

Annual Report | 2025

Our 2025 meetings and workshops reflected the multifaceted nature of modern agriculture, spanning critical topics from **soil health and crop optimization** to **advanced livestock management and dairy business resilience**. By bridging the gap between university research and on-farm application, these sessions provided producers with the data-driven tools necessary to navigate volatile markets and shifting environmental conditions. Serving both dairy and crop farmers through this diverse array of topics is essential; it ensures that our local food systems remain robust, our land remains productive for future generations, and our farming community stays at the forefront of **technological and operational innovation**.

–Janice and Betsy

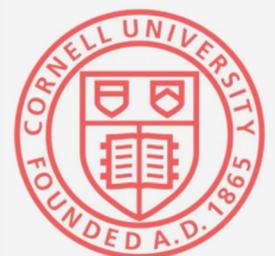


Cornell Cooperative Extension | South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program



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.



Livestock Handling Skills for Youth



This spring, youth in the South-Central NY region engaged in hands-on livestock handling training using a calf model, offered in partnership with county 4-H programs. These sessions provided young participants with a safe, controlled environment to learn essential livestock skills—such as ear tagging, administering injections, and understanding proper cattle handling—without the risks associated with working on live animals. Workshops in Chemung and Cayuga counties included instruction on anatomy, needle safety, beef vs. dairy animal behavior, and best practices around procedures like castration and vaccination. Using the calf model allowed youth to practice repeatedly, build confidence, and ask questions freely. The experience demonstrated the value of hands-on learning in preparing future livestock caretakers and strengthening industry knowledge among youth. Collaborators that contributed to program success were Sasha Diederich, CCE Chemung, Sara Wagner, CCE Cayuga, and Adam Murray, Cornell PRO-LIVESTOCK.

- Hands-on learning with a calf model provides a safe and effective way for youth to practice livestock skills—including ear tagging, injections, and safe handling—without risk to themselves or animals.
- County 4-H partnerships enabled impactful, skill-focused workshops in Chemung and Cayuga counties, combining practical instruction with expert guidance from PRO-LIVESTOCK specialists.
- Youth gained confidence and overcame apprehension, particularly around needles and animal handling, through repeated, judgment-free practice.
- Building these practical skills early helps prepare the next generation of livestock caretakers, highlighting the importance of investing time and resources into youth agricultural education.

Dairy Education

Betsy Hicks, Dairy Specialist



Transition Calf Management

The transition period around weaning is one of the most critical and challenging phases in raising replacement heifers, impacting calf health and farm profitability. To address issues such as space requirements, weather, vaccination strategies, and employee knowledge, two on-farm workshops were held in Cayuga and Tompkins Counties this spring. These bilingual sessions, led by CCE regional dairy specialists and Cornell PRO-DAIRY staff, focused on calf health, nutrition, facilities, and management during the weeks surrounding weaning.



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Transition Calf Management

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Workshops featured hands-on activities, including facility evaluations, discussions on feed protein transitions, anatomy lessons for proper injection techniques, and planning for inventory changes. Over 25 participants from 15 farms attended, gaining practical skills to analyze calf pens, optimize space, ensure proper nutrition, and reduce stress during calf movement. Attendees reported learning industry standards for bedded space and injection techniques, with one farm already applying insights to design a new transition barn. Collaborators included Kathy Barrett and Lindsay Ferlito from Cornell PRO-DAIRY.

- Transition calf management is critical for health and profitability, requiring attention to space, nutrition, and stress reduction.
- Hands-on, bilingual workshops improve employee knowledge and application, covering health, nutrition, and facility management.
- Participants gained practical skills, including proper injection techniques, space standards, and planning for calving cycles.
- Workshops drive real-world improvements, with farms applying insights to facility design and

Maternity Trainings for Native Spanish Workers

Hands-on, on-farm training in employees' native language has proven highly effective for dairy farm workers in maternity pens. Dystocia, or difficult calvings, occurs unpredictably, making it challenging to provide timely training without risking animal health. Language barriers further complicate communication between English-speaking managers and Spanish-speaking workers regarding calving protocols and potential complications.

To address these issues, CCE dairy educators Betsy Hicks and Daniela Gonzalez developed bilingual training sessions focused on maternity care in Spanish. The program combines classroom-style discussion of farm protocols and their rationale with hands-on practice using the "Birtha" maternity model. This realistic simulation allows participants to safely practice correcting malpresentations without life-or-death pressure, while trainers can intervene to prevent harmful mistakes.

