

Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

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

Program Highlights

October - December
2019

Research Highlighted at Annual Feed Dealers Seminar

Regional Dairy Specialist, Casey Havekes, had the opportunity to showcase her graduate research from the University of Guelph at two of the Cornell Feed Dealer Seminars this past December. The Feed Dealers Seminar is an annual program put on by Cornell University designed to bring nutritionists, farmers, and other dairy industry representatives together to get an update on some of the latest and greatest trends and research in dairy nutrition and feed. This year, Casey was asked to join Dr. Tom Overton and Dr. Kristan Reed at the two North Country locations (Miner Institute and Watertown) to highlight some of the key findings from her research focused on transition cow feeding management. Between the two seminars, approximately 30 people heard Casey speak about the importance of particle size, density, and palatability of dry cow diets. The transition period is a vulnerable time for the dairy cow and a challenging time for the producer – this is a period where management becomes crucial and can dictate whether a cow has a successful lactation. Casey’s message was well received with attendees ranking her presentation as “excellent” and many approaching her afterwards for further information. One farmer in the audience reported that he was interested in looking at adding molasses to his dry cow ration as a result of hearing the information presented. Another nutritionist approached Casey afterwards asking about the potential of partnering on research projects in the future. Overall, the Feed Dealers Seminar is a great example of the collaboration that exists between Cornell University faculty, Cornell Cooperative Extension county associations, and the North Country Regional Ag Team, and this was a great opportunity for the Regional Dairy Specialist to get introduced locally and create more connections with industry representatives.



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Photo credit: L. Ferlito

Statewide Cow Comfort Workshop Motivates Farmers to Make Change

With increasing consumer interest in cow comfort and welfare comes the increased importance of making sure dairy producers have the most up-to-date information on cow comfort guidelines and recommendations. Specialists on the North Country Regional Ag Team understand both the economic and practical impact that maximizing cow comfort has for individual farmers and the industry as a whole. Regional cow comfort programs were organized in collaboration with the South Central New York Team, Central New York Team, Northwest New York Team, and PRO-DAIRY, to provide dairy producers with relevant recommendations on how to maximize cow comfort in regards to various topics such as ventilation, heat abatement, and stall design. One presentation posed the question “Why should we care about cow comfort?”, which sparked some great discussion and set the stage for a productive and informative day. Another presentation delivered a powerful economic analysis of how improvements to cow comfort can positively impact a farm’s bottom line. Other speakers highlighted key considerations for barn design, ventilation, and heat abatement. The program finished with an on-farm portion at a local farm where attendees walked through a practical cow comfort assessment. The on-farm portion of the program was a great opportunity for producers to take what they learned in the classroom and apply it in a practical setting. Attendees had many great questions and concerns regarding the future of the industry and what they can do to maximize cow comfort on their individual farms. The program was well received and feedback indicated that producers plan to talk with other industry representatives to see how they can implement some changes specifically regarding stall design and tunnel ventilation on their farms.

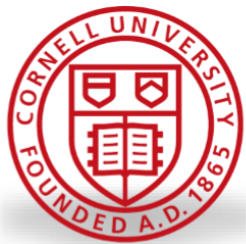


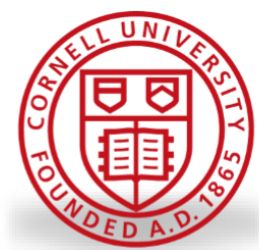
Photo credit: L. Ferlito

Labor Roadshow a Success in the North Country Region

In November, the Farm Business Management Specialist organized the Watertown site of the Labor Roadshow III that was put on with the Cornell Ag Workforce Development Group and NEDPA. There were approximately 75 people in attendance from 40 farming operations with an additional 6 operations represented on a remote site. The dairy farms in attendance ranged in size from 100 cows to over 3,000 cows with additional industries represented in apple production, vegetable production, and various ag service or supply industries. Given the changes to NYS Labor Laws that have now taken effect, this was a timely and incredibly important program to provide to farmers as well as industry professionals who work with farms directly. The need for this program was recognized by Cornell and Extension Specialists given the limited information published by the state that clarified the changes specifically regarding overtime and the day of rest laws.



The speakers, including attorneys that specialize in labor laws, NEDPA staff, Cornell University staff, NYS Department of Labor employees, and the NYS Public Employment Relations Board employees, were all there to discuss the various sub-sections of changes to farm labor per the new act. The program was a full day and allowed time for farmers to get their specific questions answered. While there were still some questions that were not answered, this was because the law is somewhat unclear as to how it will be implemented, so until there is some experience with these new laws, definitive answers cannot be provided. Given that the overtime hours level will be reviewed in 2020 by a committee that may ultimately lead to reducing the overtime limit further for farms, the group that put on this program is planning to offer further trainings and workshops in 2020. It will be crucial for farms to be compliant going forward to ensure their continuance and overall financial success. The success of these programs is in part attributed to the great collaboration between Regional Teams, Cornell University campus, NEDPA, and other agricultural groups to both organize and promote the program topics. The North Country Regional Ag Tem will continue to collaborate as much as possible with others to provide farmers the much needed clarification regarding changing labor laws and other topics as they arise.



The North Country Community Remains Connected to Farming

The North Country Regional Ag Team facilitated two North Country Public Radio featured stories during the 2019 growing season – one focused on the difficult spring conditions and one following up on the impact to fall harvest. A few interviews, field visits, and farmer interactions resulted in two stories broadcast during the morning hours and in written articles and photographs which remain available on the NCPR website. NCPR staff initially reached out to the Team in spring requesting an interview with two St. Lawrence University interns, Nicholle Gotham and James Lehner. Rather than do a simple interview, Kitty O’Neil drove the interns to Lisbon in early July to show them some damaged alfalfa and corn fields while the group talked about North Country agriculture, spring weather, pest challenges and the impact on farms. The interns were eager and asked excellent questions. After the field trip, Kitty connected the interns with Blake Gendebien, owner of Twin Mills Farm, a St. Lawrence County dairy, and he agreed to provide some input and an interview. The interns interviewed Blake and the station aired the story on August 1, 2019.



Some farmers attempted to make up for the lost spring by planting late or replanting over used soil. This leads to severe alternation of plants, where some much taller corn can overshadow seedlings and make growing difficult. Photo credit: Nicholle Gotham.

Nicholle followed up in Fall 2019 with a request for an interview about the outcomes of the 2019 growing season, given its shaky start. Kitty brought Nicholle to the one of the sites of the 2019 Corn Silage Variety Trials on the day plots were being harvested and data collected. Joe Lawrence, PRO-DAIRY Forage Specialist, was interviewed and provided Nicholle with an overview of the variety trials, the growing season, and North Country agriculture in general. Blake Gendebien again provided context and a farmer’s perspective for this second story, which aired and was published on the NCPR website in mid-October 2019.



Joe Lawrence, a dairy specialist from Cornell University, helps operate fields across the region to test how different varieties of corn grow under various conditions. Photo credit: Nicholle Gotham.

The North Country Regional Ag Team, like ag specialists across the state, seeks to connect our communities with their local agriculture and our NYS farmers.

Links to NCPR stories:

“North Country farmers struggle to survive rainy planting season.” August 2019. Nicholle Gotham and James Lehner. NCPR.org. ([link](#))

“North Country farmers face difficult fall harvest.” October 2019. Nicholle Gotham. NCPR.org. ([link](#))

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.”

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.

