Youth Workshops Provide Hands-on Livestock Skills Training

Betsy Hicks, CCE Area Regional Dairy Specialist

Providing youth opportunities to improve their livestock handling skills can be challenging, especially with young kids, or with skills like ear tagging and giving injections. Teaming up with our county associations 4-H, though, Betsy has been able to work with youth in Chemung and Cayuga counties this spring to provide hands-on trainings with the calf model.

In Chemung County, youth as part of the Animal Crackers Adventures were taught about the anatomy of the ear, and learned where the proper placement of the tag should be. They were then given a tagger and a real tag, and applied the tag to the model calf's ear. Youth were also able to learn about giving injections – first learning about needle safety and proper handling, and then were able to practice giving two types of injections to the calf model. Using the model is ideal, as kids can practice as many times as they want without the fear of the animal reacting to the injection, or hurting the animal if they do it incorrectly. Through the many trainings Betsy has done, she has watched kids who were too afraid to even look at, let alone pick up a syringe, find the courage to properly give injections to the calf model.

Betsy Hicks of CCE SCNY Dairy Team helps a Chemung County youth learn how to correctly place an ear tag in the ear of a calf model. (photo credit Serenity Conklin)

At the Cayuga workshop held on a local farm, youth were able to discuss the differences between handling dairy animals versus beef animals, led by Cornell PRO-LIVESTOCK's Dr Adam Murray. Animals were put through the farm's chute system, and safe handling of cattle in the chute were practiced. After the handling demonstration, participants were able to practice techniques including applying tags, and removing tags safely using the calf model. Applying castrating bands were also practiced on the model, and the usage of vaccinations like tetanus around banding was discussed, as well as other best practices like timing and cleanliness. Youth were able to ask lots of questions and practice with the model to gain skills and confidence in doing these practices, without the fear of doing something wrong on a live animal. Giving youth opportunities to learn and practice is the future of our industry, and is important to spend time on!

Maternity Trainings for Native Spanish-Speaking Dairy Farm Employees

Betsy Hicks, CCE Area Regional Dairy Specialist

Dystocia, or difficult calvings, are not an uncommon occurrence on dairy farms. However, their incidence is never known ahead of time, making it difficult for farm owners and managers to provide on-farm trainings with adequate time for the employee to learn without putting the health of the calf or cow in jeopardy. In addition, the finer details of the calving process and explaining potential mishaps during calving can be difficult for native English-speaking owners and managers to translate to a native Spanish-speaking workforce adequately. In response to this, CCE dairy educators Betsy Hicks and Daniela Gonzalez teamed up a number of times this year to provide education around maternity care in Spanish, utilizing a section with background in slides and lots of discussion around the farm's protocols, and the "why" behind the action needed. The second section, utilizing the maternity model known as "Birtha", is hands-on, and challenges participants to correct a malpresentation of a calf to successfully deliver the calf. Those watching can look inside Birtha to see how the calf is positioned and see how the "birther" is manipulating the calf to correct the position. For the birther, the activity is fairly well simulated, as they cannot see what they're doing inside the cow, and the calf's joints operate very similarly to a real calf's joints. The model is a great simulation tool because of these points, and there is no life-or-death situation, so that the trainers can stop the birther at any point to correct something they may have done that would potentially harm calf or cow. Because of these trainings, novice maternity pen workers have felt more confident in their skills, and advanced workers have been able to practice more advanced corrections that they have only seen a few times. Farm owners have stated that the trainings are well worth the time because we emphasize the farm's protocols within the training, bring all the tools, and they get a great workshop and time spent with all employees, without having to leave their farm.

Daniela Gonzalez of CCE CNY Dairy Team talks about the consequences of a difficult calving to a gathering of Spanish-speaking employees from different farms.

Transition Calf Workshops Provide Opportunities for On-Farm Learning Application

Betsy Hicks, CCE Area Regional Dairy Specialist

Photo 1: Rob Lynch, DVM of Cornell PRO-DAIRY leads discussion around health issues with transition calves, utilizing a set of preserved organs harvested from a sick calf that was euthanized.

