

# Cornell Cooperative Extension

## South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

3rd Quarter Report

July-September 2018

### SCNY Dairy Team Collaborates with NY FarmNet to hold Summer Social for Local Dairy Producers

In today's dairy economy, producers can be overwhelmed by tasks that they must do every day, as well as the bills that they have to pay just to keep their dairy in operation. On many farms the milk check received today is not enough to cover expenses. Dairy producers are stressed and often don't have enough time or resources to get off the farm for social activities. In response to this situation, the SCNY team and NY FarmNet organized an opportunity for dairy producers to have that social aspect, coupled with a tour of the CU Vet School Teaching Dairy and a Dairy Breakout Session.

The Summer Social saw over 30 producers and their families attend the tour and ice cream social at Stocking Hall this August. Attendees enjoyed ice cream from the Cornell Dairy, donated by Dean Boor, yogurt donated by Chobani, and milk donated by Byrne Dairy.

Many vendors that dairy producers use were available to talk to at a resource fair during the social hour. During the breakout, each SCNY team member gave a short presentation on their role within the team and current projects. NY FarmNet invited local producers, Doug and Martsje Riehlman to share their experience using NY FarmNet.

CU Professors Dr. Overton and Dr. Giordano spoke on new research they are conducting within dairy, and Harvest NY's Anika Zuber talked about small scale processing and Stocking Hall's activities. Producers came away with new and current information on activities with the team, NY FarmNet, and had the opportunity to socialize with CU professors and vendors. The Summer Social successfully provided both a social opportunity and dairy education for our local producers. \*



Cornell Cooperative Extension links the research and extension efforts at Cornell University, the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station and the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, providing the knowledge to maximize New York State's agricultural and natural resources.

**SCNY Dairy & Field Crops Extension Program**

## Reflections from a New Extension Specialist

*Mary Kate Wheeler, Farm Business Management Specialist*

If there is one thing I've learned after almost five months on the job, it's that dairy farms are incredible businesses. Farmers manage people, land, equipment, infrastructure, and, of course, animals. Their complex and dynamic production systems generate milk rich in protein and butterfat, which is hauled to one of several regional plants for processing. Despite the gloomy economic aura hovering around the dairy industry, the level of production across our six counties remains as impressive as ever. According to numbers from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, dairy farms in our 6-county region managed more than 53,000 cows in 2017. In just one month of 2017, our 310 dairy farms produced 127 million pounds of milk, enough to feed 2.4 million people.

Regardless of their remarkable management and production levels, dairy farmers are facing immense personal and financial stress. After three years of low milk prices, farms are encountering cash flow constraints, even after having

implemented cost-cutting measures. September is a time for difficult family conversations if parents are forced to choose between paying bills for the dairy and buying back-to-school clothing and supplies for their children. Some farm families that I've spoken with are questioning their decision to continue milking. I've heard families articulate a desire to keep farming, but also improve their quality of life. Some people feel stuck and don't know how or what to change. Others express feeling isolated and forgotten. One farmer with a 500-cow dairy called me the other day to share his frustration that "it feels like we don't matter anymore" to political officials or consumers.

If we could find a silver lining in the current context, it would be that many farmers are open to reexamining their goals and values, and considering new ideas. This makes for an exciting time to enter the field of agricultural extension, especially as a farm business management specialist. From my vantage point, I see great value in supporting farmers to use sound financial analysis as a foundation for making decisions and implementing changes, both on their farms and in their lives.★

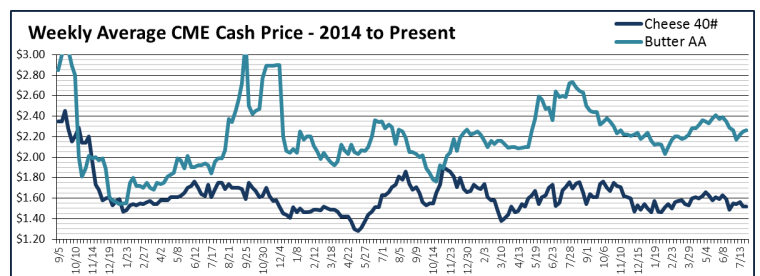


## Seasonal Update: Milk Prices & the Growing Season

*Janice Degni, Team Leader and Area*

"Northeast milk production is lower as the summer heat continues to set in. Class I sales are steady to slightly picking up as some bottlers are planning to take on more loads. There are reports of tolling happening as milk is fairly available for production needs. MidAtlantic balancing plants are receiving milk for steady production schedules, however some facilities have available capacity. Some milk is transported into other parts of the East for processing demands. Southeast milk volumes off the farms are coming down as humid conditions linger in the area. Many manufacturers are not receiving enough milk volumes for full production schedules..

