

Cornell Cooperative Extension

South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

1st Quarter Report

January—March 2019

Dairy Manager Discussion Group Links Strategies for Profitability: Genetics, Heifer Inventory and Beef Cross Calves

Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

Dairy managers from around the SCNY region have been meeting each winter for the past several years, focusing on discussion of topics they have in common. Managers that attend these discussion group meetings tend to be herds that operate freestall facilities and are over 300 milking cows.

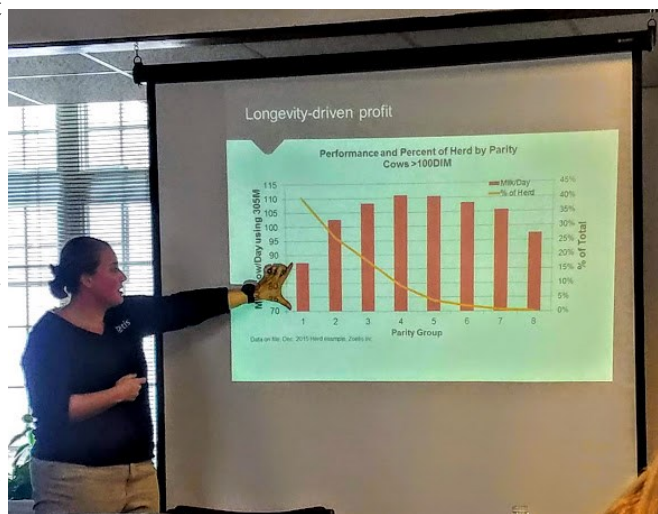
Many managers of this group recognize that their heifer inventory outnumbers the amount of heifers they need as replacements. In year's past, farms were able to sell extra animals to provide added income. But with prices in this market eroding along with milk price, farms that have additional heifer inventory have realized the price they receive upon selling these animals is far less than the cost of raising them. It has also put added culling pressure in the mature lactating herd, as the number of heifers coming in the pipeline is large. Too much culling in the mature herd can lead to a younger age in the entire herd, which can be problematic from a total herd production standpoint as first lactation cows produce only 85% of a mature cow. This has created a need for herd managers to determine a more defined breeding strategy. In addition to this need, there is also the growing trend of utilizing beef sires to achieve a cross-bred calf that is more valuable at a few days old. How farms can implement this strategy to gain additional income was a key question addressed for herd managers.

With these needs and issues in mind, this year's discussion group topics centered on strategies for raising an appropriate amount of heifers for replacements, raising the best genetic quality of replacement heifer possible, and having the unneeded animals being a source of income above what they receive for Holstein bull calves currently. In January, the group heard from invited presenter Dr. Michele

Barrett of Zoetis. Dr. Barrett walked the group through strategies for improving herd genetics, which could include genomic testing. The group had varying amounts of experience with genomic testing, and had lots of questions on the different ways to uncover this information and associated risks with using this technology. Because experience differed, members were able to bounce questions off of each other and share their own practices – good and bad.

The second meeting, held in February at Empire Livestock in Dryden, focused on beef cross calves at the sale barn. Invited presenters Hannah Worden and Claire Mulligan of ABS went over their InFocus program, a strategy dairy producers can use to obtain a higher price for crossbred calves. Because of the research and marketing ABS has done, calves that are a result of the InFocus breeding command a premium at the sale barn. Buyers know that calves with blue tags are InFocus calves and will pay above what a normal crossbred calf would bring.

Ken Krutz and Dannielle Cornelius of Empire Livestock Marketing followed up their presentation with actual pricing of calves through the ring from several sale barns, both InFocus calves and regular cross-bred calves. Producers that attended this meeting had ample time to ask both ABS and Empire Livestock representatives more information, and producers stayed well after the meeting was formally ended to continue discussion.



