

3rd Quarter

Cornell Cooperative Extension

South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

July-Aug 2019

Reaching New Heights through Digital Engagement

by Mary Kate Wheeler and Betsy Hicks, South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops Team

Social Media Success

Traditionally, extension educators have used newsletters, postcards, flyers, and other forms of print media to share technical information and advertise upcoming programs and events. Today's audience, however, relies less and less on these formats for sharing information, preferring media that is instantaneous, available at their fingertips, and updated as soon as it is viewed.

In an effort to reach a broader array of people, over the past few years the South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops Team has invested time and energy in building an online presence and engaging learners through social media and blogging. This effort has been a fun way to share resources and connect with new and existing audiences. Expanding digital engagement has been an ongoing learning process, not only for members of our team, but also for other extension educators across the state.

In keeping with our mission of creating a greater awareness of trends and options for producers to achieve their goals, our presence on social media and the content archived on our blog are two popular ways that we connect directly with producers. In a wider sense, these outlets help to make our team's work visible to a broader audience, and encourage a better understanding of agriculture by the general community.

Finding New Friends on Facebook

The SCNY team started a Facebook page in the end of April 2014, soon after Betsy came to the team. In the page's infancy, posts were often shares of other reliable sources of information. Since then, the team has broadened posts to include sharing blog articles that contain original content, updating followers on news, events and opportunities affecting the dairy industry, and creating Facebook events for our own programs.

The SCNY's Facebook page currently holds 356 total likes, up from 323 at the start of 2019. Total page followers number 393 unique people or pages. The average 28 day reach so far in 2019 is 2,796 people and 28 day impressions average 8,038 people. For a link that is posted, the average reach is 124 people; for a posted photo, the average reach is 109 people. Of our followers, 46% are women and 54% are men. The majority of men and women fall in the 18-24 age range (32%), followed closely by the 35-44 age range (27%).

The majority of our followers are from the United States (321) but we have followers from around the globe including Argentina, Spain, India and Australia. Mainly of the followers of our page are also within our six-county region, including



cities of Ithaca, Binghamton, Candor, Newark Valley, Homer, Truxton and Cortland, but also are located within neighboring counties. Followers are also counted in Greene, Norwich, Cobleskill and Eden. The majority of our followers speak English as a first language (326) but a small percentage (11 people) speak Spanish as a first language.

Our team has posted 36 events via Facebook, reaching over 14,700 people. Over 284 events responses have been recorded via Facebook, 92 of them over the last 3 months. We collaborate directly with staff from the 6 CCE county offices in our region to either share or co-host team events on Facebook, making our events visible on the county Facebook pages, as well as on our own page. Interest in events posted on Facebook has grown through our relationships with additional agricultural services and organizations sharing the events, and has been a way for the team to expand our reach beyond our email and address lists.

Blogging Increases Visibility and Engagement

In early 2019 our team decided to take advantage of the Cornell University blog service to create a South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops blog. By increasing the visibility and accessibility of our work, the blog allows us to better serve existing audiences, reach new audiences, and increase our team's capacity for digital engagement.

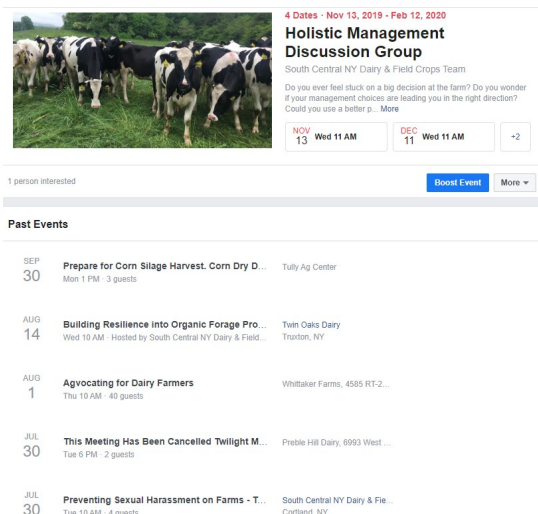
Our three initial priorities for the blog were to feature original content developed by team members; digitize and organize that content, optimizing it for search engines; and build a list of subscribers, starting with our existing mailing list. Blog posts typically fall into one of three main categories:

1. Technical articles - typically also featured in our Dairy Digest newsletter.
2. Success stories - written for monthly, quarterly, and annual reports

