



Cornell Cooperative Extension

South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

SECOND QUARTERLY REPORT

APRIL – JUNE 2020



COVID-19 Impacts and Dairy Team Response

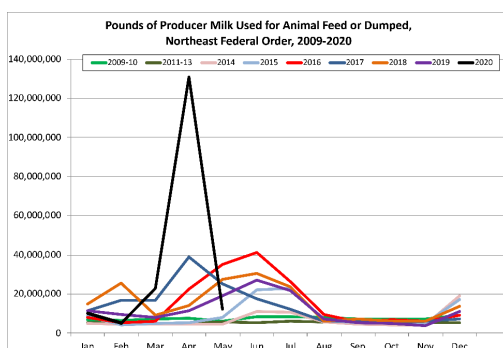
Mary Kate Wheeler, Farm Business Management Specialist

One of the strengths of our South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Team is our ability to respond quickly to emerging issues, and develop educational programming to address evolving industry needs. The coronavirus pandemic brought unprecedented change and uncertainty to dairy producers this spring, and our team's actions over the past few months illustrate our adaptability and responsiveness to the needs of our farmers.

With the arrival of COVID-19, our farmer audience immediately required sound information about the disease and strategies to reduce the risk of an outbreak in order to implement safety measures on their farms. We responded by providing information from trusted sources, including Cornell Ag Workforce Development and the CDC, and interpreting that information specifically for the dairy context. On March 28, we published a blog article titled [Biosecurity for People: 7 Steps to Protect Farm Workers from COVID-19](#). Nearly 700 people have viewed this post, and the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) featured it on their website. To reach Hispanic farm workers with this information, Janice used print and email communication tools to share Spanish language resources with farms that employ Spanish speakers.

As our economy began to experience the impacts of COVID, the positive 2020 outlook for the dairy industry quickly reversed itself. The decimation of restaurant sales and dairy exports hit the dairy industry hard, with the USDA All Milk price falling 20% in one month, from \$18.00 per CWT in March to \$14.40 per CWT in April. In April, we began hearing unprecedented reports of milk dumping from farms in our region and CCE educators across the state. In response to the oversupply for milk, Dairy

Farmers of America, our region's largest milk co-op, announced a new base excess program. Starting in May, DFA will only pay full price for 85% of the volume of milk that farmers produced in March.



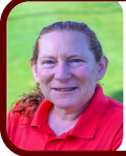
During this time, Mary Kate attended weekly Zoom meetings with a statewide network of farm business management specialists gathering to identify farmer needs and share resources. Donette set up a MailChimp account for the team to streamline our email communications, and we began sharing regular updates on COVID safety, dairy markets, and government policy responses. The whole team coordinated with PRO-DAIRY specialists to share timely resources on everything from managing cash flows during low price cycles to feeding milk to cows. We fielded calls from some farms interested in selling cattle, and others looking to purchase whole herds to expand their DFA base. We published another COVID blog post on April 7, [From our Team to Yours: COVID-19 Resources for Dairy Farmers](#), which provides a concise annotated list of publications and resources relevant to the dairy industry, including some in Spanish.

The government has enacted a number of different economic relief programs in response to COVID-19, several of which apply to farms. We have used a multifaceted communication approach, including MailChimp, Facebook, the website, the blog, and good old fashioned phone calls, to alert producers to the new state and federal aid programs. We have shared resources developed by other CCE colleagues on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). Mary Kate has provided individual assistance to more than a dozen farms on topics related to PPP, EIDL, employee management, price risk management, value added processing, and other concerns directly related to COVID-19.

As we near the end of June, milk futures have rebounded considerably, suggesting a strong recovery may be in the cards. However, we still face considerable uncertainty about the path of the virus and the economy going forward. Given the ongoing risks, our team will continue to adapt our communication and programming techniques, explore new technologies, and stay connected with farmers as best we can. No one says it better than Andrew Novakovic, Cornell Professor Emeritus, who thinks *"we've seen the worst of the price drops, which is great, but my guess is that markets will be unsettled for the foreseeable future and that the pandemic is not done playing games with us."*



Cornell Cooperative Extension links the research and extension efforts at Cornell University, and Cornell AgriTech, the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, providing the knowledge to maximize New York State's agricultural and natural resources. The South Central New York Dairy and Field Crops Program is a Cornell Cooperative Extension partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in 6 Counties.