(Continued on p 2 bottom)

Continued on p. 2

NY Certified Organic Community NYCO -26 Years Strong

Fay Benson, Abbie Teeter, Small Dairy Technology Educators

This winter marks the 26th year of holding NY Certified Organic (NYCO) meetings. This discussion group is old enough now so that sons and daughters of original members are now attending and presenting as farmers at the meetings. The meetings have always been on the 2nd Tuesday of January, February and March. The winter storm on January 8, 2019 had left roads so bad plow trucks were driving backwards down the road, spreading salt before they drove on them. On February 12, every school in Geneva and the surrounding area was closed. Although we got a hint of spring in early March, we saw winter cold weather again on March 12. However, these weather complications didn't stop our faithful NYCO attendees from arriving at our three meetings in Geneva this winter! We had over 60 people attend each meeting.



We included two farmer panels this year, one on bedded packs and one on high speed discs. Mike & Karen Hooper and Ben & Kate Whittemore spoke on their bedded packs, showed pictures and answered questions in January. In March, Eric Sheffer, Rodney Graham, Thor Oechsner and Peter Martens shared their

experiences with their high speed discs with pictures and videos.



We included speakers such as Tomasz Falkowski, Director of the Cornell Horticulture Department, Bob Schindelbeck, Director of Cornell's Soil Health Lab and Cornell University Crop and Soil Sciences Professor Emeritus Dr. Charles Mohler to talk about their specialties. This year we also used webinar technology to have Dr. Heino Schaupp and Dr. Matthias Westerschulte with Deutsche Saatveredelung AG (DSV), a German plant breeding and seed company speak.

During the winter storms of January and February, our potluck lunches had so many strong, small conversations, we decided to have no group discussion in the afternoon, but rather allow the more focused discussions to continue. This also allowed our meeting attendees to travel home on their own time, without missing any important program.

Fay Benson and Abbie Teeter moderate, arrange for speakers and, prepare Press Releases for the meetings. In addition, they organize the dish to pass lunch at each meeting.*

Strategies for Profitability continued from p. 1

The third meeting, held in March, focused on the breeding strategy of the herd. Jonna Egli of Genex presented to the group the tools they use to help individual herds come up with strategies to utilize conventional bulls, sexed semen technology and beef sires to achieve a desired outcome. This outcome can incorporate growth, genetic improvement and increased income through cross bred calf sales, and can be different for each farm, as well as tailored to changing situations throughout the year. The group also heard from Dr Mike Baker, professor at Cornell University in Beef Cattle, on market outlooks with cross bred calves as well as costs associated with raising these calves if a producer so chose. Discussion among producers and presenters helped farms explore the options they could have with different strategies.

Over the three meetings, over 45 people attended - representing 23 farms and 16,810 lactating cows. Since then, many of the farms have contacted their bull studs to request help in formulating a more defined breeding strategy and several have contacted ABS to request participation in the InFocus program. One herd has asked for assistance

from Betsy to finalize their breeding strategy, as it incorporates both herd expansion and utilization of beef sires. As setting up these strategies take time, as well as the fact that a cow's gestation is around nine months, the direct impact of breeding programs and additional income from cross-bred calves is yet to be realized. However, the cost savings of raising only the required number of heifers for replacements is a number that producers will experience as soon as they implement a strategy. While this cost isn't a check that they physically write, producers will be able to take some strain off of heifer facilities, maintain forage inventory and start the process for gaining genetic improvement more rapidly. All these things add up to overall profitability that farms need to have in order to be in business. Going forward, the group has requested more information on where cross bred calves go after the sale barn. The team is looking at partnering with Keystone Mills, a feed company that works with Amish and Mennonite farms in the Fingerlakes region that raise these calves, to set up both a mill tour and farm tour of these facilities this summer to add to the picture of what this emerging production line looks like.*

Crop Topics Supporting Yield, Quality and Environmental Stewardship

Janice Degni, Area Field Crops Specialist

The essence of an extension program that addresses field crop production is to help farmers meet their goals of producing sufficient quantities of highly nutritious feed in an environmentally compatible manner. Integrated pest and crop management practices provide the foundation of the program. Practices that contribute to environmental stewardship are a high priority for both building awareness and implementation. Environmental stewardship practices reduce non-point source losses of soil and nutrients. Safe pesticide handling and application is required by law and licensed pesticide applicators need to earn continuing education credits to maintain their licenses.