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

3. Press releases - describing upcoming team events



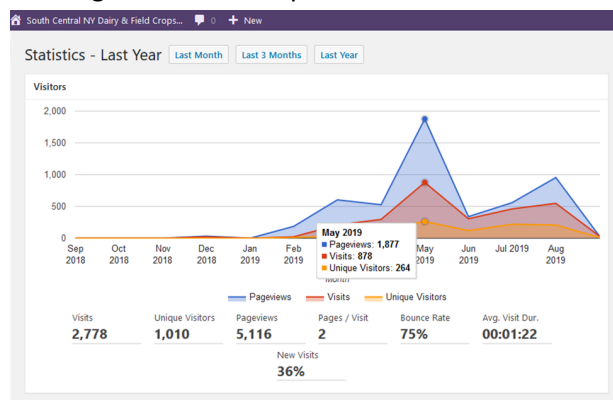
In February and March we created the blog infrastructure and populated it with articles from the prior year. We then created a schedule of weekly blog posts for 2019. The official launch took place on Monday, April 15, when we subscribed everyone on our existing email list to the blog and published ["Welcome to the new South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops blog!"](#)

The blog is off to a great start, and here are some stats (as of September 4, 2019) showing that:

- Our blog currently has 525 subscribers. Most of the subscribers are people in our region who have personal relationships with one or more team members.
- We have published 64 blog posts, dating back to January 2018.
- The blog is integrated with our team website and Facebook page. Blog posts are shared on Facebook within a day after they appear on the blog.
- Since launching the blog earlier this year 1,010 unique visitors have visited the blog 2,778 times and logged 5,116 page views.
- More than half (61%) of blog visitors arrive by clicking a direct link in their email subscription.
- Google is responsible for 16% of traffic to our blog, suggesting that our search engine optimization efforts are succeeding.
- Our team website is responsible for 9% of blog traffic, while 8% of blog visitors arrive through a link shared on Facebook.

With practice, we have learned that blogging offers a flexible format for sharing information, and we have discovered additional uses for the blog. Betsy used the blog to rapidly distribute her weekly alfalfa monitoring updates throughout the month of May to help farmers predict and plan for first cutting. We have also used it to solicit producer feedback. In June, Mary Kate circulated an online survey to dairy farmers via the blog, and then used the blog to share survey results a few weeks later.

It is exciting to report that our blog has received attention not only from producers and other educators in the CCE network, but also from media outlets. Several blog posts have been picked up and run in agricultural publications, including Hoard's Dairyman Intel, Country Folks Magazine, Morning Ag Clips, and the Cornell Small Farms Quarterly. In just three short months, the blog has made great strides toward achieving its original objectives by making our work visible to new and existing audiences. We're excited to see how it continues to grow and develop!



The Future for the Team and Technology

As the team has become more comfortable with the usage of these tools, the opportunity for reaching a larger audience through varied means has become apparent. Combining efforts with other regional educators on subject matter has been discussed, and utilizing a podcast to reach farmers that have endless tractor time is in the near future. Other social media websites, such as Instagram and Twitter, are used to some extent by other regional educators and teams, and are also being discussed as ways to grow our audience. The clear answer for the SCNY team has been to master these tools and integrate information from one platform to another in order to reach an audience without duplication of effort. Watch for efforts in social media in the near future – we're eager to reach new faces! ~

SCNYDFC Team Members Assist with Syracuse Inner City Youth Dairy Farm Tour

Melanie Palmer, Agriculture Educator

McMahon's EZ-Acres Dairy Farm in Homer, NY, hosted a farm tour for Syracuse Inner City School youth on August 14th and 15th. The event was coordinated through PEACE, Inc. and the Rotary Club of Syracuse. One hundred and twenty five youth and 16 adults visited the farm with ages ranging from elementary to high school.

Several members of the SCNYDFCT assisted the McMahon's with leading the groups of youth, as well as the adult chaperones, through several parts of the farm, including cow barn, calf hutches, milking parlor, feed storage bunks and maternity pens. As the youth visited each location, SCNY team members educated them on the importance that each

part plays in the production of milk and dairy products that they consume every day.

