



# Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

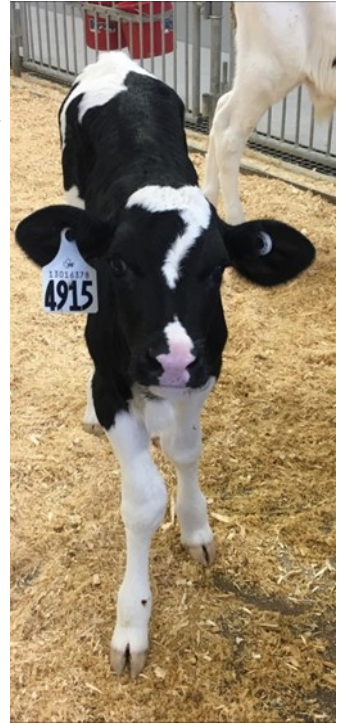
*Serving Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties*

## Program Highlights April - June 2020

### Helping Producers Navigate Critical Calf Health and Management Issues

Many producers have expressed that they experience challenges with pre-weaned calf care and management. Colostrum management, cleanliness of calving area, plane of nutrition, and ventilation, to name a few, are some of the areas that play a critical role in the calf's successful rearing. In some lucky circumstances where producers are faced with calf challenges it can be simple to identify the problem and relatively simple to implement a solution. However, in most cases, there are a variety of factors contributing to poor performance of pre-weaned calves and because they are such a finicky group, it can be difficult, frustrating, and time consuming to identify the problem and find a solution. This was the case for one Northern New York dairy producer who approached the Regional Dairy Specialists in September of 2019 looking to troubleshoot a serious calf health issue.

For the weeks following the initial conversation, the Dairy Specialists worked very closely with the farm owner to identify potential causes of the issue. The Dairy Specialists were on the farm once a week for several months in an attempt to identify any trends in the sick calves, and to identify any potential issues in the feeding regime. Due to the severity of the issue, the Dairy Specialists reached out to Dr. Rob Lynch on the PRO-DAIRY team for further guidance. Dr. Lynch has many years of experience as a veterinarian and is a trusted resource for the Dairy Specialists. In December 2019, Dr. Lynch along with Rodrigo Molano Torres, a PhD student studying calf nutrition, travelled from the Ithaca Campus to Northern New York to help troubleshoot the issue. The team spent several hours at the farm measuring passive transfer levels, reviewing protocols, and discussing strategies to improve calf health. Following the meeting in December, the farm carried out many of the changes that were discussed and recommended by Dr. Lynch, Rodrigo, and the Dairy Specialists. Despite making these changes, unfortunately the severity of the issue persisted. The Specialists and Dr. Lynch returned to the farm in early February 2020, and also met virtually with the farm via Zoom in April 2020. After several months of discussions, testing, and consultations, the calf health issue has successfully been resolved. The team of Dairy Specialists, Dr. Lynch, and Rodrigo identified colostrum management resulting in poor passive transfer and the calf housing facility as major contributing sources to the calf health issue. The Dairy Specialists are still working closely with the farm and check in periodically to ensure calves are still doing well. In fact, this herd has signed up to participate in a CCE NCRAT intensive calf management discussion group (funded by Cornell DAP) where they can continue to improve their calf rearing program.



In response to these efforts the farmer has said the following: "With the help of Casey, Lindsay, and Dr. Lynch we were able to pinpoint our major areas for improvement and work with them to fix our problems. They were very diligent and stuck with us through our struggles. With their help, our calf health problems have been resolved, yet they still continue to check in and help us as needed!" This situation is a great representation of the collaboration that exists between the NCRAT Dairy Specialists and PRO-DAIRY. Through combining ideas and experiences, this Extension Team was able to provide the farm with concrete, scientific-based recommendations that positively impacted this farm's calf rearing success.

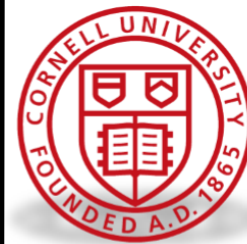
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## Seamless Support for NNY Farms and Agribusinesses During “NYS on PAUSE”



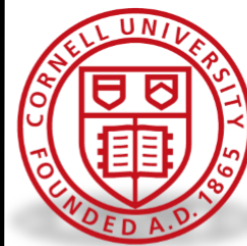
The COVID-19 pandemic took most of us by surprise, and on March 16, 2020, Governor Cuomo’s “New York State on PAUSE” executive order mandated immediate social distancing measures to curb its spread. All NYS businesses, agencies, schools, and communities were abruptly forced to adapt, and to develop new strategies for meeting work obligations and basic everyday life requirements. Cornell’s President, Martha Pollack, had directed all Cornell staff to begin working remotely just three days prior, on March 13. North Country county governments remained operational, but directed county departments to reduce or eliminate in-office staffing and to work remotely within days of the Governor’s order. Schools closed and it took a few weeks to develop new strategies to finish out the year. Most NYS businesses and agencies were suddenly forced to figure out new ways to communicate, collaborate, and meet obligations.

