to take advantage of the weather and are close to finished with harvest. It will not be long until we see snow and we all hunker down for the winter season.

With the upcoming quiet times of late fall and winter, please take note of the many virtual programs that the team will be offering. Although we would like to be meeting with folks face to face, the COVID risk is still too great for in-person meetings. Cornell has advised all regional teams to continue with virtual learning through the winter meeting season. Unfortunately, this will affect Corn Day and Dairy Day, typically held at the Otesaga. Nevertheless, know that you can still receive quality programs in the comfort of your home. Just imagine having the ability to grab a cup of coffee, a snack and your computer (Apple or Android devices, too!) and listening to programming designed just for you. All without leaving your kitchen or cozy living room.

Finally, as we continue to be proactive in delivering more information in a timely manner and not overloading our producers, the team is designing a weekly email that will include registration information for all upcoming events. This will be in addition to the quarterly newsletter. Producers have commented they find great value in the newsletter so we will continue publishing it. As of 2021, the newsletter may have a different look; the content will continue to be useful for our CNY producers.

Please continue to stay healthy and safe!

Nicole

By Erik Smith. Location: Little Falls, Herkimer County

Inside this Issue

Looking Back, Looking Around, and Looking Ahead

By: Erik A. Smith, CNYDLFC Field Crop Specialist

As I start my career as Field Crops Specialist with the team, a position so well defined and executed by Kevin, I've been taking stock of what where we've been and looking at where we would like to be. So while I work to maintain some of the existing programming and continue the good work that he's handed off to me, I'm looking forward to getting to know the folks in our region and seeing what new directions we can take with regards to crop production, emerging and changing markets, and pest management. As we make our way through harvest and into winter, two quotes keep coming back into mind….

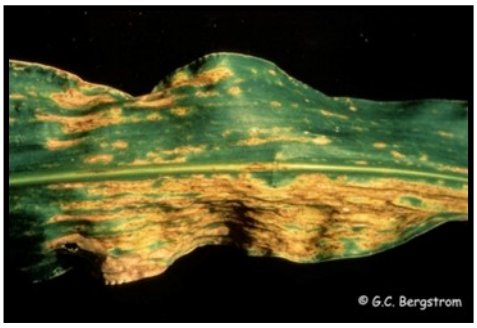
***"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."* - George Santayana**

I'll save the second quote for later - but speaking of pests, we should be mindful of past and current conditions so we can *prevent* them from causing us greater problems down the road. Yield is our greatest concern at harvest time, but be sure at this time of year to also take note of things that could come back to haunt next year's crops. Many of our worst pests are difficult to forecast because they either travel long distances or don't overwinter in our region, but others stay local through the winter: Anthracnose leaf blight of corn (pictured, right), and white mold fruiting bodies (sclerotia) and damage (pictured, left).

The good news: We were fortunate that in general, foliar diseases in corn were fairly mild this year, most likely due to the dry weather we had this summer. This can lessen the amount of inoculum that overwinters in crop residue and in the soil, which is especially of concern in no-till and reduced-tillage systems.

The not-so-good news: The cool, wet spring left us with a few latent diseases that only make themselves apparent later in the season as crops are maturing, like white mold in soy (I took these photos a few weeks ago). I didn't see much, but fields especially hard-hit by this disease should be rotated out of soy for at least 2-3 years. In fields with a history of outbreaks, fungicide applications should be made at flowering to prevent premature dieback and yield loss.

How to not repeat the past: So while we might breathe a little easier from the lack of foliar diseases, we still need to be on guard next year if wetter weather returns. Choosing resistant varieties (if available) is the best strategy for all diseases, but yearly crop rotation is also recommended to prevent damage from those that take up residence in our fields. If a field was hit hard this year, plant a non-host crop the next two years if possible. For white mold, this means cereals or corn.



Anthracnose leaf blight of corn

White mold fruiting bodies (sclerotia) and damage

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Looking Back continued…

Now for the bad news: While the dry weather may have been good for limiting foliar disease outbreaks, weeds were another story. Long rain-free periods this summer left many hayfields throughout our region with little grass growth, which allowed perennial weeds to take over. Weeds have an even easier time of out-competing forage crops if we're overaggressive and don't leave enough stubble at cutting time. Established alfalfa is more tolerant of shorter stubble, but grasses will shed root mass when repeatedly cut short, depleting nutrients and leaving them vulnerable to dry conditions later on. Unlike grasses, perennial weeds can draw on deep roots to take advantage.

