



Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

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.

Quarterly Report

January -
March
2023

CCE North Country Team is Proud of our Successful and Robust Return to In-Person Winter Programming

As the warmer weather returns and the 2023 growing season comes into view, the North Country Regional Ag Team is feeling proud of a very successful return to in-person programs during this past winter. The CCE Specialists and staff are extremely grateful for the team's advisory committee, farms, and ag businesses, all other partners and collaborators, and for the team's role in working together with all our constituents to deliver a slate of programs aimed at supporting ag industries in our region. To remain viable and productive, farms need to seize every advantage to adapt to changing markets, to produce marketable products more efficiently, to meet steadily increasing market standards, all while impacting the environment as little as possible. The team's daily work is to create and support those opportunities, by providing evidence-based information, education, and guidance. The Specialists also assist the North Country industry, government, public institutions, and agribusinesses toward those same goals.

This year, the team successfully returned to fully in-person programming to continue to meet the team's mission and deliver impact. COVID taught the team lasting skills for delivering programs virtually and brought a new robustness to the team's regional impact that will last into the future, but it was wonderful to communicate face-to-face, in-person again. The programs also had great participation this winter, mainly due to the relevance and timeliness of the topics and expertise that was shared, from on-farm anaerobic digester planning to seedcorn maggot management. The Specialists were also able to deliver some dairy trainings in Spanish language for the first time, to directly impact Spanish-speaking farmworkers.

The Dairy Specialist seized the opportunity for in-person programs with a series of events, scattered across the region, aimed at providing technical information on a wide range of topics with both hands-on experiences and lecture-style presentations, in-person and webinar formats, and in English and Spanish. Dairy programs focused on herd health topics, animal nutrition and feeding, new and exciting opportunities for on-farm co-digestion of manure and food wastes, and exposing students to real dairy farming examples and models. The team is very proud of the great attendance and evaluations received from these events.



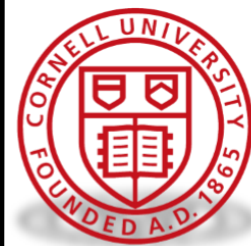
Tour of a dairy with a digester. Photo credit: L. Ferlito.

Authored by:

Lindsay Ferlito
Mike Hunter
Kitty O'Neil

Layout/design by:

Tatum Langworthy



CCE NCRAT continued to respond to requests for courses providing NYS DEC pesticide applicator credits where needed, in addition to the regular offerings. The Field Crops Specialists even collaborated with a CCE Regional Tree Fruit Specialist to organize an orchard pest management course to provide requested and hard-to-find category 22 credits to fruit and grape growers in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, and Franklin Counties. Crop Congress offered pesticide applicator credits but also focused on other emerging issues such as seedcorn maggot research and management recommendations, herbicide-resistant weed management, strategies for minimizing fertilizer expenditures, and corn biological N treatments research findings. Watertown's WWNV TV7 news reporter, Emily Griffin, attended the Lowville Crop Congress program and filmed three news segments, airing in February and March. In March, the team offered two days of manure applicator and nutrient management planner trainings, with overviews of the new NYS CAFO permit, with a PRO-DAIRY Specialist as the speaker. All these programs were very well attended and met with approving reviews.

The CCE North Country Regional Ag Team collaborated with the six very capable county association ag staffs, partner agencies, and other CCE Educators and Specialists across the state to develop and deliver a slate of quality programs this past winter. The team is grateful for each of those collaborative and generous relationships and the strength and breadth of programming that can be provided as a result.



CCE Regional Field Crops Specialist, Mike Hunter, presents research findings on herbicide-resistant weed control to a group of farmers attending the Lowville Crop Congress in February 2023. Emily Griffin gathers video footage for a subsequent WWNVTV7 news story. Photo credit: K. O'Neil.



Monitoring Heifer Barn Ventilation Across the Seasons

Calves and heifers are the future of a dairy farm, and it takes a large amount of time, effort, and money to keep calves and heifers growing and healthy. In the North Country, having four very different seasons throughout the year can make it hard to provide adequate ventilation to these smaller animals, while keeping them out of the elements. Good ventilation can have a big impact on animal growth and health and is important to regularly monitor on farm. One way to assess ventilation is by fogging a barn using a smoke stick to create fog/smoke in the barn, and watching where and how quickly smoke moves through the barn.

