

Cornell Cooperative Extension

South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY – MARCH 2023



Calving Workshop Offers Hands-on Training in English & Spanish

Betsy Hicks, Area Dairy Management Specialist

Difficult calvings, while not a frequent occurrence, are still a major part of a herd manager's job on dairy farms. Hands-on experience to correct calf positioning is done in the moment when time is of the essence, and little options to practice exist. New herd managers or workers in the maternity pen may need to experience several difficult calvings before being able to identify and correct a malpresentation with skill and precision. In addition to inexperience, many maternity pen managers are now also Spanish speaking, and options to give training to these employees is further limited. To help with this need on dairy farms, Dr Rob Lynch of Cornell PRO-DAIRY obtained a calving and dystocia model to use across the state to offer to farms to further educate on this important skill.

Regional dairy educators teamed up to offer the "Calving & Dystocia Workshop" in both English and Spanish across NY. In the South Central Region, we offered two workshops, one in Ithaca and one in Auburn, in both languages. Daniela Gonzalez, a Masters Student at Cornell University, enhanced our

workshops with teaching in the Spanish language. The workshop focused on a normal calf presentation, proper technique to pull calves, and multiple malpresentations. Attendees were able to work hands-on with the calving model to identify and correct the calf presentation, and properly assist the "calving". In addition to the hands-on portion, attendees learned about post-calving care for both the cow and the calf.



Over both sites, sixteen Spanish-speaking attendees were able to practice with the model, as well as four English-speaking attendees. As space around the model and time to practice for each individual is limited, class sizes were also limited for the workshop. Attendees stated that the best part of the workshop was being able to practice multiple corrections in calf presentation with the model. All stated that they learned something new from the training. Attendees will be able to take these skills back to their farms to implement right away during their next hard calving. More workshops with the model are being planned for the summer throughout our region, and we look forward to reaching more farms with the model, affectionately named "Birtha".

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.



Farm Business Management Highlights: Farmers improve accounting skills through a self-paced online course

Mary Kate MacKenzie, Farm Business Specialist

In January and February 2023, Mary Kate taught **Farm Accounting with QuickBooks Online**, a 5-week online course for farm business managers to improve recordkeeping and financial accounting skills. Course content included articles, pre-recorded videos, discussion forums, quizzes, and five live webinars. A total of 27 farms enrolled, including six dairy farms.

Student quotes illustrate what they liked most about the course:

- * *Working on the material at your own pace and having the ability to refer back to the material.*
- * *Online tools, online setting, time commitment, very clear and well explained.*
- * *Videos were great to show you step by step.*
- * *Great job simplifying everything to make understandable and in farming terms.*
- * *Everything was perfect length and not too overwhelming. Broken down greatly.*
- * *Great navigation through the App.*

This course was supported by a \$10,000 grant from the USDA Northeast Extension Risk Management Education center, and it generated additional income of \$2,512 through course fees.

A third milk storage grant is awarded to a farm in our region.

A small dairy that participates in Mary Kate's Organic Dairy Discussion Group was awarded \$37,000 under the Milk Storage and Handling Grant through the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center. The farm will use these funds to transition from an outdated and inefficient tie-stall milking system to a new TRANS Iowa Low-Cost Milking Parlor. This transition will dramatically improve the farm's labor efficiency while saving energy and boosting milk quality. The farm's history of collaborating with our team on the Dairy Farm Business Summary (DFBS) and other recordkeeping and financial management education programs strengthened their application. Mary Kate provided a letter of support, using data from the DFBS to justify the business case for a new

parlor investment.

Dairy Farm Business Summary supports financial benchmarking and decision making.

In Q1 of 2023, Mary Kate worked closely with 15 dairies to complete their 2022 Dairy Farm Business Summary (one is still underway). This included helping two farms get back into the DFBS after they missed two years during COVID. By completing the DFBS, farms in our region are represented in the 2022 Progress Report published by PRO-DAIRY and used widely by dairy farmers and business consultants across the state. Each collaborating farm also receives detailed reports comparing their own 2022 performance vs prior years and vs other similar dairies. Benchmarking helps farms identify strengths and weaknesses in their operations and identify opportunities to improve their management. Farms that complete the DFBS regularly make improvements to their systems for keeping financial and production records and get more value out of those systems.

Organic dairies benefit from peer-to-peer learning as they struggle with tight margins.