Common ragweed seedlings

Common milkweed seedling

Smooth Bedstraw

How not to repeat the past: As we know, we need to adjust our cutting height in relation to our forage mix (shorter favors alfalfa, longer favors grasses), but if your fields tend to suffer especially badly in the driest weather, especially midsummer, cutting your grass-heavy or grass-only fields a bit taller can help them through. Timely mowing and appropriate selective herbicide applications can help your forages regain the advantage this fall, but no matter what, think about how the field might look next spring: was it enough to give your fields a chance, or do you need to consider reseeding, lime, fertilizer, or other renovation/restoration? Proper soil nutrient levels and pH will go a long way toward maintaining healthy forage stands that can out-compete weeds. So if you think that a change is in your field's future, the very next question you should ask yourself is when you last had a soil test….

***"To reach a port we must set sail. Sail, not tie at anchor. Sail, not drift."* - Franklin D. Roosevelt**

Ah, but farming and education are less of a port and more of a continuing journey, but you get the point. And I'm looking forward to continuing this journey with you all.

Striving for Mediocrity?

By Timothy X. Terry, Harvest NY
(reprinted from 10/2/19 Ag Focus)

"Nobody is special and everyone gets a participation award." To anyone who has had recent contact with an elementary school curriculum, or a summer soccer program, this is an all too familiar mantra. While this may temporarily spare the feelings of a select few, it is counterproductive at inspiring others to greater achievement. Understandably, "if everyone gets the same why should I put forth extra effort?" But as Bill Gates has said, "This (mantra) doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING in real life."

In real life there are winners and losers, and there are teams that succeed and there are teams that…uh…umm… are…umm…they're a team. Fortunately, mediocrity doesn't have to be your destiny. There are four leadership practices you can implement that will promote higher performance. These are presented here in a specific order as each is a stepping stone to the next.

1. Consequences of truth. On any agricultural enterprise there are likely a number of teams, or crews, and they are often engaged in specific pursuits – calf crew, barn crew, milkers, field crew, greenhouse, etc. On smaller farms the player rosters are often the same on various teams just in a different order. Your job as manager/owner/operator is to make sure everyone knows their job and understands its importance – why they are doing what they do. Mediocrity can often be a symptom of a broken feedback loop from a person's performance and the consequences of poor performance.

A sure cure for this is to have the offender walk a mile in the next person's shoes. This connects them with the results – experiences, feelings, impacts – of good and bad performance. (I often wonder how the design of automobiles would change if engineers and designers had to spend at least one summer working in a repair garage.) It's very important to keep the lines of communication open. Dialog must be simple and constructive. Avoid accusations and negative confrontations.

2. Be SMART about it. Mediocrity can also be an indication of unestablished, undefined, or unattainable goals. Conversely, meaningful objectives will make poor performance painfully obvious. Often, the only way you can successfully shift someone in a positive direction is if they can feel some measure of discomfort in their present situation (see also #1).

As it relates to goals, SMART is an acronym for:
S – specific - what are we trying to do
M – measurable - how many or how much
A – attainable/achievable - enough said
R – Rewarding - has value, otherwise why do it
T – Timed - a dream with a deadline
(All you Managing for Success graduates can probably recite this in your sleep.)

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Striving continued…

3. Apply peer pressure. As counterintuitive as it may seem, mediocrity can be a result of strong supervision. (What!??) Surprisingly, it seems to be a function of accountability. Research has shown that:

- on the weakest teams there is no accountability
- on mediocre teams the team leader or supervisor is the source of accountability – may often be expressed as micro-managing
- on superior teams the members manage, support, and coach one another.

There is no way any team leader can be everything to every team member – even on a family operation. After helping everyone to understand what it is they do and why they are doing it, your job then becomes one of fostering a culture of peer accountability. You've achieved this when everyone can immediately and respectfully confront anyone when issues arise provided they are in the best interest of the team's goals. Frequent shared reviews can help build this culture. These don't have to be long or formal, but they do have to be regular (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly).

4. Step up and speak up. High performance comes from high expectations, unfortunately, neither is the default setting for humans. Essentially you are calling everyone to a place of potential stress. How you handle the uncomfortable situations that arise sets the tenor for the team as well as their regard for you. How will you handle directives from upper management that are difficult to meet or are at odds with other goals? What will you do about the under achiever in your midst? Failure to act may cost you the respect of your team, not to mention any progress you've made toward high performance.