So, who teaches our youth about agriculture? Do they know where food and clothing come from? Through this event, the SCNYDFC team had the opportunity to introduce ag practices to youth that have limited exposure to any form of farming. Connecting our youth to agriculture can have lifelong impacts in the way of understanding the economic importance to communities, food and clothing that we all depend on, future career opportunities and a general support and appreciation for how agriculture affects our daily lives.~

Advocating for Dairy Farmers – Helping Producers Tell Their Farm Story

Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

Consumers, more now than ever, are interested where their food comes from. Consumer perceptions of agriculture shape preferences in their food choices, which in turn shape requirements from grocery retailers that get passed down to the farmer. Many of these consumer perceptions have been altered by the growing focus of negative media and videos from animal activists, whose aim is to put an end to animal agriculture. Research conducted by the Center for Food Integrity found that consumers hold farmers responsible for the health and safety of food they produce, along with federal agencies and food companies. The thing that separates farmers from the other two, however, is that farmers are recognized as being one of the top three most trustworthy parties to carry out that responsibility. For many years, dairy farmers let their Dairy Checkoff dollars do the positive marketing for dairy. Today though - with the advent of social media, farmers have grown eager to tell their farm story to the public. The issue, though, is that many farmers don't know where to start. Knowing this fact, and having eager farmers to share stories are two key reasons why educating farmers in how to advocate for agriculture – or Advocate – is important.

A workshop designed to help producers tell their farm story was organized, utilizing the help of the NY Animal Ag Coalition (NYAAC). NYAAC is “a farmer founded and funded organization whose mission is to enhance the public's understanding of and appreciation of animal agriculture by fostering a dialogue with consumers, engagement with farmers and cooperation among members of the industry.” The morning portion of the event was led by directors Erin Hull and Eileen Jensen, who had participants focus on their “why”. Why do you do what you do? What is your story, what makes you proud to be a farmer? Their direction led the participants to first understand that your why is the first thing that is important – the “how” to advocate should happen after you understand the “why”. NYAAC then led the group through an exercise to uncover how you, as a farmer, are like your audience, and how you can make a personal connection to your audience. Combining all of these

things while using listening skills will allow the two parties to find common ground. Participants role-played different situations and worked through the process of creating their story.



The afternoon portion of the workshop featured a panel of producers who Advocate in different ways. Johanna Bossard of Barbland Farms, Julie Patterson of Patterson Farms and NYFarmGirls – sisters Evelyn, Claudia and Jojo Leubner all shared their methods of advocating and best practices for sharing their stories, and answered questions from the participants. Johanna utilizes Facebook extensively, and shares photos from the dairy frequently, along with offering tours of the dairy to groups. Julie also shared that they maintain a Facebook page, but prefers to give tours of the dairy and shared guidelines they follow when doing so. NYFarmGirls hold a huge Instagram presence and talked about mistakes they made early on when gaining momentum, and best practices for posting photos and stories. Some have a newsletter, which is mailed to neighbors quarterly, and shared that NYAAC offers assistance for the design of the newsletter, and will help with appropriate content. In all, twenty-two people participated in the workshop, hosted by Whittaker Farms in Whitney Point.

After the workshop, two farms contacted NYAAC for help in putting together a newsletter. Another asked for help in guiding tours to their dairy. Several others have started advocating more regularly via social media channels, and sharing more of their farm story. Another workshop, focused more on social media, is planned for the winter program season, as producers have expressed further interest in setting up a farm page on Facebook or Instagram. ~

Hemp Cultivation Continues to Grow in NYS & Nationwide

Janice Degni, CCE Technical Specialist, Cornell Hemp Team

In 2019 Hemp permits increased by 30 fold. Interest is holding steady judging by the number of inquiries are received at CCE. In 2017, there were 10 permitted growers, by 2018 the number had grown to 100 and in 2019 there were over 300 permits granted hemp production. The majority, more than 75% of the permits are for growing hemp for CBD. The markets for grain and fiber are developing more slowly.

 **511,442**
Acres of hemp licensed nationally

 **34**
States licensed hemp cultivation

 **16,877**
State growers licenses issued

We are still learning about ideal growth requirements and practices for this crop and are working to hone recommendations. Scouting has found many insects that like to feed on this crop from flea beetles to corn borer and diseases that like to infect it like grey and

white mold as well as other less familiar fungi. Weeds are a management concern for all producers because there are no registered herbicides for use on the crop in the US. Professor Chris Smart worked with DEC to identify plant protectants that could be used in Industrial Hemp Production with over 43 products including insecticides, fungicides and plant growth currently identified for legal use.

Oversite and regulation of hemp production is transitioning from state to federal oversight with USDA guidelines, currently in development according to the 2018 Farm Bill.