These trainings have boosted confidence among novice workers and enabled experienced staff to refine advanced skills. Farm owners report that the sessions are highly valuable because they reinforce farm-specific protocols, use authentic tools, and occur on-site, minimizing disruption to operations.



- Native-language, hands-on training improves maternity pen skills and confidence among dairy farm workers.
- Unpredictable calving and language barriers make traditional training difficult, highlighting the need for bilingual, on-farm education.
- CCE educators use the "Birtha" maternity model for realistic, risk-free practice, allowing workers to correct malpresentations safely.
- Farm owners value these sessions for reinforcing protocols, minimizing disruption, and enhancing employee competence.

Pasture Walks: A Living Laboratory for Learning and Connection

- Pasture walks are effective, hands-on learning tools that promote sustainable grazing practices and community engagement.
- Managed pastures deliver environmental and economic benefits, including biodiversity, erosion control, and improved forage quality.
- Each event showcased practical strategies, from mob grazing and parasite control to infrastructure improvements and grazing height management.



Schlabach Organic Dairy, Owego

Pasture walks serve as dynamic, on-farm learning opportunities that bring pasture management principles to life. These events highlight the environmental, economic, and community benefits of managed grazing systems, including biodiversity, erosion control, and sustainable forage production. In 2025, pasture walks were held across six counties, each showcasing unique strategies for improving pasture health and livestock management:

- **Simme Valley (Cayuga County):** Genetics in beef herd improvement and calf immunization protocols aligned with paddock rotations.
- **Organic Grass-Fed Dairy (Tioga County):** Nutrient comparisons of manure sources and grazing height demonstrations to prevent overgrazing.
- **Ironwood Grazing Co.:** Mob grazing techniques to suppress invasive species and enhance forage quality.
- **Laughing Goat Fiber Farm (Tompkins County):** Small ruminant grazing challenges, parasite management, and conservation projects.
- **Heavenly Acres (Broome County):** Horse grazing strategies using structured rest and hay supplementation.



Laughing Goat Fiber Farm, Ithaca



Heavenly Acres, Whitney Point

- **Benjamin Family Farm (Chemung County):** Efficient cattle handling systems and infrastructure improvements for limited pasture acreage.

These events foster collaboration among farmers, specialists, and conservation partners, strengthening knowledge of pasture-based systems while building community connections.

Bringing Education to Livestock Producers

Dairy and field crops produce the highest value of ag receipts in each of our counties. On average 75-85% of total ag receipts. As dairy farm numbers have declined in our counties we recognize the need for extension programming to extend to livestock producers. We have visited with producers to evaluate pastures and recommend practices for improvement.



Betsy offers a pasture management course through the Cornell Small Farms Program each winter and beef production workshops in conjunction with the NYS Beef Producers Association and local ag educators. Janice offered a hay evaluation workshop to producers and 4-H youth in Chemung county as well as a presentation on soils and site selection for a homesteading/new farmer workshop. Working with the county ag educators and SWCD staff we organized six unique pasture walks focused on different classes of livestock and pasture management techniques. Pasture is one of the lowest cost production methods for growing forages. When adequate quantities and quality are achieved through pasture management farms benefit both financially and in terms of animal health and productivity. We had 98 attendees collectively at the pasture walk events.

Livestock producers often look to extension educators for guidance on a range of practical and strategic issues that affect the productivity and sustainability of their operations. These may include support with:

- herd health management—such as disease prevention, vaccination planning, and biosecurity
- nutrition strategies that optimize feed efficiency and reduce costs.
- help navigating forage and pasture management challenges, especially in the face of changing weather patterns.
- Guidance on regulatory compliance, environmental stewardship, and manure management
- assistance with adopting new technologies like precision livestock tools or data driven decision systems.

education on farm business management, including risk mitigation, succession planning, and market trends, to help ensure long-term viability.

Having worked in our communities for many years we are in a strong position to address

Home-Grown Grains– Are They A Right Fit For Your Farm?

Growing home-grown grains for dairy operations can either enhance profitability or strain farm resources. Success depends on a thorough evaluation of land base, forage inventories, machinery, labor, and financial implications through partial budgeting. Grain margins are typically narrow, with occasional high returns, making it essential for producers to clearly defined crop goals and assess how grain production aligns with overall dairy objectives.