Our CCE North Country Regional Ag Team is well-equipped for remote work and adapted to this ‘new normal’ immediately. From its inception, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the 6 County CCE Associations designed the NCRAT team to work across a large area and equipped its staff with everything needed to deliver programs, projects, and communications using mobile, remote, and distance methods. The team was issued cars, laptops, and equipment, and has the entire Cornell infrastructure of software, support, and systems available at the other end of a phone or internet connection. Adapting to working without an office during “NYS on PAUSE” was seamless.

The team met this new challenge by first, relying on electronic communications in new ways. The team has always employed various long-distance communication methods like email, Zoom, and our NCRAT website, but needed to extend the reach immediately to temporarily replace in-person communication with local communities. Back-burner YouTube and blog projects were immediately re-prioritized to the top of the list. The Specialists populated the YouTube channel with video content that had accumulated from recent educational programs, as well as with new content generated by interviewing industry representatives on timely topics. By June 30, the CCE North Country Regional Ag Team channel listed 29 consistently edited and titled original videos and podcasts that had been viewed almost 1000 times. For months, there had been plans to implement a blog to disseminate urgent and brief bulletins to all NNY constituencies. By April 1, the blog was fully implemented, linked to the 6-county email list, and hosted 15 posts on a range of topics. By June 30, 61 posts had been published and the subscriber list stood at close to 1200 readers. Email announcements are sent weekly to all subscribers, summarizing the week’s blog activity. Blog posts and YouTube videos are further shared via the NCRAT Facebook page and Twitter feed. Also, with less travel to CCE offices and farms, the team planned more frequent internal CCE communications within the region. Weekly team Zoom meetings and email communications with County Association staff were implemented. The team distributes once or twice weekly email updates to all counties to keep them informed of the state of agriculture in the region and to provide updates and bulletins for each county office to communicate to each of their constituencies via email, Facebook, and other social media. These networks and methods were used to share NYS COVID-19 updates and mandates in addition to the normally relevant materials. With these new electronic communication methods in place, the team turned to improving its reach among the portions of its ag constituency that do not use electronic communications, beginning with the many Amish and Mennonite communities. In early June, a multi-pronged strategy was implemented to connect with and identify leaders and central communicators in each community to share NYS Business Safety templates and related information as well as to connect them with mask, sanitizer, and food distributions led by their county CCE offices.

The team continued to collaborate with other Extension Specialists across the state and with other industry professionals to increase the impact across the North Country. Though COVID-19 precautions hastened each of these efforts, they have brought a new robustness to the team’s regional impact and the team will continue to deliver information using this wider range of formats.

## NY Forward Safety Plan Resources - A Collaboration with Ag Workforces Development and Regional Teams



After re-opening from the COVID 19 Pause orders began, it was made clear that farms (even those that were deemed essential and had not closed) would have to complete the Reopening Safety Plan laid out by NYS. While it was recognized this was for everyone's safety, this requirement came at a difficult time for farmers right in the thick of spring planting and first day crop harvest. This is when Cornell Ag Workforce Development and various members from regional teams that focus on employees or food/public safety came together to quickly and judiciously create resources that would be helpful to farmers in completing their plans. The NCRAT Farm Business Management Specialist was asked to be a part of this team. The group focused on first creating examples and considerations for each industry area, with Dairy, Greenhouses, Fruit Tree/Vegetable, Other Crops/Livestock, and Vineyards all being identified as industries to be addressed. However, upon working through the plans and the guidance, it was clear that there was so much overlap that one consolidated commercial agriculture document should be used as the situations addressed were concerning employees that all had at least somewhat similar experiences on farms. This is when the larger group consolidated down to a team of 5-6 individuals who focused on combining all of the industry guidance documents into two primary resources: Examples and Considerations for Commercial Agricultural Businesses and for Retail Agricultural Businesses that should be added onto a farm's primary plan should they interact with the public directly.