This past winter I offered the Annual Winter Crop Meeting (WCM), two plant protection meetings, and a pesticide applicator training with certified crop advisor (CCA) and DEC pesticide re-certification credits available for attendees. I helped plan the topics for the Tompkins County Ag Summit, which focused on farming with changing weather patterns, and co-sponsored the Manure Handling and Trucking Safety Workshop organized by Dairy Support Services, the Potter brothers' regional custom work business.

An overview of a few of the key topics follows:

The WCM and plant protection meetings addressed the management options available when challenged with resistant species of insects and weeds, strategies and tools for adaptive management for N in season, and species options that offer improvements in haycrop feed quality.

A talk entitled "What Difference Does 2 Degrees Make?"

provided an overview of the global climate system and the significance of a warming planet.

For some time, there has been a lot of buzz on the internet around glyphosate and its health risks, much of it sensationalized with many claims not clearly supported by scientific data. Dan Wixted from the Cornell Pesticide Management and Education Program presented a review of data and the relationship of glyphosate to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma cancer incidence. Dan used the relationship between toxicity and exposure to frame the assessment of risk of harm from glyphosate or any agrichemical.

Learning from peers' experience is always of interest to farmers. A farmer panel of no-till practitioners was featured at the Winter Crop Meeting. At the Crop Protection meeting in Horseheads, a dairy nutritionist, grower, and custom operator comprised a panel that shared their experience growing soybeans and the infrastructure required for home grown grain.

These forums are planned to disseminate information about current issues and research findings to attendees to help them meet their goals of improved crop quality and yield with decreased costs or increased income as a resulting outcome.*



NY FarmNet Mental Health First Aid Training

Melanie Palmer, Agricultural Educator

Agriculture is the focus for the NY South Central Dairy and Field Crops Team. Direct contact with our farm producers is part of our daily activities. These producers have experienced an extended period of low prices for their products, be it milk or crops. This, unfortunately, is an opportunity for high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness, not only in the producer, but also very possibly for those working directly with the producers.

NY FarmNet collaborated with Cornell Cooperative Extension to bring *Mental Health First Aid Training* to the agricultural community. Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental illness, builds understanding of their impact, and gave an overview of common supports. I had the opportunity to participate in this training in February at the Madison County CCE office. This 8-hour course used role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to offer

initial help in a mental health crisis and connect persons to the appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help care. We learned the common risk factors and warning signs of specific types of illnesses, like anxiety, depression, substance use, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and schizophrenia. We were taught basic knowledge about mental health problems in order to administer the appropriate help by following the Mental Health First Aid Action Plan.

This training was an opportunity to prepare field representatives, agricultural professionals, farm neighbors, and agency staff with the skills needed to start a conversation with someone who seems to be reaching out for help. By attending this training, I am able to assess the risk of harm, listen nonjudgmentally, give reassurance and encourage professional help and support to people experiencing mental health problems.*