Applying similar principles, Major Greg (Pappy) Boyington took a rag-tag group of screwballs and misfits destined for the brig and turned them into the "terrors of the South Pacific" (VMF 214 – Black Sheep Squadron). Imagine the profound shift in performance and workplace satisfaction you could see in your team(s) by implanting these four practices.

Minerals Matter - Introduction to Mineral Nutrition

By B. Lynn Gordon

Don't skimp on your mineral program. Adequate mineral intake can solve a myriad of production problems.

Although their percentage of the diet is small, minerals pack a big punch in the beef cattle herd. Producers seeking solutions to poor pregnancy rates, weak newborn calves or other reproductive or performance issues should not overlook a thorough review of their beef herd mineral program. Often, deficiency in minerals surfaces as a factor influencing the health and nutrition of the beef animal.

"We are always learning more about what minerals can do and learning more about the basic needs of beef cattle nutrition," Stephanie Hansen, Iowa State University beef feedlot nutrition specialist, told cattlemen during a webinar series on mineral nutrition hosted by NCBA. She noted minerals matter because they are important to the overall animal health, along with bone and muscle growth, feed efficiency, carcass quality, and reproductive performance. To develop the proper mineral nutrition program it is important to know the two main types of minerals associated with beef cattle diets: macro minerals and micro-minerals.

Macro minerals

"Macro-minerals are usually less than 1% of the diet, but are very important," Hansen explained. Common macro minerals are calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), phosphorus (P), and sodium (Na). Since beef animals cannot store macro minerals in their body, these minerals must be provided in a constant supply through the animal's diet, either from feedstuffs or supplements.

Fortunately, forages supply macro minerals, meaning cattle grazing grasses have access to these critical minerals. Research indicates the ratio of calcium to phosphorous in the diet should be 1:1.

While many nutrient needs are met through forage consumption, a common misnomer is that grass tetany occurs in the spring because the grass is low in magnesium levels. This is not true, Hansen said.

The magnesium deficiency which causes grass tetany is the result of interference of other minerals in the grass, creating a decrease in absorption of magnesium at levels needed. The main culprit of this interference is potassium (K), which tends to be represented at high levels in forages in the spring, thus preventing the animal from obtaining the required magnesium levels and forcing producers to supplement the beef animal's diet with a mineral high in magnesium, correcting the shortfall.

"The rule of thumb is a potassium to magnesium (K to Mg) ratio of 10:1. Nitrogen regularly used to fertilize grass and forages is also capable of creating interference with absorption levels of magnesium."

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Minerals continued…

Micro nutrients (trace minerals)

The other primary family of minerals important to beef cattle diets is micro minerals, more commonly referred to as trace minerals. “Fed at levels as parts per million (ppm), trace minerals are a very, very small part of the diet, yet cattle can still be deficient in these minerals, impacting productivity,” said Hansen.

Top of mind for cattlemen are copper (Cu) and zinc (Zn), as these two trace minerals are often deficient in forages. Unlike macro minerals, the ruminant can store trace minerals in their body to be utilized later, thus alleviating the need for access to the constant intake of trace minerals.

“Where monitoring of trace minerals becomes important is due to their great variability in forages.” However, one trace mineral abundant in forages and harvested feedstuffs is iron (Fe). Iron is commonly found at levels two to three times higher in forages than needed to balance nutritional requirements.

The concern with iron is its role as an antagonist. Iron acts as a buffer against some of the other critical trace minerals, such as copper and manganese, preventing them from being absorbed and utilized at levels to maintain proper cattle health and nutrition.

Finding the balance

The nutrition specialist is often asked, “Can cows balance their diets when their body indicates a deficiency in a mineral?” Unfortunately, the answer is no.

“Research has found that cattle will select a palatable but poor-quality diet in preference to an unpalatable, nutritious diet,” she said, “requiring constant management practices to focus on herd nutrition.” Salt has become the primary intake driver in most free choice minerals to add palatability to products and keep consumption levels up.

Following nutritional requirements is a good baseline, but “don’t assume the book averages apply in all cases.” Mineral content varies by plant species, soil characteristics, soil fertility, stage of plant maturity, and climatic conditions. To find minerals that matter to your cowherd, first test forages and second conduct water tests. Water can play the role of an antagonist in mineral bioavailability–how much of the mineral the animal can absorb and use.