Forage Quality Underpins Profitability

Janice Degni, CCE Field Crop Specialist

***"I always look forward to your first cutting monitoring. We did our first cutting on May 20. Relative forage quality came back at 230. In a few days will be doing our second (cutting). Thanks."* – Doug Riehlman, Crop Farmer**

"FIRST CUTTING usually defines the success of the forage-making year."
- Mike Rankin, former University of Wisconsin soils and crops Extension educator

In anticipation of the first hay harvest of the year there is a fairly narrow window for harvesting high quality feed. Grass crop quality declines more rapidly than alfalfa making timing of harvest critical to support lower feed costs at any level of dairy production.

Spring-like conditions began in early March this year, which was then followed by weekly snowfalls throughout April. The colder temperatures supported very slow growth of alfalfa from late April through mid-May. During the last week of May there was a transition in the crop that followed some rainfall and more seasonable temperatures. The crop actually took shape increasing 7-10" in a single week after several weeks of 3-6" of growth. Growth in any field will vary based on age and health of the stand, fertility, orientation to the sun and elevation. We check fields with different orientations and elevation to ensure that our measurements are representative for the region.

No other cutting experiences the possible range in environmental

conditions that first cutting does; cool & dry, cool and wet, hot and wet, hot and dry, which has a profound impact on forage growth & quality from year to year.

Fiber digestibility can take a wild ride during the course of spring forage growth. When cut on time, 1st cut NDFd can be, and often is, higher than any other cutting of the year in response to cooler temperatures, which is the reason we put so much effort toward monitoring the development of the crop is that



1. Small improvements in fiber digestibility can make for LARGE differences in milk production and
 2. Forage Quality declines at a faster rate for first than other cuttings
- The downhill change in forage quality is accelerated by warming temperatures and is even more dramatic if grass is in the stand. The negative consequence can be large quantities of very poor, low digestible forage once maturity advances beyond grass heading or alfalfa flowering.

Across the six counties we monitored 82 fields on 41 farms impacting several thousand acres of hay crop directly and indirectly.



Small Dairy Program Updates

Fay Benson, Small Dairy Support

This quarter, the COVID-19 stay-at-home initiative was at full impact. Work done with farmers looked different, and included numerous Zoom meetings. Below are the areas where I was able to make an impact for area farmers.

As a lifelong resident and dairy farmer in Tompkins County, I stayed in touch with local farmers through phone calls and chance meetings. During this period of stay-at-home, farmers appreciated the personal check-up calls. I was able to relay updates about rules and regulations, which were changing regularly. ProDairy resources were very useful to keep up-to-date on these changes. Some of the questions from farmers included: How, where, and when to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program, how are other farms dealing with the rules, can we ship cattle interstate, how is the organic dairy market being impacted. In addition, I worked with Tompkins CCE to help deliver hand sanitizer and masks to farmers, which were provided by the NYSDAM. I called the ten farmers on my list, and reached out to others not on the list, to see if they required these products. I, then, delivered / dropped off to the farms that did ask for them. Communicating directly with farmers was a small part of my time during this quarter, but I feel it was very important as an

extension educator, since maintaining the community of farmers ensures resiliency during these uncertain times.

Other work completed which was not impacted by the stay-at-home order included:

SARE Pasture Compaction Grant – I reached out to NE SARE to ask about changing the focus and or having an extension to the grant since my plan of work included having nine on-farm events with the NY Soil Health Trailer. What we agreed to was, they would allow an extension, but since the grant goes until August 2021, I should wait to request the extension. I increased the time and scope of the research portion, which is collecting compaction data from three farms instead of two, and the creation of a training video on the topic of soil compaction in pastures. I am working with Bob Shindlebeck and Joseph Amsili, both with Cornell's Soil Health Initiative on the creation of the video.

Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program – I signed up one new Master in eastern New York, and one new apprentice paired to a Master in western New York. One farm was an eight-hour round trip drive to the east, and the other was eight hours to the west. Travel is one of

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Usage of Virtual Means Reaches Producers in this “New Normal”

Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

Had you asked any Extension Educator about moving program and outreach to a purely virtual realm six months ago, most would have probably responded with an alarmed look: wide-eyed and shocked at the thought of not being able to have face-to-face contact with producers. Mid-March, however, this became our reality and thinking outside the box to reach farms because a constant puzzle to figure out. The team has utilized a number of different ways this quarter to keep in contact and provide education, support and resources to our producers – some familiar, some modified and expanded, and some totally new approaches to reach out and also be a source of information during these unprecedented times.

When in-person farm visits were not an option, team members utilized Zoom calls a number of different times to virtually visit individual farms on several subjects. In these meetings, Betsy and Mary Kate frequently teamed up with each other to provide consultations on record keeping, grazing management and the Dairy Acceleration Program among other topics. Troy Bishopp of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition provided additional support on grazing topics and helped develop grazing strategies for a few herds. Zoom enabled the educators to show different maps, work through grazing plans and be a face behind the voice for both producer and educator. Even though both sides felt the frustrations of not being able to visit in real life, seeing faces on the calls provided more of a personal feel to the experience.

Part of this quarter, dairy educators would have been putting on in-person workshops and time for peer-based learning – work that had been created but had to be set aside because of social distancing measures. In response to this, Betsy and Melanie along with the other CCE regional dairy educators and Kathy Barrett & Rob Lynch of PRO-DAIRY, developed a podcast series based on a talk that Betsy was supposed to give at a local feed mill during the first week of the shutdown. The podcast contains eight episodes each about twenty minutes long, and covers the life cycle of a dairy cow and management factors to allow cows to achieve their genetic potential. This series - “Dialing into your Best Dairy” - went live on June 15th, and features interviews from Cornell professor Dr Mike VanAmburgh, Paul Fouts - a dairy producer from Central NY, and Pam & Scott Pralle - the owners of a world-record setting cow, on

factors that are important for raising dairy animals. This series was truly a team effort, where each person added content and support, and expanded our abilities as well as being challenging and rewarding for each of us. Each week since the initial episode release on June 15th, a new episode is shared via PRO-DAIRY e-alerts, and episodes have been listened to over 822 times on Soundcloud. Hoards Dairyman has featured two of the episodes in articles shared on their Hoards Intel emails, which reach farms across the country and world. It can be found on Soundcloud on the new CCE Dairy Educators page, as well as the PRO-DAIRY website. The dairy educators are starting work on the next podcasts, which include Troubleshooting Herd Health Issues, and Role of the Feeder on Dairies, which will also be posted on Soundcloud and the PRO-DAIRY webpage.

Lastly, with all this virtual content being created in the form of webinars, presentations, recorded Zoom meetings, and podcasts, Betsy took the time to create a You-Tube channel for the SCNY Team. Other regional teams have started these channels, and have shared original content as well as playlists of content created by other channels. Subscribing to each team’s channel and creating playlists of this content on our channel is another means to provide a database of resources for our farmers, so that work we create originally and alongside others is not lost. New content is added regularly, and is focused across topics such as herd management, HR resources, COVID-19 resources and calf management to name a few. Donette has cross-posted some of these videos via Twitter, also a new social media platform for the team, and another means to reach more producers.

While having to be separate from our producers, this quarter became a time for us as educators to learn new platforms, learn new skills in audio and video editing, and become more comfortable in providing education in the virtual world. We’re working to maintain this content and share it when and where it’s appropriate. Even though farm visit restrictions have somewhat loosened, having the time this quarter to learn new platforms and means of sharing in place makes it easier to share information widely now that we can be back in the field.



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the hardest parts of administering this program. In April, I submitted a NIFA Beginning Farmer Grant to support increasing the number of educators working with this program from one to four, to ease the demand for travel. I hope to hear the result of that proposal by August.