South Central NY (SCNY) Extension Dairy & Field Crops Team

Meetings & Workshops Fall 2018-2019

Oct 10	Holistic Management Discussion Group I: Overview of Holistic Management CCE Tioga County, Owego	Mary Kate	5p
Oct 25	Calving and Neonatal Calf Care Training, Session I: Care in the Maternity Pen & Initial Calf Care Considerations East River Dairy, Cortland	Betsy	8p
Oct 30	Grant Workshop for Farmers Candor Fire Hall	Mary Kate	22p
Nov 2	Blueprint for Change: Navigating Dairy Decision Making CCE Broome County	Betsy & Mary Kate	22p
Nov 7	Holistic Management Discussion Group II: Developing a Farm Family Goal CCE Tioga County, Owego	Mary Kate	5p
Nov 8	Calving and Neonatal Calf Care Training, Session II: Caring for Neonates Fouts Farm, Groton	Betsy	6p
Nov 27	Basic Legal Agreements for Farm Business Management CCE Tioga County Auditorium, Owego	Mary Kate	14p
Dec 5	Holistic Management Discussion Group III: Testing Decision Using a Holistic Framework CCE Tioga County, Owego	Mary Kate	4p
Dec 10	2018 Feed Dealers Seminar Maximizing milk fat on the dairy & RUMinations on nitrogen efficiency Chamber of Commerce, Cortland	Betsy	17p
Dec 10	Dairy Girl Network Meeting - The Basics of Farm Accounting Plus Updates from the National DGN Meeting Historic Masonic Lodge 470, Cortland	Melanie	11p
Dec 11 & 12	DGA Holistic Management Training for Apprentices 37 Church St., Cortland, NY	Fay & Abbie	12p
Dec 13	Organic Dairy Task Force DFA Offices, Syracuse, NY	Fay & Abbie	31p
Dec 14	Succession Planning Kickoff Seminar for Farm Businesses Doubletree Hotel, 6301 State Route 298, E Syracuse, NY	Betsy, Mel & Mary Kate	49p
2019			
Jan 8	NY Certified Organic (NYCO) #1, Bedded Packs & Organic Crops Jordan Hall, 630 West North St., Geneva, NY	Fay & Abbie	67p
Jan 9	QuickBooks for Farmers and Growers: Session I Cortland Chamber of Commerce, 37 Church Street	Mary Kate	17p
Jan 10	Holistic Management Discussion Group IV Testing Decisions Using a Holistic Framework	Mary Kate	3p

Jan 16	QuickBooks for Farmers and Growers: Session II Cortland Chamber of Commerce, 37 Church Street	Mary Kate	15p
Jan 17	Dairy Manager Discussion Group: Genetic Advancement Chamber of Commerce, Cortland	Betsy	17p
Jan 22	Invited Presentation at Cortland Rotary "The Dairy Crisis" Cortland Elks Club	Janice	25p
Jan 23	QuickBooks for Farmers and Growers: Session III Record Keeping for Risk Management Cortland Chamber of Commerce, 37 Church Street	Mary Kate	12p
Jan 24	RMA Webinar with PRO-Dairy: Risk Mgt for Dairy Farmers Online	Fay & Abbie	45p
Jan 29	Winter Crop Meeting 2019: Forages, IPM, Yields & Data & No-Till Panel Clarion Inn, Ithaca, NY CCA/DEC credits	Janice	80p
Jan 30	New York Ag Labor Roadshow Co-sponsored with Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development NY State Fairgrounds, Syracuse, NY	Mary Kate & Melanie	26p
Jan 30	QuickBooks for Farmers and Growers: Session IV Cortland Chamber of Commerce, 37 Church Street	Mary Kate	12p
Feb 5	SARE Farmer Update Meeting Oriskany NY	Fay & Abbie	25p
Feb 6	Holistic Management Discussion Group V Testing Decisions Using a Holistic Framework	Mary Kate	4p
Feb 8	Dairy Day: Uncovering Opportunities for Your Dairy Feb 8, Owego Treadway; Feb 7, NYS Fairgrounds, Syracuse (Cancelled)	Betsy & Mel	21p
Feb 12	NY Certified Organic (NYCO) #2: Getting the Most Out of Your Soils Jordan Hall, 630 West North St., Geneva, NY	Fay & Abbie	65p
Feb 13	Guest Lecture at Cornell, Matt Ryan's Organic Agriculture Class Management Changes for Organic Dairy Transition Cornell University, Ithaca, NY	Fay & Abbie	22p
Feb 14	Dairy Manager Discussion Group Beef Cross Calves at the Sale Barn, Empire Livestock, Dryden	Betsy	26p
Feb 15	Hemp Meeting Research Update CCE Broome County	Janice	22p
Feb 26	Texas A&M Representative Farm Data Meeting McMahon's EZ Acres Dairy, Homer	Betsy & Mel	11p
Feb 26	Strategies for Farming in the NE with Changing Weather Patterns VFW, Dryden	Janice/CCE Tompkins	45p
Mar 5	Crop Meeting Binghamton CCA/DEC credits CCE Broome County, 840 Upper Front St., Binghamton, NY	Janice	12p