In March, Mary Kate's Organic Dairy Discussion Group held its tenth meeting in 5 years. The meeting was conducted virtually over two days due to extreme weather conditions that prevented travel. Eleven individuals from nine farms attended the meeting. Despite having a wide variety of management practices represented in the group, everyone in the group struggled with low margins and low profitability in 2022. The group discussed short-term management opportunities to respond to rising input costs and changes they might make if their existing farm business models are no longer viable. Even though the discussion was difficult at times, participants appreciated the opportunity to share their challenges with other managers facing similar realities.



Soil Health – Imperative for Sustainability and Resilience

Janice Degni, CCE Field Crop Specialist

Soil health was a key message at several educational events this winter. The Annual Winter Crop Meeting keynote speakers addressed aspects of soil health. Mr. George Foster, a long term no-till crop producer from Middlebury, Vermont shared his farm story of the changes to no-till production and the success of adoption since 2012 on their heavy clay soils on their 2200 acre dairy farm. Observed benefits included increased water infiltration and retention. Better soil aggregate stability also resulted in less soil compaction particularly during harvest.

Jodi DeJong-Hughes, a regional educator in soils and water quality and professor at the University of Minnesota Extension reported findings from field research in tillage systems, soil compaction and soil quality. She shared practical strategies for reducing field

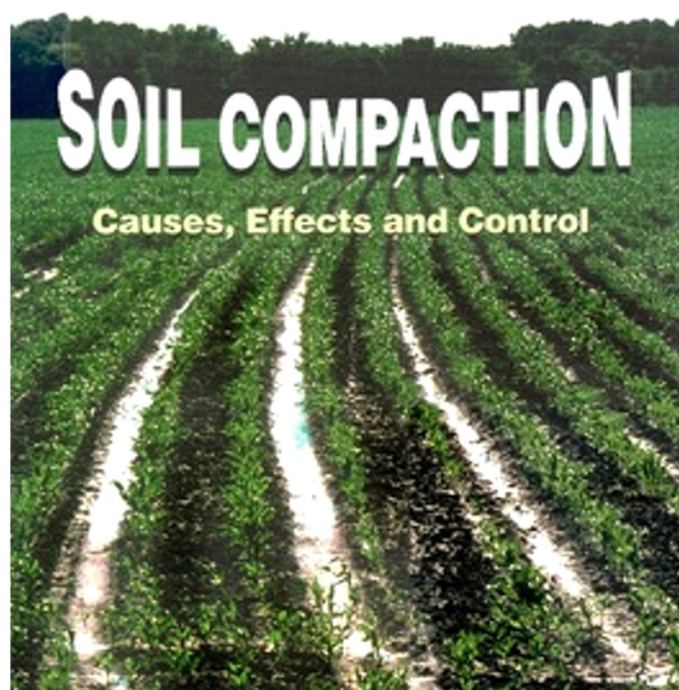


compaction and remediation.

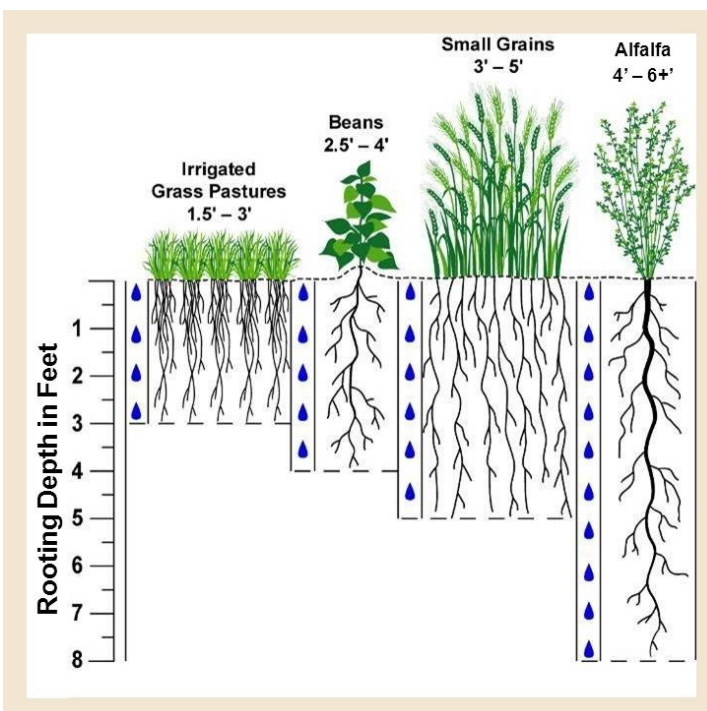
Janice collaborated with the Tioga County Soil and Water Conservation staff to organize a Soil Health meeting. She gave an overview of soil health to kick the meeting off. Other topics included the benefits and contributions of cover crops and the benefits of reduced tillage for soil health. In addition the 33 participants also learned lessons from the district's experience using an interrow seeder to establish cover crops in a growing crop and potential funding streams to support soil health practices.