“No mineral is an island. You can’t just fix one problem; you need a holistic approach because a change in one mineral can mean a change in the other.”

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

By David R. Balbian, CNYDLFC Dairy Management Specialist

Over the years, I have witnessed all kinds of approaches that dairy producers have employed to manage their operations. The one thing that really stands out with the most successful producers is that they are proactive when it comes to heading off problems, not reactive. What do I mean by that you might ask? Well, here is a list that I have come up with. They are in no particular order. I am sure there are other things that could be added, but these things come to mind.

Vaccination Program: The current pandemic brings this to the top of the list. Do not be lax about your vaccination program. Work with your vet, develop a plan and stick to it. Do not miss boosters that are necessary for a good immune response. Treating a herd with a disease breakout is much more expensive than the cost of a good vaccination program.

Ventilation & Heat Abatement: Ventilation is needed 12 months of the year, even in the dead of winter. The removal of contaminated air and replacing it with fresh outside air goes a long way in reducing respiratory problems in cattle. Be sure your barns provide adequate ventilation, including barns for young stock. Be sure fans and any other cooling systems, like sprinklers, are ready to go before spring and early summer heat arrives.

Reproduction: Getting cows pregnant on time is one of the most cost effective ways to improve your daily milk output/cow/day. As a general rule of thumb, a herd at 160 DIM vs. 200 DIM will produce around 10 lbs. more milk/cow/day simply because you have a fresher herd. Again, work with your vet and AI technician to develop a plan and stick to it. This may or may not include a synchronization program. Have a scheduled herd health plan with your vet. Also, do not forget the heifers. Heifers calving at 30 months of age is a drain on your business.

Foot Health: Few things will hurt milk production (and reproduction) more than cows with foot problems. Work with a competent hoof trimmer to maintain a hoof trimming schedule along with a well thought out footbath that is used and maintained.

Milk Quality & Mastitis Prevention: Today I see herds that usually keep somatic cell levels under 100,000! It is amazing the job there herds do. They maintain equipment, change inflations on time, and follow an approved milking prep protocol. They also use the services of a lab to culture samples to track down problems. They use and follow the advice of the QMPS (Quality Milk Production Services) program.

Fresh Cow Monitoring: Herds that have a fresh cow group have some advantages here. These are our most vulnerable cows when it comes to metabolic problems. Routine temperature checks along with intense observation can help to detect problems early, when the odds of a successful intervention are greatest. If your fresh cow monitoring is determined by when a fresh cow is too weak to get up in her stall at milking time, it is far from adequate.

Pre-fresh Dairy Nutrition: This group of cows should be a high priority. They should not be overcrowded and need plenty of bunk space. Cows on a Negative DCAD diet should have their urine pH routinely monitored to be sure the diet is working as expected. When multiple fresh cow problems have already occurred is not the time to begin monitoring urine pH on these pre-fresh cows.

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Be Proactive Not Reactive continued…

Dairy Nutrition: The combination of home grown and purchased feeds are your largest expense. Employing a competent nutritionist to formulate your dairy rations is critical. With fluctuating milk component prices, be ready with your nutritionist to feed for butterfat and/or milk protein. Its pounds of components produced that really matters, not pounds of milk.

Feeder Accuracy: You can have the best nutritionist, but if the ration fed to the cows does not match what your nutritionist formulated you are greatly limiting your potential. When there is a ton of feed left over or the bunk is licked clean is not the time to check the dry matter on the haylage. Have a schedule/system to monitor forage dry matters so as fed weights can be adjusted before big changes take place. Monitoring cow number changes in a pen so feed quantity can be adjusted is critical.

Quality Forages: Your nutritionist is only as good as your forage. Poor quality forage hamstrings your nutritionist, no matter how good they are. Timely harvest, good fermentation, and a feed out strategy that keeps feed fresh without secondary fermentation is critical.

Forage Storage: Can you get to the feed you want when you want it? Having adequate storage options to target specific animal groups with the right quality & types of forage can make a big difference in production potential and purchased feed cost.

Calf & Heifer Program: This is your future herd. They are extremely important when it comes to your future success. Colostrum consumption of 4L within an hour of birth is ideal. Free choice water needs to be available. Calf & heifer diets need to be properly formulated and growth rates monitored. This is a huge opportunity area for many dairies.

Equipment: Maintenance and replacement – equipment needs to be ready in advance of when its' needed. Rebuilding the corn planter in May, when it should be in the field is the classic example of not being ready on time. Equipment does not last forever. Plan ahead. You are in a better bargaining position if you do not need the new piece tomorrow.

