Focusing on Supply and Pricing for 2022 Crop Inputs

As the 2021 growing and harvesting season came to a close, the CCE NCRAT Regional Crops Specialists were already beginning to look ahead to the 2022 season as forecasts for high fertilizer prices began to roll in. With the rising fertilizer prices in the news each week, reports of possible seed shortages ahead of the 2022 season began to also creep into those conversations. The CCE Regional Crops Specialists went to work collecting information, writing articles, designing recommendations, and sharing resources to guide 2022 crop planning decisions in light of these industry-wide developments.

- CCE NCRAT began by setting context by sharing information reported elsewhere about historical and current fertilizer prices for materials commonly used in NNY. Price data was gleaned from reliable North American sources such as DTN/Progressive Farmer and published in the October 2021 CCE NCRAT Ag Advisor newsletter in an article titled “Fertilizer Prices Trend Upward in Late 2021... and Into 2022?” The article also briefly introduced ideas for cost-cutting by using other resources efficiently.

- The team expanded on the idea of effective and efficient use of on-farm nutrients to minimize fertilizer expenses in a December newsletter article titled “Given the Trend in Fertilizer Prices, What’s Manure Worth?” The article focused on some of the unique opportunities that NYS and Northeast farms have that would not appear in some of the Midwestern ag-dominated media. Calculations of fertilizer-equivalent prices for different manures were listed along with best management practices to capturing the maximum value from manure.

- A brief note by Ev Thomas (Oak Point Agronomics) was published in the Miner Farm Report in their December 3rd 2021 edition, encouraging farms to “get your forage seed ordered immediately” in response to reports of seed shortages, most notably forage seeds. This article was shared via the CCE NCRAT blog the following week.

- Numerous requests for information, resources, and assistance with fertilizer and manure calculations and purchasing decisions have been fielded by CCE NCRAT Crops Specialists this fall and early winter. Calculations, spreadsheets, and recommendations are routinely provided in response.

- More emphasis on fertilizer pricing and efficient nutrient management is planned in the coming weeks and months between now and spring.
  - CCE NCRAT Crops Specialists are collaborating with Cornell faculty and PRO-DAIRY Specialists to provide written articles for the March 2022 Progressive Dairy quarterly “The Manager” insert. Articles on maximizing fertilizer use efficiency and correctly managing and valuing manure during peak fertilizer prices are in progress.
  - The 2021-2022 Winter program season will feature the topics of cost-cutting nutrient management strategies and seed shortages as appropriate.
  - Additional newsletter articles will appear on these topics before Spring 2022 gets underway to help guide these weighty nutrient management and fertilizer purchasing decisions on North Country farms.
CCE Dairy Specialists Deliver “Healthy, Hardy, Heifers” Series

Not only can raising heifers be one of the most challenging areas on a dairy farm, but it is also one of the largest costs for producers. This makes it increasingly important to ensure calves are transitioning well post-weaning and are achieving appropriate growth to meet age at first calving goals. Naturally, a majority of focus, research, and efforts are dedicated towards pre-weaned calf care as this age group is typically more vulnerable to stressors. However, given how much post-weaned management and nutrition can influence productivity there is an opportunity for more information and strategies dedicated to this age group.

CCE Dairy Specialists on the North Country Regional Ag Team as well as the South Central Dairy and Field Crops Team recognized this opportunity and designed an educational program specifically geared towards post-weaned heifer nutrition, comfort, behavior, and management. The program titled “Healthy, Hardy, Heifers” was a free, 8-part virtual series hosted over lunch hour every Friday for 8 consecutive weeks. The series featured the CCE Dairy Specialists as speakers, but also brought in excellent outside speakers including Dr. Murilo Carvalho (Holstein Canada), Dr. Dörte Dopfer (University of Wisconsin), Dr. Julio Giordano and Dr. Mike Van Amburgh (Cornell University), Dr. Tom Tylutki (AMTS), and Dr. Katy Proudfoot (University of PEI). Each presentation lasted for 20-30 minutes, followed by a live 10-minute question and answer period. The series was offered at no cost thanks to the generous support from industry sponsors.