I developed and delivered the presentation, Soils: The foundation of production, as a session in the CNY



Farming Series which targeted a general ag audience. Principles and practices to support soil health were included.





Nutrient Management – The Foundation of Environmental Stewardship

Janice Degni, CCE Field Crop Specialist

In winter 2023, we delivered a comprehensive seminar series addressing nutrient mgt topics. In a collaboration with field crop educators from the North County Regional Ag team and CCE Oneida county, Dr. Kitty O'Neil, Jeff Miller and I organized a 5-week virtual series. In spring of 2022 fertilizer prices hit all-time highs and supply chain issues were at the forefront. In anticipation of a 2nd year of high fertilizer prices we organized a 5-week virtual nutrient management series to address *Maximizing Fertilizer Efficiency with Peak Fertilizer Prices*. We reached 151 people with this series.

The 4-R fertilizer stewardship principles were an underpinning of messaging. 4-R refers to the right source, right rate, right time and right placement. The details of achieving these goals throughout the cropping system to ensure accuracy and minimize the need for purchased nutrients were discussed. The value of manure and practices to optimize nutrient retention was presented through research findings from studies that measured the effect of manure incorporation tools and depth of tillage.



Three seminars focused on management strategies and practices for specific crops in the rotations. Corn, wheat, oats, soybean and hay crop were all addressed. Fertilization practices that optimize winter wheat and triticale forage production were addressed. Dale Dewing presented a solid plan for meeting the fertility needs of the humble haycrop while considering the use of hay and its nutrient quality in a

livestock ration. The final session described the use of precision technologies to improve nutrient efficiency and fertilizer cost savings.

Similar principles were presented and discussed in an informal setting at a shop meeting. Over 35 attendees reviewed the method for determining nitrogen needs for corn. The discussion included the role of soil testing for providing the status of soil fertility and the use of manure nutrients and purchased fertilizer where they are needed and conserving where needs are met by nutrient turnover from organic matter and safely drawing down previously built reserves.



Small Promoting and Connecting Graziers and Grazing in the SCNY CCE Region

Fay Benson, CCE Organic & Small Dairy Technology Specialist

Promoting grazing has been a significant portion of my work since I began with the SCNY team. I was originally hired on as a "grazing specialist" as part of the GRAZE NY Project twenty years ago. This past winter I decided to get back to my roots and offer discussion meetings in each of the six counties of the SCNY area. As a way to follow up on the discussion group meetings I planned and worked with others to put on the Central NY Grazing Conference on March 25th.

The discussion meetings were offered in five of the counties with a total of 32 people signing up. We held four evening meetings and another meeting was canceled due to weather in Chemung County. A summer pasture walk is being planned to make that up in Chemung County. The meetings included guest speakers, videos, but most were discussion among the participants with Extension resources provided to everyone.

The Central NY Grazing Conference was the result of a collaboration of the SCNY Dairy Team and the Cortland SWCD. Our keynote speaker was Russ Wilson, a well know grazer, consultant and YouTube personality. He and

his family operate the Wilson Land & Cattle Company in Tionesta, PA. He used their farm records to show how adaptive grazing management has improved profits with low capital investment on the 220-acre family farm. We had 56 attendees at the conference. Costs were kept to a minimum since I was able to utilize funds from a NE Dairy Business Innovation project to provide funding for Russ and three other speakers on marketing. The new slaughter facility in Rome NY, owned by "Open Range" donated the 40 pounds of Grassfed Brisket for our lunch.

This was my last winter-programing after 20 years with the team. I was glad to focus it heavily on grazing with farmer to farmer knowledge being shared. As I pointed out at the conference; grazing does not receive a lot attention in research or articles. This is partly due to the nature of grazing, as it is more of an art since the grazier has to continually monitor the crop and the livestock. They do not have a silo full of a known amount of forage with a known amount of nutrients. Yet grazing is a low cost production style that when practiced correctly can be greatly beneficial to carbon sequestration, water quality, and animal health.