



Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

Serving Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties

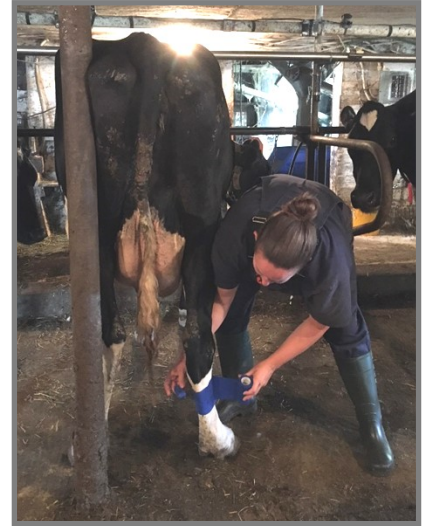
Program Highlights

April - June
2019

On-Farm Data Provides Dairy Farmers with Valuable Information

Although previous research gives dairy farmers an idea of what to focus on to improve cow comfort and profitability on-farm, nothing beats having data that is specific to their operation when considering making changes or improvements. Without farm-specific data, farmers aren't sure where their own performance falls on the continuum, and what areas of opportunity they should prioritize. Lindsay Ferlito, our Regional Dairy Specialist has been helping dairies across the North Country by collecting and analyzing data on individual farms and providing producers with tailored recommendations.

One key component of cow comfort is ensuring cows get enough rest on a comfortable surface. To help farmers monitor this, Lindsay has attached lying behavior loggers to individual cows to collect behavior data. Every minute, these loggers will record whether a cow is lying down or standing up, from which her average daily lying time and how often she gets up and down can be calculated. A report is provided to the farmer that shows the herd averages for lying behavior, the herd diurnal lying time pattern throughout the day, and a breakdown showing each animal's data. The farm is also provided with industry benchmark data to show them how they compare, and help outline any areas of opportunity.



Data logger being attached to a cow to monitor lying behavior

Additionally, Lindsay has helped farmers monitor the Temperature Humidity Index in their barns by placing recording sensors in the barn. This information helps determine if the ventilation and cooling systems are adequate and operating appropriately to maximize animal comfort and health. When one farmer received his report, he stated "this is really helpful. Thanks!" Further, he said "it's a nicely put together document! It's encouraging that it's consistent across pens. It would be interesting to revisit in the coldest of winter and in July to compare to our average daily gain and treatment records." A follow-up assessment was done in the cooler months to compare the barn throughout the seasons.



Temperature-humidity sensor in a calf barn.

Having Cooperative Extension provide North Country dairies with farm-specific data is very beneficial. Farms can use it as a benchmarking tool to compare themselves to others in the industry and see where they are relative to peers, and it can be used for them to compare to themselves after changes in management or housing have been made. This helps farms track changes and improvements on farm, leading to increases in everything from cow comfort to productivity and profitability.

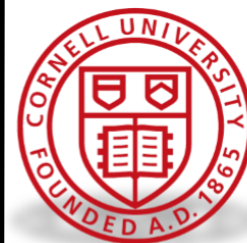
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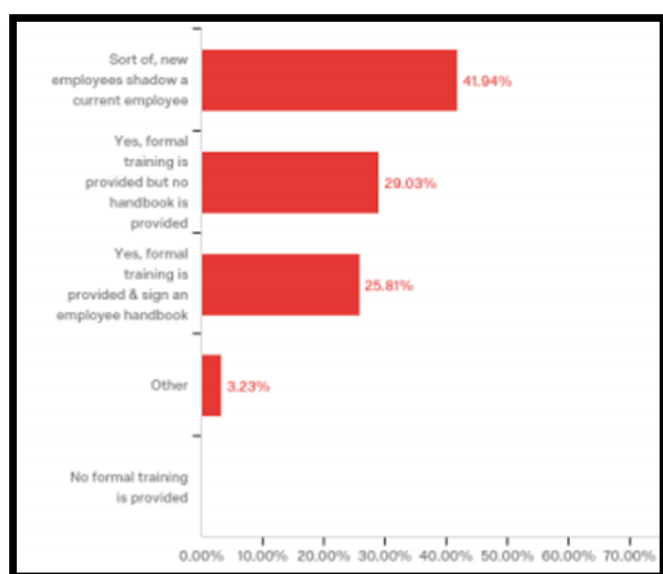
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Labor Trends on Dairy Operations in Northern New York- The Impact of Research