A total of 96 people signed up for the series, including producers and industry members from NY, as well as around the world. Each session was recorded and posted to the CCE NCRAT YouTube page. The videos on YouTube have been well received with up to 55 to 75 views on some videos to date. Furthermore, the post-program survey results confirmed the success of the program. Participants were asked what their knowledge was prior to participating in the session and what it was after attending individual sessions. On average, participants rated their prior knowledge at 3 (on a scale of 1-5, 1 = no knowledge and 5 = an expert), and rated their knowledge after at 4. On average participants rated the overall clarity and quality of the program at 4.5 (very good). When asked if participants plan to make changes following the information they learned during each session, one participant said “do an air exchange evaluation”, another participant said “I plan to review the nutrition plan for my pre-calving heifers”, and lastly another participant said “yes, there are several excellent recommendations and that is what makes it great having the series on YouTube, to watch them over and review the concepts”. During a recent in-person farm visit, one Northern NY producer said “I’ve been joining the “Healthy, Hardy, Heifer” webinars and I’ve really been enjoying them. There is so much information, thank you for putting this program together”. Another dairy producer from South Central NY was thankful that the recordings were posted to YouTube so that they can watch later. Other positive feedback from the survey includes: “I love these short talks to get you back on track for those aspects that you forget. Thanks!” and “Thank you for an amazing series, cannot wait for the next one!”.

Overall, this series provided producers and industry members with in-depth knowledge, research, and information for a group of animals that are easily forgotten on dairies. This is an excellent example of how CCE Dairy Specialists across different regional teams collaborate to deliver a product that is not only practical, but also enjoyable for the audience.
Transition Cow Webinars Provide New Information to Large Audience

Most dairy producers aim to have cows calve every 12-13 months, and the period around calving (3 weeks before and 3 weeks after), called the transition period, is one of the most critical periods in a cow’s life. The success of this period can have significant impacts on the health and production of that cow throughout her next lactation, as well as on the health and productivity of her unborn calf. Research has indicated that up to 30-50% of all dairy cows are affected by at least one infectious or metabolic disease during the transition period, making this a crucial period to focus on in terms of animal welfare, productivity, and profitability on farm.

To address these needs, the statewide group of CCE Dairy Specialists, including CCE NCRAT, collaborated to create a 7-part weekly webinar series called “Transition Cow Tuesdays”. Each week focused on a different topic from nutrition and feeding management to facility considerations and monitoring and evaluating transition cow success. Presenters included CCE Dairy Specialists, as well as Cornell’s Dr. Tom Overton, Dr. Daryl Nydam, and Dr. Rob Lynch, as well as Judy Moody from Dairy One.

With 100 to 150 attendees joining live each week, this program reached a wide audience across the North Country, New York state, and the world. Additionally, all sessions were recorded and posted to YouTube and some videos have already been viewed 90-130 times within the first month of posting. These videos will continue to be available to participants and all North Country dairy farmers and industry members to watch in the future. Participants were emailed a survey to provide feedback, and the initial responses from about 20 attendees were positive overall. All responses indicated that the program provided them with some new information, and their “level of knowledge on transition cow topics before the series” averaged 3.2 (1=low, 5=high), and their level after the series increased to an average of 4.1. The overall quality of the program was rated a 4.5 out of 5 (very good), and when asked for comments, one attendee said “It wasn’t all new to me, but I still found it beneficial because it makes you evaluate what you are doing. Sometimes we get complacent and need refreshers. Then we can see where we can make improvements, there’s always something that can be done better. Thank you!”. Another attendee said “Some of the topics (calving with Dr. Lutz) were already presented by her on our farm. Judy Moody’s presentation was the best since it had information that was new to me. Overall it was a good series.”, and another attendee said “Thank you for the opportunity to listen!”.

Overall, this successful program highlights the strong connection between the CCE NCRAT Dairy Specialists and other Specialists across the state, and how this collaboration helps provide new and valuable information to local farmers and agribusiness professionals in the North Country.
Helping Farms Navigate the Future

The continuation of an unsteady milk market and high input costs have forced some dairy producers to consider alternatives to milking cows. In some cases, producers either completely exit or hastily move to feeding beef cattle at their farm without much planning. Both can be dangerous if not for proper planning and execution of the plan. Tax implications, loss of income, and loss of agricultural land assessment status are among a few of the issues that can rear their ugly heads if not carefully considered. Therefore, there is a need for local producers to have access to resources to help them successfully transition from milking cows and outline their future path.

Utilizing the CCE Farm Business Management Specialist, a North Country dairy farm was able to create a plan that was in their best interest during their time of transitioning out of the dairy industry. Ballooning debt, no time away from the farm, stresses to the family unit, and exhaustion elicited a call to help find a way out. Working with their farm accountant and the CCE Farm Business Management Specialist, the farmer was able to create a plan to keep their farmland, restructure their debt to avoid serious tax implications, and alleviate family stresses. This was not an exit from agriculture, but a new beginning on a different path. A path that is more manageable for the farmer and their family. Working closely with the farm family and understanding the deep feelings folks have when going through a major shift like this, the CCE Farm Business Management Specialist successfully offered support, guidance, and inspiration.

Contact us directly through our website: http://ncrat.cce.cornell.edu/

“The North Country Regional Ag Team is a Cornell Cooperative Extension partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton, and Essex counties.”