Class I sales have picked up as bottlers have requested more milk loads for their order fulfillment needs. Florida's weather has been hot with thunderstorms and rain occurring very frequently. Milk production is still dropping as the heat index affects cow comfort. Class I sales have been on a slight increase as schools are restocking their supplies for the start of the new school year. Cream multiples are 1.36-1.48 this week, as the demand for cream is strong. With hot temperatures around, milk components are lower, causing there to be limited cream supplies in the



region. Buyers are actively taking from their weekly contracts to fill production needs. However, many buyers who do not have regular contracts are putting price pressure on the market, leading to increased prices. Condensed skim loads are lower as milk production has decreased. Not as many condensed skim loads are being delivered to other regions. Interest is fairly stable currently as many buyers are ordering regular loads. Sale prices have increased compared to recent months, as market participants report not seeing offers or purchases at a discount.."

*-Excerpt from USDA Dairy Market News—July 23-27, 2018*

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## Education and Outreach

### *Mary Kate Wheeler , Farm Business Management Specialist*

Melanie Palmer and Mary Kate Wheeler each spent a day visiting dairy farms across Tioga County with Dave Stoner. Dave is an agronomist representing Ward & Van Scoy, Owego's own local feed, seed and farm supply store. Through his work, Dave has developed longstanding relationships with many dairy farms across Tioga County. Regular contact with these farms has given Dave a front row seat to their current needs and challenges. After identifying farm accounting and record keeping as critical needs, particularly for smaller dairies in Tioga County, Dave reached out to the SCNY Dairy & Field Crops Team for support. The following list summarizes lessons and outcomes from these visits.

One farm was considering diversification into alternate farm enterprises, in an effort to become less dependent on milk sales. However, cash flow management was the most pressing and immediate priority for this farm. In September Mary Kate had a follow-up meeting with the farmer to develop cash flow projections. Mary Kate will continue working with the farm to complete a robust financial analysis that will provide a foundation for strategic planning.

The operator at another farm expressed interest in installing a robotic milking system as a strategy to reduce the costs and risks associated with hired labor. After the visit Mary Kate sent him information by email about the Dairy Acceleration Program (DAP) and a partial budget example showing numbers for a small dairy conversion to robotic milking.

A different farm operator reported struggling with a serious labor shortage. This farmer also expressed a need for help with a succession/transfer/exit strategy. We will keep him in mind for the succession planning workshops scheduled in early 2019.

The cows in one of the dairies that we visited showed signs of lameness. We relayed this information to Betsy Hicks, who followed up with the farmer and successfully enrolled the farm in her research project linking lying time and lameness in tie stall barns.

We identified a general need for improved record keeping and accounting systems, particularly for the smaller family-run operations that are still prevalent in Tioga County. To meet this need, our team is developing programs on basic accounting for farm businesses, and collaborating with SCORE to host a QuickBooks training for farmers.

In addition to strengthening our team's connections to dairies in Tioga County, these two days of farm visits also solidified a collaborative relationship with industry partners. Ward & Van Scoy continues to support our team's extension programming by providing space for event flyers in their Owego store, and by financially sponsoring the Summer Social earlier in August. ★

## Tie Stall Grant Project Reaches New Farms

### *Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist*

The second round of funding for the grant awarded by NY Farm Viability Institute to work specifically with tiestall producers this year is well under way. Six farms comprise the study in this region for the funding cycle, including one farm in Onondaga, two farms in Tioga and three farms in Cortland County. Of these six farms, four are farms that have not regularly used Cooperative Extension; this is the first time the team has made a strong connection with two of these four farms.