Our Farm Business Management Specialist, Kelsey O'Shea, in collaboration with Sara Bull, Ag Educator in Clinton County, completed the study of Labor Trends on NNY Dairy farms through funding from NNYADP this spring. The full report is featured on the NNYADP Website (<https://www.nnyagdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/NNYADP19DairyLaborTrendsReportFINAL.pdf>). This research is important to assist dairy farmers in understanding how businesses in the six county region are managing and retaining labor. This project was implemented in response to a large number of farms asking "How are other farms finding and keeping labor?" While Kelsey could answer this question with anecdotal or specific tactic recommendations, there was no collective research or averages available to understand not only how farms are managing and maintaining labor, but also if certain management techniques led to increased retention or business performance. Some key insights from the report are as follows.

Percentage of Farms Providing Training by Type, NNY Dairy Farm Labor Trends Project, NNYADP, 2018-2019.



Most farmer inquiries were regarding what hourly rate they should be paying employees to be competitive with other farms in the region. The data showed that, across all positions, the average hourly rate was \$13.28 and the average starting hourly rate was \$11.54- both above current minimum wage. Farmers found this data to be in line with what they were experiencing, with some indicating that it is most likely even higher when housing benefits, that cannot be charged to an employee, are considered. The next area of focus was average hours per week worked to gain insight into how employees were managed. In addition, given the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act passage to now make farm labor subject to overtime, this hourly data is especially important. It showed that of all employees accounted for in the study (598) that 43% worked between 60-70 hours per

week. This means that as of January 1, 2020 farmers will have to restructure current schedules or pay overtime for those hours over 60 per week. When training was evaluated, it showed that 42% of farms only completed "informal" training with no handbooks or formal training programs provided.

Regarding these key findings, Kelsey has already met with over 15 farms individually to address their labor practices, ensure legal compliance, and to strategize methods for improvement based on this new data. In addition, this research has reached considerably more farm producers since it was featured in Dairy Herd Management at this link: <https://www.dairyherd.com/article/dairy-labor-survey-shows-trends-vulnerabilities>. Moving forward, this research provides an excellent benchmark or starting point from which dairy farms can assess and evaluate their labor management practices. One of the final questions evaluated on the survey was "what would make managing and retaining labor easier for you as a dairy farm owner?". The two most selected answers were more reliable employees and more applicants to choose from. Based on this, Kelsey and Sara plan to offer a training on these topics in the fall of 2019. This will further give dairy farms resources needed to meet or exceed the averages or benchmarks indicated while also adhering to current law changes, ensuring compliance and improved performance.

Regional Ag Team Responds to Unstable Spring Weather, Pests and Adaptation

The first half of the 2019 growing season has not gone well for North Country farmers and will impact fall harvests, forage inventories, grain purchases and rotation plans into 2020 and maybe beyond. Even before planting season was underway, extensive winterkill of alfalfa and alfalfa-grass fields became apparent in April. Many farms in the North Country lost large proportions of fields and quickly needed to rearrange crop rotation plans to turn sods to corn fields. Then, the planting season began with an atypically long stretch of cold and wet weather, causing the majority of field preparations, forage seedings and corn planting operations to be severely delayed or even skipped. Spring rains came frequently, presenting few opportunities for soil drainage and drying, for forage or corn planting and even for harvesting first cutting hay on most farms. Many many acres of corn were planted extremely late in June and into July. First cutting was finally off in late June and was not high quality for many. The weather delays also caused mistimed herbicide applications and weed problems, the need to shift to shorter-season annual forages and a risk of putting wet hay bales in the barn. Now, in July, some fields remain open. Complicating the weather delays, we also saw an unusually high population of black cutworm in NYS and the North Country this spring. Black cutworm damages young corn seedlings, cutting them off at the soil surface. Some fields, already planted late and behind in development, lost up to 60-70% of the corn plants to black cutworm. Some field were replanted despite the late date.