2019 Performance of DFBS Cooperators in Central NY and the Southern Tier

By Mary Kate Wheeler, CCE South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops Team; Nicole Tommell, CCE Central NY Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Team; and Bonnie Collins, CCE Oneida County

Cornell Cooperative Extension's farm business management educators work closely with dairy farm operators to complete the New York State Dairy Farm Business Summary (DFBS) on an annual basis. This article summarizes 2019 DFBS results for dairy producers from 15 counties across Central NY and the Southern Tier: Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Fulton, Herkimer, Madison, Montgomery, Oneida, Onondaga, Otsego, Saratoga, Schoharie, Tioga, and Tompkins.

The DFBS is open to any farm that wishes to participate, and participation is voluntary and confidential. Forty-one dairy farms from this region completed the DFBS in 2018 and 2019. The data summarized below are from farms marketing milk conventionally. Dairies selling organic milk are not included.

Farm Size & Production Yields

In 2019, the 41 participating dairies from our region had an average of 804 cows per farm. Farm size among this group ranged from fewer than 140 cows to more than 1,600 cows. The average number of cows per farm increased by 5% from 2018 to 2019. The average number of heifers per farm also increased, yet the average ratio of heifers to cows declined slightly, from 0.86 heifers per cow in 2018 to 0.83 heifers per cow in 2019.

Dairies in our sample reported 2019 milk production ranging from fewer than 3.0 million pounds to more than 43.6 million pounds per farm. Average milk sold in 2019 was 21.4 million pounds per farm, a 7% increase over 2018. This jump reflects the 5% increase in the number of cows per farm, plus a 2% increase in the pounds of milk sold per cow. Average milk sold per cow was up 382 pounds, from 26,176 pounds in 2018 to 26,558 pounds in 2019.

Average tillable acres per farm increased by 4%, from 1,576 acres in 2018 to 1,632 acres in 2019. On average, dairy producers saw hay yields increase by 3% and corn silage yields decrease by 5% in 2019 compared to the prior year.

Farm Labor

Dairies in our region reported a 3% increase in worker equivalents per farm, on average, from 16.6 FTE in 2018 to 17.2 FTE in 2019. Labor efficiency also increased from one year to the next. The average number of cows per worker was 46.9 in 2019, up 2%, from the previous year. Milk sold per worker increased by approximately 40,000 pounds, or 3%, from 1.20 million pounds per worker in 2018 to 1.24 million pounds per worker in 2019.

The cost of hired labor on dairy farms rose in 2019. The average cost of hired labor was $42,887 per worker, up 4% from 2018. However, the increase in labor efficiency described above partially offset the impact of rising labor costs per worker. As a result, the average cost of hired labor per unit of milk production rose 2%, from $2.85 per hundredweight in 2018 to $2.91 per hundredweight in 2019.

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2019 Performance continued…

Milk Price & Income Generation

In a boon for the dairy industry, total operating receipts rose by 10%, on average, from 2018 to 2019. Average total operating receipts were $5,769 per cow and $21.72 per hundredweight in 2019, compared to $5,186 per cow and $19.81 per hundredweight in 2018. Higher milk prices in 2019 drove this change. Gross milk sales rose 12%, on average, from $17.17 per hundredweight in 2018 to $19.31 per hundredweight in 2019. Gross milk sales averaged $5,127 per cow in 2019, up $632 per cow from the previous year.

Cost Control

Feed is the largest single expense category for most dairies. In 2019, the average feed and crop expense per unit of milk production fell by 5%, dropping from $7.06 per hundredweight in 2018 to $6.74 per hundredweight in 2019. Yet the average total farm operating expense barely changed, rising from $17.43 per hundredweight to $17.48 per hundredweight over the same period. Increases in spending on machinery repairs, machinery rent and lease, and repairs to land and buildings in 2019 offset most of the cost savings on feed. This suggests that farms may have taken advantage of improved financial performance in 2019 to catch up on deferred maintenance and repairs.

The average total cost to produce milk, which includes operating costs, depreciation, and opportunity costs of labor and capital, increased 1%, from $19.04 per hundredweight in 2018 to $19.26 per hundredweight in 2019. Notably, in 2019 the average gross milk sales of $19.31 per hundredweight exceeded the average total cost to produce milk, which was not the case in 2018.