This group transferred the Safety Plan Templates into easy to use fillable PDF and Word documents, while also making the Examples and Considerations Resource documents to follow the format of the template. This made it easy for farmers to get access to example protocols, signage, and various linked resources as they completed the plan section by section. The group recognized though, that while having these resources available was the first step, the next step was education and dissemination of this information. As a participant on this important workgroup, the NCRAT Farm Business Management Specialist volunteered to present and help organize a series of webinars that addressed the new rules, as well as how to use the resources and industry specific considerations. The group first decided to host an in-service webinar for those in the Cornell system so that educators could help further spread the work on the new rules and resources. This webinar had 72 attendees who can now further engage with farmers, and help promote the industry specific webinar series. Each industry used the resources created and had the following attendances during their respective live webinars: Dairy/Livestock/Crop = 150 participants; Fruit/Vegetable = 253 participants; Retail = 99; Greenhouse/Landscaping/Ornamental = 49; and Equine = 60. This means that over 600 farm businesses were directly engaged with the live webinars and the recordings of these webinars already have over 100 views.

Finally, the Farm Business Management Specialist also focused on creating a promotional video that explains the basic requirements and resources, as well as CCE's commitment to helping farms through these difficult times. This video was used on various social media platforms and has been viewed over 100 times. The group recognized that farmers sometimes struggle with utilizing this type of technology, so the Specialist put together an instructional video for how to use Box (sharing drive), how to download and save PDF and Word documents, and how to use the hyperlinks included in the CCE resources. That video has been viewed over 190 times. The NCRAT Specialist is now following up by creating a fully printable binder for the Plain Community that will be distributed to the churches in the six North Country counties so hard copies can be made as needed of safety plans, signage, or other resources.

This project highlights the strong relationship the NCRAT Farm Business Management Specialist has with other Cornell Specialists and groups across the state, and how this work has a large impact on helping farmers meet new guidelines and regulations while keeping their businesses operational in both the North Country and across New York State.

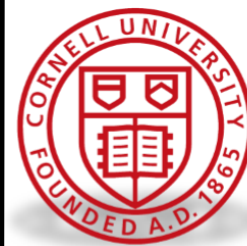
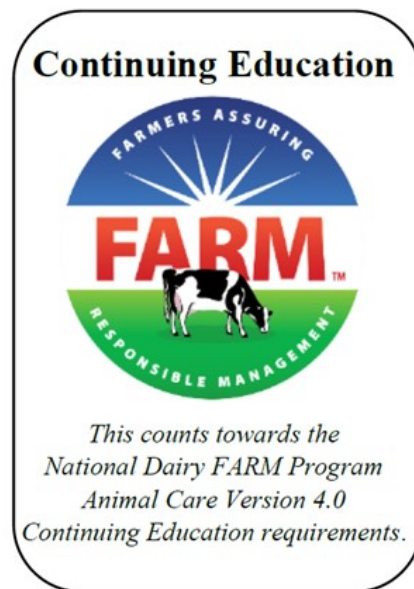
[Resources Developed](#)

[Instructional Video](#)

[Promotional Video](#)

## Helping Dairies Meet the FARM Program 4.0 Continuing Education Requirements

The National Milk Producers Federation's Dairy FARM Program helps address increased consumer awareness of where food comes from as well as demands from purchasers and processors for animal welfare certifications or audits. The National Dairy FARM Program was created 11 years ago, and since Version 3.0 started in January 2017, the program has been adopted by almost all milk cooperatives across the country, and currently more than 98% of the nation's milk supply participates in the program. Version 4.0 of the program commenced on January 1, 2020, and, among other changes, now requires dairy farm owners and workers to show proof of training and annual continuing education in certain areas related to animal handling. The five target areas include: animal stockmanship, pre-weaned calf care, non-ambulatory animals, euthanasia, and fitness for transport. While some resources already exist to help farmers meet these new requirements, it was clear through group and one-on-one meetings with farmers, as well as discussions with other industry members, that some farmers were concerned about understanding and meeting these new requirements.



Since January, the CCE North Country Regional Dairy Specialists have worked to help develop various resources and provide them to farmers. The Specialists received approval from the National Milk Producers Federation FARM Program to create a logo (shown below) that indicates to farmers which resources and documents count as continuing education. A newsletter article series was written covering the five key areas, and these articles were published in the NCRAT newsletter, on the NCRAT Facebook page, and NCRAT blog. These articles were also shared with a local milk cooperative that includes many North Country farmers, and with other Dairy Specialists across New York state to get the information in front of a larger audience. Additionally, three YouTube videos and podcasts were created by the Dairy Specialists interviewing industry representatives on some of the key areas. Lastly, the FARM Program has also published these articles on the National FARM Program webpage under the resources section (<https://nationaldairyfarm.com/animal-care-training-resources/>). This project highlights how the work of the NCRAT Dairy Specialists is helping farmers in the North Country, as well as across the state and country, and reinforces the importance of relationships with other industry organizations to help bring timely and valuable information to North Country farmers.

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### 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.