The North Country regional agronomists, Kitty O'Neil and Mike Hunter, together with agronomists and others across the state, prepared and disseminated many communications to farms and agribusinesses this spring, to help manage cropping operations despite these challenges and constraints. We also responded to an elevated number of phone calls, text messages and emails from farms and businesses. In addition to our normal springtime communications about weather and first-cutting alfalfa development, we published bulletins and articles about late cover crop termination, forage reseeding decisions, alternative late herbicide treatments, emergency annual forage alternatives and other topics. We authored these articles and also collaborated with other regional specialists, NYS IPM and Pro Dairy staff to respond to relevant topics in a timely manner. We also participated in radio and newspaper interviews and recorded podcasts with other journalists about springtime weather and its impacts. We quickly generated videos to help farmers and consultants use available online tools for making cropping decisions in response to the challenging season. Weekly NYS IPM conference calls and reports from neighboring states alerted to expect more problems with black cutworm this spring, so we began to distribute scouting and treatment information early. We also expected armyworm problems and shared scouting and treatment tips for that pest, though we were relieved that few problems were reported. Many of the spring forage seedings that were skipped will be planted in late summer, so we made sure to redistribute information to help manage those decisions and procedures. First-cutting hay and haylage quality is poor this year, due to late harvest. We shared Pro Dairy articles about managing and storing low quality forages for best outcomes.



A black cutworm larva with a cut off corn seedling. St. Lawrence County, July 2019. Photo by K.

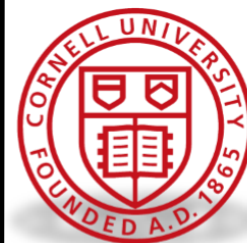
Though our general approach to timely, relevant and accurate responses to North Country farming needs and inquiries remain consistent with previous years, our team has tried to broaden our methods to further extend our reach. We've responded in multiple formats, in multiple outlets, maximizing collaborations and on as many fronts as possible this spring, to expand our impact at a time of high stress and strain on many farms, even before the challenging spring weather.



Harvest New York

Harvest NY Studies NNY Wholesale Produce Crops and Prices

Harvest NY secured \$19,768 from Northern New York Agriculture Development Program for the New Wholesale Marketing Northern New York project. The research proposal looks at wholesale pricing at the produce auction. The object of the project is to help farmers make informed decisions on approaches to receive a higher average sales price than they are currently receiving for their products. Throughout the 2019 growing season, Harvest NY will be tracking monthly sales and comparing the top five crops of 2018 to 2019 sales including timing of sales, lot size, and average sale prices. The top five crops in 2018 were flowers, tomatoes, mums, pumpkins, and beans. On May 2nd, the St. Lawrence Valley Produce Auction opened for a second season. The sales for the month of May included hanging baskets, annuals (vegetables and flowers), perennials, asparagus, and rhubarb. For the month of May, the auction had a 62% increase in sales from 2018. In 2018, the St. Lawrence Valley Produce Auction did an estimated sales of \$240,000. The Northern New York Agriculture Development Program will also support bringing in outside CCE regional specialists, to provide educational training on vegetable and fruit growing practices. During the second quarter, Harvest NY arranged outside CCE regional specialists to provide educational support through farm visits. Farm visits included helping farmers with production issues related to disease, pest, and plant fertility. Additional farm visits and a production field meeting will be held during the third quarter.



Our Mission

“The North Country Regional Ag Team aims to improve the productivity and viability of agricultural industries, people, and communities in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton, and Essex Counties by promoting productive, safe, economically, and environmentally sustainable management practices and by providing assistance to industry, government, and other agencies in evaluating the impact of public policies affecting the industry.”

“The North Country Regional Ag team is a Cornell Cooperative Extension partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton, and Essex counties.”

Contact us directly through our website: <http://ncrat.cce.cornell.edu/>

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associates, county governing bodies, and U.S.D.A. cooperating.