Mar 6	Holistic Management Discussion Group VI Developing a Monitoring Plan	Mary Kate	5p
Mar 6 & 13	Dairy Managers Training Day 1 & 2 Mar 6 Spencer's Dairy Farm, Newark Valley Mar 13 McMahon's E-Z Acres, Homer	Betsy	11p
Mar 8	RMA Webinar: Considerations for spring planted crops Online	Fay & Abbie	13p
Mar 8	Spring Manure Handling and Trucking Safety Workshop with DSSC In collaboration with Dairy Support Services NYS Grange, Cortland	Janice	108p
Mar 12	NY Certified Organic (NYCO) #3: Review of Tillage Reduction Machinery Jordan Hall, 630 West North St., Geneva, NY	Fay & Abbie	58p
Mar 13	Hemp Conference CCE Broome County	Janice	122p
Mar 15	FSA/CCE Producer Appreciation Luncheon & Ag Fair Dryden Fire Hall	Melanie	53p
Mar 19	Organize Ag Committee Meeting for Representative Brindisi NYS Grange, Cortland	Betsy	65 p
Mar 20	Crop Meeting Horseheads CCA/DEC credits CCE Broome, 840 Upper Front St, Binghamton	Janice	15p
Mar 18	Adaptive Management & In-Season N Use w/ Prof. Ketterings and Karly Czymmek CCE Cortland	Janice	4p
Mar 21	Dairy Managers Discussion Group: Herd Strategy for Breeding & Dairy Beef Cross Calves Cortland Chamber of Commerce, 37 Church St., Cortland, NY	Betsy	6p
Mar 28	Pesticide Applicator Training Dryden Fire Hall	Janice	15p



Cultivating AGvocates-CNY Region Conference for Women

Melanie Palmer, Agricultural Educator; and Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

When people hear the term ‘farmer’, most will generally think of a male, and yes, male principal operators predominate the farming industry. However, women are an integral force in farming and agricultural businesses. According to the US 2017 census, there were more than 489,000 female primary producers across the country, up from the over 288,000 female principal operators in the US in 2012. In NY State alone in 2017, there were 9,282 female primary producers, up from 6,459 female principal operators in 2012. Because of this growing trend in female operators, the opportunity to strengthen this segment of agriculture is large. Additionally, it goes almost without saying, the stresses on farmers today are large and varied. Learning new techniques and ways to offer information to our producers is a priority to be able to reach out and connect on multiple levels.

Recognizing the contributions of women in agricultural production and businesses, Cayuga Community College sponsored the ‘Cultivating AGvocates – CNY Regional Conference for Women’ on February 13, 2019. Melanie Palmer and Betsy Hicks attended the conference in order to network and develop skills from sessions covering finances, social media and enhancing personal skills to help promote business and products. Keynote speaker, Dr. Christine Allen, President of Insight Business Works, engaged the audience through her talk on stress and not being able to pour from an empty cup. She discussed how to prioritize to maintain work-life harmony. There was a wide variety of agricultural business represented at the conference including guest speakers and attendees. The conference allowed us to make new connections and strengthen our professional networks and skills, all of which are valuable resources.

SUNY Morrisville also recently held a Farmer Appreciation Day, aimed at “supporting area farm families by bringing together Human Services Agencies and Agribusinesses to provide information and support” to local farms. Melanie and Betsy were able to attend this conference, alongside two women who operate dairy

farms in the SCNY region. At this meeting, farmers and agribusinesses were able to interact on many levels – brainstorming about how to diversify farm income, ways to increase local milk consumption by getting milk on the shelves in convenience stores, and candid conversations about the state of the dairy industry and supporting neighbor farms. Jane Coddington, an instructor at SUNY Morrisville, also led conversation dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed and how to cope. Dr. Sheila Marshman, Associate Professor at SUNY Morrisville, provided much of the facilitation for the meeting. She brought a unique perspective to the conversation, as she and her husband own a dairy and she works full time off the farm. The conversations and interactions from this conference are tools we plan to bring to SCNY programming.