Net Farm Income & Return on Investment

Net farm income (without appreciation) is a key measure of profit. Net farm income for the 41 farms in our sample averaged $522,011 per farm in 2019, which is equivalent to $649 per cow or $2.45 per hundredweight. This is approximately four times the average profit recorded in 2018. Average net farm income for the same group of farms in 2018 was $123,893 per farm, $162 per cow, and $0.62 per hundredweight.

Rate of return on equity capital (ROE) and rate of return on all assets (ROA) are important measures of profitability. Excluding appreciation, the average ROE was 5.1% in 2019, compared to -0.8% in 2018. The average ROA was also 5.1% in 2019, compared to 0.7% in 2018. These data show that, on average, participating dairies were more profitable in 2019 compared to the prior year.

Final Thoughts

Dairies across Central NY and the Southern Tier achieved increases in productivity (pounds of milk per cow) and labor efficiency (pounds of milk per worker) in 2019, both of which respond directly to management choices. These trends show positive change for operations striving to make the most of their resources and opportunities. However, dairies in this region achieved higher profits in 2019 due in large part to higher milk prices, which depend on forces that are external to the farm. To survive and thrive in an industry characterized by rapid and unpredictable price changes, dairy operators must focus on improving the management practices and outcomes under their influence, while considering strategies to mitigate price risk and other threats that exist beyond their control.

New York Sick Leave Requirement: What We Know, Still Don't Know, and Action Items

By: Richard Stup, Ag Workforce Development, Cornell University

What We Know

The Law

New York State, in the 2020 budget act, mandated annual sick leave on a permanent basis. There is no exemption for farm employers from the sick leave requirement and we expect most farms with hired employees to be affected. The amount and type of sick leave required varies by employer size and income, as follow:

- For employers with 4 or fewer employees and **less than** $1 Million in net income: 40 hours of **unpaid** sick leave per employee
- For employers with 4 or fewer employees and **greater than** $1 Million in net income: 40 hours of **paid** sick leave per employee
- For employers with between 5 and 99 employees: 40 hours of **paid** sick leave per employee
- For employers with greater than 100 employees: 56 hours of **paid** sick leave per employee

Note that this is a new requirement for all employers, if you already provide sick leave that meets or exceed these levels then your policy already meets the requirement. Employers are not required to provide the sick leave until **January 1, 2021** but they are required to begin accruing hours of sick leave for employees on **September 30, 2020**.

Reasons to Use Sick Leave

The new law has detailed requirements about reasons for sick leave that your policy must also meet, including some that you might not expect. According to the law, employers must provide leave:

(i) for a mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition of such employee or such employee's family member, regardless of whether such illness, injury, or health condition has been diagnosed or requires medical care at the time that such employee requests such leave;

(ii) for the diagnosis, care, or treatment of a mental or physical illness, injury or health condition of, or need for medical diagnosis of, or preventive care for, such employee or such employee's family member; or

(iii) for an absence from work due to any of the following reasons when the employee or employee's family member has been the victim of domestic violence (…), a family offense, sexual offense, stalking, or human trafficking: (a) to obtain services from a domestic violence shelter, rape crisis center, or other services program; (b) to participate in safety planning, temporarily or permanently relocate, or take other actions to increase the safety of the employee or employee's family members; (c) to meet with an attorney or other social services provider to obtain information and advice on, and prepare for or participate in any criminal or civil proceeding; (d) to file a complaint or domestic incident report with law enforcement; (e) to meet with a district attorney's office; (f) to enroll children in a new school; or (g) to take any other actions necessary to ensure the health or safety of the employee or the employee's family member or to protect those who associate or work with the employee.

Accrual and Carryover

Employees can accrue sick time at a rate of no less than 1 hour of sick time per 30 hours worked, or the employer can choose to award all of the sick time upfront at the beginning of the calendar year. If the upfront approach is used the employer is not permitted to reduce or revoke the awarded sick time if the employee ends up working fewer hours during the year than expected. Unused sick time must carry over to the next year but employers with less than 100 employees can limit use of sick leave per calendar year to 40 hours, and employers with greater than 100 employees can limit it to 56 hours.

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NYS Sick Leave continued. . .

What We *Still* Don't Know

In spite of repeated requests by employers, business organizations, accountants, attorneys and this author, the NYS Department of Labor has not yet provided details about many important questions relevant to farm employers.