At this stage in the project, the six farms have met with the project leader to learn more about cow comfort and factors that can influence cow comfort and lameness. The second stage in the project saw all six herds participate in the assessment, which measured both cow and facility factors that are key to comfort and minimizing lameness on each dairy. Data is currently being analyzed by the project leaders and turned into report form for delivery back to the dairy.

The next step in the project includes report delivery, which includes the data specific to the farm and comparison to the benchmark. After the farm has

received its report, the project leader will formulate an action plan with each farm to make changes specific to their operation over the winter. Producers may also choose to have a winter assessment completed during this time. The final step involves meeting with each producer to assess and document any changes next spring.

Two farms that participated in the Tie Stall Project funded by NYFVI is being highlighted in a video project that will be put in front of legislators and stakeholders in Albany at NYFVI's annual meeting on November 27<sup>th</sup>. In this video, the farms talk about their involvement in the project and how they utilize the Dairy Team and Cooperative Extension to help them make changes and stay profitable. The video will be made public after the viewing in Albany to further enhance education about CCE and the Dairy Team. ★





## Retrospective of the Crop Season

A February warm up incited spring fever, but wintry conditions soon returned with a vengeance. They hung on through April, with snowfall each week and squalls late into the month. The late start to spring caused some logjams, particularly with manure spreading and planting. Cold soil temperatures caused some consideration for delaying planting, but calendar date overruled and planting began as soon as soil conditions permitted in early May.

All planting; oats, other spring grains, new seedlings and corn were going into the ground in early May. Surprisingly, once spring's work got started, it progressed pretty smoothly. Heavy damaging thunderstorms were limited early in the season, but later storms made up for time and harmed fields with soil susceptible to erosion. Early season nitrogen applications were not lost. Pests were light.

Heat units racked up this summer, keeping crop maturities on track and helping the late planted corn and soybean. We were saved from drought injury by timely rains in early July. Unfortunately the spigot stayed on. August rains boosted hay, corn and soybean yields. Windows for dry hay harvest were narrow or nonexistent



Alfalfa with  
leafhopper damage &  
Japanese beetles

later in the season. The early and more active Caribbean and E. Coast hurricane season brought more precipitation, making this one of the wettest falls for harvest in several years. Its never bodes well when conditions are wet at the beginning of harvest. The nearly constant rain has made it almost impossible to harvest soybeans. Wet, heavy snow will devastate what's left of the crop. Only harvested crop will qualify for the FSA payment meant to soften the effect of current trade wars, causing a double blow to farmers.

Conditions have been a mixed bag, but on the upside inventories are replenished, most with better feed quality than last year. ★



Potato Leafhopper Resistant Varieties

## On the Road with the Soil Health Trailer

Dates	Event	Location
January 11	Catskill Ag Days	Delhi, NY
April 14	Tompkins County AgStravaganza	Ithaca Commons
May 12	Pasture Walk at Paul & Connie Spas	Ashville, NY
May 16	NRCS Soil Health Training	Aurora, NY
June 2	Event at Cortland Water Works	Cortland, NY
June 21	Tioga County Soil & Water Conservation District Open House	Holland, VT
July 11	Pasture Walk at Rivington's	Hamilton, NY
July 19	Pasture Walk at Ziehm	Hoosick Falls, NY
July 26	SARE Pasture Walk	Laurens, NY
July 27	Broome County Fair	Whitney Point, NY
July 29	Tioga County Sundaes on the Farm	Owego, NY
Aug 8-9	Empire Farm Days	Seneca Falls, NY
Aug 22	Kings AgriSeed Field Day	Interlaken
Aug 30	Pasture Walk @ Kim & Janice's	Birdsall, NY
Sept 4	SUNY Cortland Students	Cortland, NY
Sept 6	Twilight Pasture Walk, Jakes Gouda Cheese	Deansboro, NY
Sept 24-25	Conservation Days	Greene County
Sept 27	Delaware County Pasture Walk	
Nov 6	New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling	Cooperstown, NY
Nov 9	Female Land Owner Farm Tour	Mt. Morris, NY