I worked with National DGA on submitting a National Conservation Innovation Grant which will provide a pasture dry matter measuring tool, developed by the University of Missouri that is

mounted to a 4-wheeler to track pasture forage inventory on a farm. The Carey Farm in Groton will be one of the New York locations, if the grant is successful. Dan and his son Eric have been Master and apprentice, respectfully, with the DGA program for the past year.

Articles written during this quarter include:

“Ecological Control of Pasture Flies”

“Cows Celebrate June Dairy Month Too”

“Time to Pump Your Brakes on Grazing”.





CNY Dairy Women's Group Virtual Meetings

Melanie Palmer, Area Dairy Support

The COVID-19 pandemic – how quickly it changed our ‘normal’ daily lives and everything that we did. It forced all of us to make adjustments and be creative in order to accomplish our activities and educational gatherings. A few years ago, the South Central Dairy and Field Crops Team, in conjunction with CCE Madison County, established the CNY Dairy Women's Peer Group. This peer group focuses on building camaraderie with other dairy women, to share ideas, experiences and encourage one another. Covid-19, what a great time of needed sharing and encouragement for dairy women.

Janice, Betsy, Mary Kate, Donette, Tess Southern (Madison County CCE) and I met via Zoom to plan the first Dairy Women's Virtual Social. We all agreed that our focus topic should be stress relief during this pandemic time. That led us to contacting Kate Downes, Extension Support Specialist with NY FarmNet, to invite her to be our guest speaker covering this topic. The date was set for April 24, 2020. We had 22 attendees on the virtual Zoom meeting. After introductions, Kate opened the meeting with a brief presentation geared towards coping with the additional stresses dairy women are facing during this current situation. Discussion followed with most of the women sharing thoughts, ideas, struggles and laughable moments with all.

It was great to receive this comment from one dairy woman that

attended the social:

"I was hesitant at first to participate because I thought I didn't have an hour and a half to "waste" but I am so thankful that I did. It was great seeing other women and talking about what's going on and how we're coping and different strategies. The virtual social was so good for the soul and by the end, I wanted more time to visit".

Feeling that the virtual social was worthwhile, we planned for a second meeting on May 15th. We had fewer in attendance for this session and understandably, as cropping season was in full swing. We opened the meeting with an icebreaker question followed by some 'covid related thought questions' for discussion. Once again, it was a great time of sharing, support and encouragement for all that joined the social.

So, as the team searched for creative methods to stay connected with the dairy producers in our counties during the COVID 'lockdown', using these virtual socials for the dairy women's group was a success. We were able to give the dairy women in the SCNYDFC area an opportunity to socialize with other dairy women that experience, understand and live their lives. A time to share the good, the bad and the ugly. And most important, a time to relax and laugh!



SCNYDFC Team Welcomes Summer Intern

The South Central Dairy and Field Crops team is pleased to welcome summer intern, Carolyn Wright, a Cornell student studying Agricultural Sciences with a focus on education.

Carolyn is working closely with the team's Farm Business Management Specialist, Mary Kate Wheeler, on a project examining the needs around managing the financial, legal, and human risks associated with the succession planning process specifically related to dairy farms. Her main focus is on conducting a needs assessment that encompasses the South Central team's six-county region. The needs assessment involves compiling data from existing sources, interviews with experts and past program participants, focus groups, and surveys that can be examined to provide an accurate picture of producers' needs surrounding specific components of succession planning, barriers they face along the way, and ways extension can more effectively meet those needs. The results of the needs



assessment will be used to inform future grant applications and program development decisions.

Carolyn is from a small farm in Franklinville, NY where her family milks 50 cows and operates an 8,000-tap maple operation. Wright's farm has been in the family for several generations and has seen many changes. Carolyn has enjoyed growing up and working with her family on the farm. She values how the experiences she has had developed her work ethic, taught her responsibility, but most of all, fueled her passion for agriculture and sharing it with others.

Prior to attending Cornell, Carolyn earned an Associates Degree in Agricultural Business from Alfred State College. She plans on pursuing a Masters degree in teaching after graduating from Cornell in the spring of 2021, with future career goals of being part of the family farm and pursuing a job in agricultural education whether that be high school, extension, or something similar.