- How will net income be calculated? What formula will NYS Department of Labor use?
- What about seasonal farm employees, are they included in the sick leave requirement? How many hours or days must they work each year to be included in the employer's number of employees?
- Can employers provide a pro-rated amount of sick days upfront to seasonal employees, such as 20 hours for employees who work 5-6 months, or must the hourly accrual of 30:1 be used?
- What about family members who work on the farm as defined in the Farm Laborer Fair Labor Practices Act, is sick leave required for them?
- What about youth workers, employees under age 18, are they included in the sick leave requirement?
- What about different business entities with varying levels of share ownership? Which of those entities will be combined in order to calculate the number of employees?

We will continue to press for answers to these and other relevant questions and will share this information through written releases and employer training when available.

Actions Items for Employers

1. Track hours worked for **all employees** beginning September 30, 2020, if not already doing so. Employers can always go back and credit employees with sick time earned if the number of hours worked is known.
2. Consider adopting modern software and tracking systems to create employee schedules, record hours worked, integrate with payroll, and keep track of sick leave and vacation accrual and usage for all employees.
3. Review your current sick leave policy and update as needed.
4. Train managers and employees about your sick leave policy and any changes that will occur.
5. Stay tuned to the Ag Workforce Journal and other industry newsletters for more information about New York's sick leave requirements.

Late Gestation Requirements for Ewes Prior to Lambing

By Ashley McFarland, CNYDLFC Livestock Specialist

Quite often producers tend to forget about the nutrition requirements their ewes need to maintain themselves, as well as their fetus. Approximately 80 percent of fetal growth occurs in the last 4-6 weeks of gestation.

The goal is to prevent pregnancy diseases (milk fever, pregnancy toxemia) in the ewe, in order to do so producers need to provide all the nutrients the ewes need to maintain a healthy pregnancy. Not only does the ewe need the right nutrients to maintain herself, but she also needs to maintain the growing lambs in utero, udder development, and the development of colostrum. The best indicator you did your job correctly with feeding the ewe is the color of the colostrum, once she lambs. If the color is a bright yellow color and very thick, the ewe has been fed correctly, a pale yellow and thin consistency would indicate the ewe was lacking requirements in her diet prior to giving birth.

The last 4-6 weeks prior to lambing is a very critical phase in the flock, for both the ewe and the lamb (s). The ewe will require more energy and protein than she has required previously and it will double or tri-ple if she is carrying more than 1 lamb. "Energy is especially important during late gestation as it affects lamb size and vigor at birth. Lack of energy results in small, weak lambs that are more prone to create problems for the shepherd and many of these are at increased risk for mortality."(Mike Neary-Purdue Sheep Specialist)

Another issue sheep farmers have to deal with is the lambs are growing quite a lot in the last 4-6 weeks and are taking up more and more space in the ewe. This occurring will cause the ewe to eat 25-35% less than her original diet. That is why it is very important to slowly increase the nutrient density of the ewe's diet to go along with the fetal growth.

A Bred ewe that is roughly 160 pounds should be on a 14% protein diet, along with free choice minerals and vitamins throughout her gestation. This will allow is the ewe to maintain a healthy pregnancy and weight, a good supply of minerals will also ensure healthy and vigorous lambs at birth.

Body Condition Scoring is another critical issue sheep producers need watch. This will help determine what feed requirements are needed for the ewes. The ideal BCS at lambing should be between 3-3.5, below a 3 producers tend to see pregnancy diseases in the thin females and above a 3.5 we see the same for being too heavy.

All of the pregnancy diseases can be prevented from proper nutrient and management. If you are looking for help with these requirements your veterinarian can work closely with your nutritionists to set up a plan for your operation.

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Resources

CNYDLFC Team Website: https://cnydfc.cce.cornell.edu/

CNYDLFC Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/cnydlfc

NYCAHM: https://www.nycamh.org/ **Farm Partners**: 1-800-343-7527

NYS Ag and Markets: 1-800-554-4501, https://agriculture.ny.gov

COVID-19
Need information? View the following Cornell CALS and CCE Resource Pages Updated Regularly:

General Questions & Links: https://eden.cce.cornell.edu/

Food Production, Processing & Safety Questions:
https://instituteforfoodsafety.cornell.edu/coronavirus-covid-19/

Employment & Agricultural Workforce Questions: http://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/

Cornell Small Farms Resiliency Resources: https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/farm-resilience/

Financial & Mental Health Resources for Farmers: https://www.nyfarmnet.org/

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