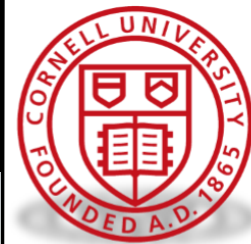
After building a new heifer barn, a North Country dairy farm reached out to the CCE NCRAT Dairy Specialists last summer to assess the ventilation system. The Dairy Specialists fogged the barn and determined it was performing adequately for the warmer summer months. More recently, the farm requested to repeat this during the winter months, and the Dairy Specialist fogged it again. Given the colder temperatures, the barn was more closed up and was relying on the positive pressure tubes for ventilation, but the fogging showed that the barn was still achieving adequate air exchanges according to industry recommendations.

This is a good example of the CCE NCRAT Specialists providing local farms with data specific to their farm. This information can be used to help troubleshoot an active issue, or as preventative maintenance to double check the current system or protocols. In this case, no changes were recommended, but instead this helped confirm to the farm the new barn was performing as they hoped and providing adequate ventilation for their heifers.



Examples of calf barns being fogged (barns pictured are not the barn mentioned above). Photo credits: CCE NCRAT.

Calving Assistance Program Provides Unique Hands-On Training for Local Dairies



Most dairies strive for each cow to have a calf every year, and while cows usually calve with no complications, there are still times when intervention and assistance are necessary. Difficult calvings pose a risk to the cow, calf, and even the farm worker, and without the proper training these risks are greatly increased. Therefore, it is important for all workers with calving responsibilities to be trained in the best management practices and the farm's protocols.



Photo credit: L. Ferlito.

The Cornell Cooperative Extension Dairy Specialists collaborated with Cornell PRO-DAIRY to offer a hands-on calving assistance training program in both English and Spanish across the state, including two North County locations. PRO-DAIRY recently acquired a unique life-like cow and calf model to be used for training. This program was truly hands-on and allowed every participant the opportunity to practice assisting a “cow” during various calving scenarios, including ones that are less common and more challenging. Attendees learned how to reposition a calf, when to intervene during calving, and the importance of keeping everything clean. Without this calving model, there is no real way to practice these techniques on a farm except during an actual calving.



Photo credit. K. Gugin.

Between the NNY two locations, English and Spanish participants from several farms from 3 counties represented over 11,000 cows across the region. Participants indicated it was just the right level of information and they learned a lot. They liked the life-like cow model and the ability to actually practice real-life scenarios. This program is a great example of how the CCE NCRAT Dairy Specialist is working with other Specialists and PRO-DAIRY to deliver valuable and practical training for dairy farms and farm workers across the North County.



Preparing Corn Growers for Proposed Changes in the use of Atrazine Herbicide

Atrazine is an important and widely used herbicide in field corn because it is economical, has a flexible use pattern, long residual herbicidal activity, is effective against a broad spectrum of weeds, and is an important tool in the management of herbicide resistant weeds. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed mitigation measures to reduce the runoff risks to aquatic plant communities from the use of atrazine, including limiting when and how atrazine can be applied and reducing the maximum use rates in field corn. The use of atrazine has been a foundational herbicide used in preemergence field corn weed control programs in Northern New York (NNY).

While atrazine has been proven to be effective for broad spectrum weed control, NNY corn growers have relied on atrazine use rates higher than those outlined in the EPA's proposed label changes that could be implemented as soon as Fall 2023. There is an uncertainty of whether reduced rates or no atrazine entirely can provide acceptable weed control in field corn without additional costs or reduced weed control.

In the first quarter of 2023, CCE North Country Regional Ag Team Field Crop Specialists have been discussing these proposed atrazine use and application rate changes with corn growers, crop consultants, and agribusiness during individual field visits and grower meetings. This information has been presented at 11 in-person and virtual CCE- and industry-sponsored grower meetings to over 425 attendees throughout New York State, including 8 grower meetings in NNY.

To further prepare corn growers for the possible reduction of atrazine use rates, CCE North Country Regional Ag Team Field Crop Specialists successfully secured funding from the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program to conduct two on-farm research trials in NNY to evaluate corn weed control programs with and without atrazine during the upcoming 2023 growing season.

This research will compare currently used rates of atrazine, reduced rates, and no atrazine at all in field corn weed control systems on farms in NNY. The development and evaluation of several herbicide programs with and without atrazine will help NNY corn growers make informed decisions about their weed control systems.

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."

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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.