Photo 2: Kaitlyn Lutz, DVM of CCE NWNY Dairy Team leads discussion around neck anatomy and proper injection technique utilizing the injection model.

Photo 3: Tim Terry of Cornell PRO-DAIRY facilitates analysis of calf facilities, highlighting bedded calf space, water access and feed access along with ventilation aspects to consider.

Two of five state-wide calf workshops were held in the SCNY region this spring in Cayuga and Tompkins Counties, focusing on the weeks surrounding weaning, or the calf transition period. These workshops focused on health, nutrition, facilities and management and were taught by CCE regional dairy specialists and PRO-DAIRY staff, in both English and Spanish. Workshops included group discussions around proper feed protein transitions, analysis of a facility of a group of calves, anatomy and proper injections, vaccinations and health, and planning for calf inventory changes and challenges throughout the year.

Over 25 people from 15 farms attended the workshops, held on-farm to utilize scenarios as training tools. From the workshops, attendees would be able to analyze their own transition calf pens for adequate space to minimize crowding and maximize feed and water access. In addition, they were challenged to work with their nutritionist to ensure their calves are receiving adequate protein through feed changes, as well as look at their own records to plan for large numbers of calvings throughout the year.

Attendees stated that they took away new information from the trainings, including learning anatomy of the neck and proper administration techniques for injections. They also stated learning what industry standards are for bedded space, and how to keep stress around moving calves at a minimum. Since the training, one farm has reached out to plan their new transition barn, citing the information they learned from the workshop as guidance for their plans

Photo 4 – Daniela Gonzales of CCE CNY Dairy Team leads discussion in Spanish in front of a group of transition calves. (photo credit Julie Patterson)

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.

Statewide Collaborative Field Trials to Assess Risk from Early Season Crop Pests

Janice Degni, CCE Field Crop Specialist

The 2025 growing season marks the beginning of a 3-year collaborative project with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, the NYS IPM program and ten CCE crop specialists. The project will assess risk by comparing early-season pest abundance and damage in neonicotinoid-treated and untreated seeds in field and vegetable crops in New York State.


Establishing Plots

"For decades, neonicotinoid-coated seeds have been used to manage soil-dwelling insect pests in field crops as well as other crops. However, recently passed legislation in New York State will prohibit the sale and use of neonicotinoid-coated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds beginning on January 1, 2029, unless a waiver is issued by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. To obtain a waiver, a pest risk assessment must be conducted to demonstrate that the pest poses a significant risk that justifies the use of neonicotinoid-coated seeds. Therefore, measuring how the abundance of early-season insect pests (including seedcorn maggot, *Delia platura*) and their associated damage changes in response to the use of untreated seeds is important. These data will be essential for developing a risk assessment tool and improving future recommendations, especially as additional states begin to implement similar regulations on this insecticide use." -Chloe Yi-Luo Cho, PhD Candidate, Poveda Lab


Treatments Marked


Mid-season corn


Mid-season soybean

And On-Farm Research to Better Understand the POWER OF MANURE

The Cornell Spear Nutrient Management Program has data from several years of on-farm research projects to better define the nutrient and fertility contribution of manure in cropping systems. This spring Janice recruited a cooperating farmer that has provided fields for the *Power of Manure Study*. This study is collecting data to help us learn:

- ✦How much N can my soil provide?
- ✦How does past manure applications and management impact soil N supply?
- ✦Can microbial biomass predict soil N supply?

Nitrogen is our most important nutrient for increasing yield in grass plants, both hay crop and corn. It is also an expensive nutrient, with prices fluctuating with energy markets in addition to supply and demand. Soil N supply can be impacted by field management (manure, cover crops, rotation, etc.).

The experiment was set up to measure yield where nitrogen side-dress occurs and is then compared to 3 areas which do not receive side-dress nitrogen. In addition to yield, soil microbial biomass, soil fertility, silage or grain quality, corn stalk nitrogen tests (CSNT), a post-mortem evaluation of N levels in the crop, and nitrogen uptake will all be measured. A second field received fall applied manure and no additional spring manure and no side-dress. The same data will be collected from the field before and around the time of harvest. The data that is collected will contribute to our body of knowledge and understanding of the contribution and uptake of soil nitrogen from both organic and inorganic forms in fields under different management conditions.