The Hemp Technical Team continues to orient new producers to the industry and works to support their success with on-going research, networking, information exchange and technical support.

Maintaining a Positive Environment for Farming – Educating Farmers and the Public

Mary Kate Wheeler, Farm Business Management Specialist, Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

Community relations are a growing concern for farmers, who face increasing public scrutiny. Public perception of agriculture shapes consumer preferences, new regulations, and evolving industry standards. These, in turn, may impact production practices and requirements for market entry or maintenance of current market channels.

Our team supports outreach events that bring consumers onto dairy farms to learn about the industry. We also train farmers on public relations and how to be “ag-vocates” for themselves and their industry. The summer season is prime time for dairy farm tours, and the team is invited to be a resource on many occasions.

This year, tours of E-Z Acres in Homer were given to Cortland Fifth Graders once again. This annual event leads 200 students through over ten stations on the dairy, including the parlor, feed storage area, manure pit, maternity area and calves. Children learn what makes the barns comfortable for cows, how many chambers a cow’s stomach has, and how farmers harvest feed for their cows.

Sundaes on the Farm in Tioga County was held at Stronghaven Farm in Barton this year. Mary Kate was the first face the public saw as they signed in for the tour. Betsy set up a station in the freestall barn, educating the public about how farmers feed their cows. Fay brought the Soil Health Trailer and demonstrated how farmers use practices to improve their land. Janice answered questions in Strong’s newly constructed calf barn. The breadth of

education provided by the team for this event reached over 400 people at this event.

The Tompkins County Open Farm Days featured the Fout’s Dairy Farm in Tompkins County. Janice along with PRODAIRY Specialist Karl Czymmek and Peter Wright provided a narrated tour to the farm’s manure storage explaining the role of a nutrient management plan and manure spreading technology. Betsy along with Dr. Tom Overton, Professor of Dairy Science at Cornell provided explanations of herd care and management on the barn tours.

Team members were on-site at the 3 dairies featured during ON-Farm Fest, Onondaga county’s farm open house event meant to connect consumers to their local producers and food system.

The team has a presence at several school events including Tully’s Ag Career Exploration Day and Ag Awareness Day, CCE Cortland’s Ag Stravaganza and which features stations addressing a broad range of ag enterprises, and the Marathon FFA School Agriculture Fair which is open to classes and the general public.

The effort the team applies to public perception of agriculture is important. We bring an unbiased source of information and a credible resource to both the consumer and producer. We make connections for both parties and strive to have ag’s voice heard.~

Soil Health Trailer Events - 2019

Date	Event	Location	No. Attended
4/26/19	Soil Health Training	Hoosick Falls, NY	13
4/27/19	Climate Wise Gardening	Ithaca, NY	32
4/30/19	Armed To Farmed	Honeoye Falls, NY	21
5/3/19	Soil Health Training	Jasper, NY	14
5/22/19	Beef Tour, NY Beef Council	Union Springs, NY	65
6/1/19	Water Fair	Cortland, NY	35
6/3/19	Groton High School	Groton, NY	10
6/17/19	Putting Carbon in it’s Place	Cornell University	65
6/18/19	Finger Lakes Graziers Pasture Walk	Penn Yan, NY	55
7/10/19	Harris Seed Trial	Rochester, NY	18
7/16/19	Musgrave Organic Field Day	Aurora, NY	60
7/18/19	Glynwood	Cold Spring, NY	15
7/21/19	Sundaes on the Farm	Tioga County	70
7/25/19	Grasstravaganza	Cobleskill, NY	110
7/31/19	Organic Vegetable Field Day	Ithaca, NY	65
8/1/19	Organic Orchard Field Day	Ithaca, NY	55
8/6/19	Empire Farm Days	Seneca Falls, NY	100
8/7/19	Empire Farm Days	Seneca Falls, NY	100
8/8/19	Empire Farm Days	Seneca Falls, NY	100
8/14/19	Building Resilience into Organic Forages	Truxton, NY	52
8/15/19	Agricultural Stewardship Association	Greenwich, NY	8
8/21/19	Stonewall Farm	Keene, NH	12
8/22/19	State Fair	Syracuse, NY	300
9/2/19	Event in Maine	Freport ME	21
9/4/19	Event in Maine	Farmington ME	18
9/5/19	Event in Maine	Sydney ME	25
9/8/19	Open Farm Days	Berne, NY	1,200
9/21/19	Onondaga "On Farm Fest"	Manlius NY	600