Assisting Farms Through the Pandemic

The COVID-19 virus has certainly changed our lives. New information and resources from NYS agencies and Cornell were being compiled and updated daily, leaving many people feeling bombarded with information overload. The NWNY Team began meeting weekly via Zoom to discuss critical issues and commodity updates.

Our goal quickly became to filter and distribute the most recent developments in timely updates once a week in email and a mailer to our audience. The first update sent out on March 27 contained the team’s status, safety precautions and emergency financial resources. Subsequent updates pertained to the team’s topic areas of dairy, livestock and field crops with resources for operations of all sizes. Other resources that were included related to impacts such as marketing, employee safety training, and farm safety plan development. The email updates were sent to approximately 1,300 people and paper mailings were sent to 85 people.

Reaching Spanish-Speaking Farmworkers during the COVID-19 Crisis

Through the specialists’ interactions with farmers and farmworkers, it soon became clear that Spanish-speaking farmworkers might not be getting up-to-date, local information about the COVID-19 pandemic. Since local news sources are primarily in English, and state and local regulations were changing rapidly, there were many questions and rumors in the farmworker community.

In response, the NWNY Team worked with Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development to create English and Spanish fact-sheets titled “Reliable Resources for Spanish- & English-Speaking Farmworkers about COVID-19.” These explain what COVID-19 is, how to protect yourself, what to do if you or someone at your farm gets sick, and resources for those suffering from stress or isolation. These were updated as state and local recommendations changed. Together, the factsheets have been viewed 1,177 times and downloaded 197 times.

In addition, the Team worked with NYCAMH (New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health) and Cayuga Marketing to create a 5-minute video in Spanish explaining the basics of the coronavirus, which has been viewed 851 times and is available to view on YouTube. All resources were developed using CDC and NYS DOH guidelines.
Crop Alerts: Timely Pest Observations from the Field

There is no better way to scout for insects, weeds and diseases than “boots on the ground.” Every growing season is different. Environmental conditions can affect which pests will be problematic and lead to economic populations and possible yield losses.

The NWNY Team publishes a weekly online Crop Alert starting on May 1st. The alert informs growers and industry reps what pests we are currently seeing in corn, alfalfa, soybean and small grain fields. We include pictures of the pest and plant injury and possible management solutions. Many of the tips we get are from growers, consultants and industry reps. Our hope is to get the ag community out in the fields correctly identifying pests and their injury, at the right time, with the appropriate control measure before economic losses occur.

A great example of Crop Alert’s value is our utilization of pheromone traps to monitor for Black Cutworm and Common Armyworm. Both of these pests migrate in every spring on storm fronts from the south and can cause severe yield losses in corn and wheat. The traps allow us to monitor their first arrival into NY and how many come in each week. Based on degree-day data we can determine when eggs will hatch and when larvae will be large enough to cause economic plant injury. We had some very large flights of both of these moths this spring. We were able to alert everyone when to start scouting their fields and determine if economic populations were present to warrant a control measures.

New Podcast Reaches Farmers Across the Region

The NWNY Team collaborated with Dairy Specialists across the state to produce a new podcast series entitled, “Dialing Into Your Best Dairy”. Episodes in the series were released weekly beginning on June 15th. The aim was to discuss management practices and tips to reach a herd’s full genetic potential. In 8 episodes, CCE Dairy and PRO-DAIRY Specialists discussed the different life stages of the dairy cow. Topics discussed included:

- raising calves through the milk phase and weaning
- managing weaned heifers up to freshening
- making decisions about which replacements to keep including inventory management
- disease prevention and culling decisions
- feeding and nutrition management during lactation
- facilities, time management, and ventilation considerations throughout lactation
- management factors surrounding reproduction, gestation and the dry period

Episode guests featured Cornell faculty and staff, allied industry professionals, and farmers sharing technical information and experience regarding each topic. The target audience of this podcast is farmers, farm employees, allied industry, and others who are interested in learning ways to improve dairy herd production, health, efficiency and profitability. As of June 24, two episodes had been released with a total of 350 listeners.