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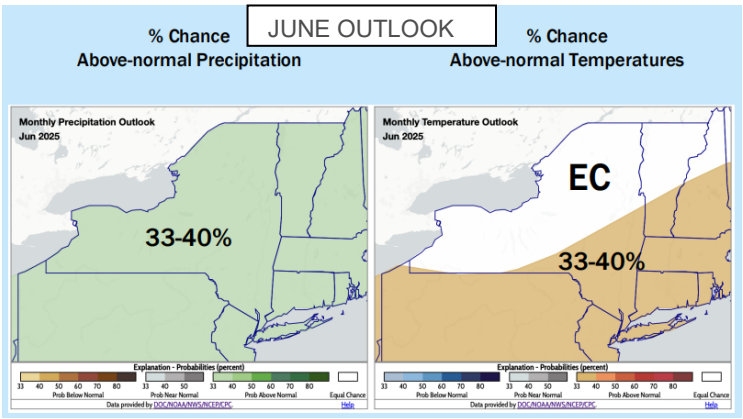
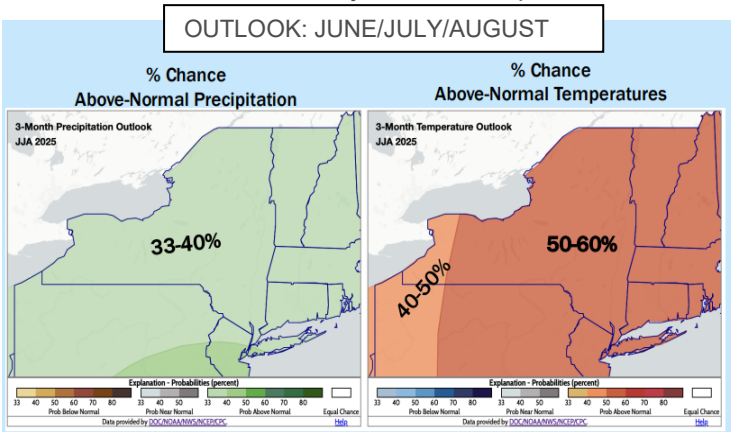
2025 Cropping Season off to a Challenging Start

Janice Degni, CCE Field Crop Specialist

This spring's planting season has been challenging to say the least. After a cold, dry winter, March featured some "spring fever" days, but the weather generally remained cold and with enough rain through April which limited access to all but the most well-drained fields. Fields that access for spreading manure or starting tillage had to be carefully selected. Almost daily rain in May was frustrating to everyone and required strategic field selection for planting. The rain and cooler temperatures didn't hold our hay crop back. Alfalfa came through the winter strong, thanks to a good insulating snow cover and very few if any freeze/thaw events. Now in late May, alfalfa is in the bud stage and is ready to be harvested when conditions allow. Mixed stands are past the prime stage and grass quality is declining rapidly as fiber builds in the plants.



It's getting late by the traditional measure of having corn in the ground by the end of May. That looks like it will be impossible to accomplish this year w/ the weather outlook. I just want to remind you that *"This too shall pass"*. We have the bulk of the growing season ahead of us. It's way too soon to predict the state of the crop at harvest. The last couple of falls have been extended, allowing the accumulation of additional growing degree days. I'm choosing to remain positive for now. Daylight will continue to accumulate through June giving plants the maximum time to photosynthesize. Growing degree days are within the normal range by + or -3 degrees from mid-March to mid-May. For June, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted a 33-40% chance of above normal precip and equal chances of above or below normal temperatures. For June/July/Aug a 50-60% chance of above normal temperatures and a 33-40% chance for above normal precipitation were predicted. The weather is constantly changing and doesn't always act as predicted!



These maps show the rainfall for the spring months.