To address these considerations, CCE Cayuga and PRO-DAIRY hosted a workshop covering key topics such as determining the number of dairy replacements needed, matching forage acres to herd size and storage, feed and crop management, and evaluating the viability of a grain enterprise. Attendees gained tools and resources to analyze their current operations and make informed decisions to maintain balance between crop and dairy enterprises.

Home-Grown Grains: Right Fit?

■ Home-grown grain production requires careful resource evaluation, including land, forage, machinery, labor, and financial impact



■ Margins for grain are thin, so producers must define crop goals and assess alignment with dairy production objectives



■ Workshops provide practical tools and guidelines for evaluating forage needs, feed management, and grain enterprise viability



■ Balancing crop and dairy enterprises is critical to avoid resource strain and ensure long-term profitability



FIELD CROPS

Janice Degni, Field Crops Specialist

High Oleic Acid Soybeans offer Nutritional and Economic Benefits in Dairy Diets

High-oleic acid soybeans offer significant nutritional and economic advantages in dairy cow diets. Unlike conventional soybeans, which contain high levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) that negatively impact rumen microbes, high-oleic varieties reduce PUFA content from 63% to 9–10%. This shift allows for greater inclusion rates in diets, supporting improved milk fat synthesis and reducing reliance on purchased fats.



Research presented by Dr. Tom Overton at the 2025 Winter Crop Meeting highlighted that high-oleic soybeans maintain similar protein and fat levels to conventional beans while providing a fatty acid profile more compatible with rumen health. Since their introduction in 2013, soybean growers have widely adopted high-oleic varieties due to comparable agronomics and early market premiums. These beans represent a dual opportunity for dairy farmers: enhanced productivity and cost savings through improved feed efficiency.

- High-oleic soybeans improve rumen compatibility by reducing PUFA levels, enabling higher feeding rates without negative effects.
- Nutritional benefits include increased milk fat synthesis, reducing or eliminating the need for purchased fats in dairy diets.
- Economic advantages stem from cost savings and improved income over feed costs, as highlighted in current research.
- Adoption is widespread among growers, driven by comparable agronomics and early market incentives.

Building AG Awareness

Ag Awareness, Youth Education & Outreach

Summer provided numerous opportunities for agricultural education and public engagement across the South-Central NY region. Janice and Betsy supported 13 outreach events, partnering with local CCE staff to connect communities with farming, crop production, and dairy practices. Activities ranged from county fairs and farm tours to hands-on youth workshops, reaching hundreds of participants.

Youth learned practical skills such as ear tagging, vaccination techniques, and cattle handling differences between beef and dairy breeds. Public events like Tioga County Sundaes on the Farm and Cortland Agstravaganza featured interactive stations on field crops, forage, and livestock housing, along with butter-making demonstrations that engaged hundreds of visitors.

The team also contributed to major events including the NYS Fair Dairy Birthing Center and forage and grain crop displays. These efforts fostered agricultural awareness, strengthened community connections, and inspired future generations to learn about agricultural practices.

Collaborators included partner CCE offices, county school districts, Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and USDA agencies.

- 13 outreach events engaged youth and the public, promoting agricultural awareness through fairs, farm tours, and workshops.
- Hands-on learning for youth included ear tagging, vaccinations, and cattle handling, while public activities like butter-making connected communities to dairy.



- Large-scale events such as Tioga Sundaes on the Farm and Cortland Agstravaganza showcased field crops, forage, and livestock systems, reaching hundreds of participants.
- Collaboration with CCE offices, schools, and conservation partners amplified impact, fostering understanding of agriculture's role in local communities.

<https://scnydfc.cce.cornell.edu/>

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For more information on the South Central Dairy & Field Crops Team, contact Tatum Langworthy,
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The South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops Program provides educational opportunities and technical assistance to help the industry with emerging issues, production bottlenecks, and new technologies. Our primary audiences are dairy, livestock, and field crop producers as well as agri-service providers with secondary audiences of the media, livestock producers, non-farm residents and consumers. We focus on areas that will help improve farm profitability within the region since farm financial success is a key to maintaining a viable dairy and field crops industry. Our program's education helps our industry respond to both internal and external forces that help it keep pace in a rapidly changing world.

Our Mission:

- ◆ Enhance the profitability of farmers to maintain a strong regional dairy industry
- ◆ Create greater awareness of trends and options to help producers achieve family and business goals.
- ◆ Maintain environmentally responsible agricultural practices, and