Because of these opportunities to interact with farmers in the extended region, the team has new contacts and resources in their toolkit to use as we educate and support local producers. Melanie plans to utilize speakers for the CNY Peer Group of Dairy Girl Network, a group of women in all walks of dairy in the region, who meet to discuss topics specific to dairy as well as stresses unique to women. Brainstorming sessions and techniques used in the workshops can be employed in our discussion groups and bring a different dimension of awareness and self-guided learning to our local producers. These opportunities in the extended region have also been invaluable for the continued education of our own regional staff!



Quickbooks Training Fills to Capacity

Mary Kate Wheeler, Farm Business Management Specialist



In August 2018, Mary Kate and Melanie attended a USDA SCORE Resource Fair and built relationships with SCORE volunteers. Following this event, the South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Team partnered with the SCORE Syracuse chapter to collaboratively organize and implement a 4-week class on recordkeeping with QuickBooks software in January 2019.

The course was completely full, as sixteen students from thirteen farms participated in the *QuickBooks for Farmers* workshop, held at the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce. The participants included 7 dairy operations, 3 livestock producers, 2 crop farms, and one seed farm. These thirteen farms represented Broome, Cortland, Otsego, Tioga, and Tompkins counties.

SCORE volunteer Lynn Stearns was the lead instructor for the class, and three other SCORE volunteers attended various sessions to provide additional student support. The course began with an overview of basic accounting principles, before diving into setting up a company and recording business transactions in QuickBooks. SCORE provided laptops with QuickBooks software for students to use during the course, making the class interactive and engaging. Lynn's computer was connected to a projector, so students could watch and follow along at the same time. Lynn used a QuickBooks file representing a sample farm to demonstrate various features of the accounting software. Students appreciated the ways that Lynn adapted his standard course content to make the class especially relevant to farmers. In particular, students liked the demonstration on how to enter various components of a milk check in QuickBooks.

In the third week of the course, Mary Kate gave a brief presentation on *Record Keeping for Risk Management*, fulfilling an objective for the New York Crop Insurance

and Risk Management Education Project. The risk management discussion dovetailed nicely with the broader accounting and recordkeeping themes. Students who completed the training can submit receipts for up to \$100 reimbursement for the purchase of QuickBooks software, funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency.

Upon completion of the course we received 10 evaluation surveys from the 16 participants. These evaluations indicated that the training met student expectations. Prior to taking the course, 40% of participants had never used QuickBooks in their farm business. After completing the course, 100% of students said that they plan to use QuickBooks to track financial records on the farm in 2019.

Individual students reported several additional actions that they plan to take following the course, including:

- Purchase and start using a new payroll program
- Separate personal checking and farm checking accounts
- Improve the Chart of Accounts to better categorize revenue and expense transactions
- Start using new functions within QuickBooks to keep more detailed records
- Stay up to date and keep better records
- Supply better records to my tax accountant

Students gave excellent ratings to instructor knowledge, class handouts, and the venue. Notably, all students enrolled in the course reported finding out about it from one of several different CCE publicity efforts, including Facebook, CCE email, CCE website, the Dairy Digest newsletter, Country Folks, and word of mouth. This finding highlights the importance of the South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops team's marketing and publicity efforts to the success of this ongoing partnership with SCORE.

Our first QuickBooks training was so successful that we decided to offer a second session in March and April, 2019. We have three farms participating in this second round, including two dairies and one diversified livestock farm. After the first two classes of this 4-part workshop, two of these farms have already made changes to their record keeping system. The third producer is planning to purchase QuickBooks and start using it after finishing the course.*

