



CORNELL NWNYS PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2015

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Calf & Heifer Congress – A National Draw with Local Impact

The NWNYS Team continued the tradition of a year-end dairy replacement conference started in 2011 by Cornell PRO-DAIRY. The Dairy & Heifer Congress 2015 was held on December 15-16 in Syracuse. Nationally recognized university researchers, industry experts and dairy producers joined together for a well-received program attended by over 180 people. Two dozen sponsors provided support and exhibits for the event. The displays proved to be quite popular and a source of updates on newer technology and products.



Photo source: Cathy Wallace

Presentations varied from dealing with calving difficulties, newborn care, barn design, ventilation, feeding strategies and economic expectations of conventional versus more intensive feeding programs. A section focused on the new Veterinary Feed Directive, antibiotic stewardship, drug residue trends and public concerns of antibiotics in the food supply. Popular producer panels showcased animal friendly and labor efficient barn features as well as effective protocols.

One dairy owner who attended with his calf manager said it was “a great refresher and stressed attention to detail. We have changed how we handle electrolyte use for scours cases and pay more attention to making sure just born calves are positioned upright and not laying out flat. Both of these protocols have resulted in less problems and fewer treatments.”

A dairy veterinarian in the region noted “The conference was an excellent resource for calf raisers and like-minded individuals to share thoughts and learn new strategies for managing youngstock. The topics were timely and relevant to many of the progressive dairies.”

The combination of big venue conferences and local Dairy Skills Training modules through the WNY Dairy Institute offers the needed varied levels of information for a wide spectrum of farm personnel.

Production, Pests, and Profitability – On-Farm Education for Corn Growers

With over one million acres of corn planted in New York this spring, corn growers need to keep up to date on the latest in management techniques and agronomic research to be successful. A new program for corn producers, Production, Pests, and Profitability (PPP), modeled after the Tactical Agriculture (TAG) Team design, was coordinated with seven producers in Livingston County who collectively grew and managed 8,550 corn acres.



Photo source: Mike Stanyard

Participants completed ten hours of in-field and classroom training covering crop production and IPM practices with a focus on weed, disease, and insect pest sampling and management. At each of the 5 meetings, a field guide and handouts were utilized and assembled in a folder for future reference. Each meeting was at a different host farm to view a variety of production scenarios with a hands-on approach.

Participating producers benefited from the educational materials and timely sampling techniques to make the most economical crop and pest management decisions to maximize their corn production. Participants learned how to correctly identify, sample, assess and apply different management tools on potential corn pests and make management decisions based on economic thresholds. Pre and post-tests were given at the first and last meetings of the season. Collectively, participants increased their general knowledge of corn management from 50.8% to 86.6%; an increase of almost 36%. All participants agreed that this program helps growers understand the importance of pests and crop management issues and they would highly recommend this program to other corn producers.

Feeder Basics Course Draws High Participation

In early 2015 our dairy advisory committee suggested that we offer a very basic course for dairy workers who feed cows. As this is a position on dairy farms that is more frequently being filled by Spanish-speaking employees, we decided to offer the class in both Spanish and English. We also shortened the course to four hours on one day, instead of the fifteen-hour, five-day courses we've held on the subject of feed and nutrition in the past.

We held the course in two locations, and collaboration with a local dairy nutritionist in each site brought great practical expertise to the course. Holding the class on a farm allowed us to include both classroom time and hands-on learning. Overall we had 40 people attend, which far exceeds other classes that we've held recently. About one quarter of participants were Spanish-speaking, and the team's bilingual specialist, Libby Eiholzer, translated the class for them.

Survey responses from attendees were overwhelmingly positive, emphasizing that the information presented was relevant and will be useful to them. Spanish speakers were very pleased to have the opportunity to take a class in Spanish.

It can be difficult to find the perfect mix of time, location and subject matter that draws the highest participation, but we certainly hit the mark with this class. We plan to follow this shorter one-day format and focus more on hands-on learning for future courses. Providing this type of continuing education class is extremely important, as it helps employees gain new skills needed for advancement, gives them a greater sense of job satisfaction and can ultimately lead to better employee retention.

Feeders handle materials on a daily basis which account for over 50% of a farm's expenses, so ensuring that they have the right skills to limit waste and feed cows accurately has a huge impact on a dairy farm's overall profitability.

Forage Quality Education Leads to Improved Feed for Dairies

Quality forage production is critical to the success of dairies in Western New York. Crop production managers from 6 farms and 2 consultants expanded their knowledge of forage production practices through workshops and hands-on discussion during a 5 session Dairy Institute module including 12.5 hours of both classroom and on-farm sessions.

Each person gained knowledge they can put to work producing higher quality feeds for the dairies where they work. Participants indicate they learned information they are highly likely to use on the farm. In evaluations, participants indicated they would make changes in forage pest management, use of triticale for forage, crop rotation and soil health improvement. All indicated they would recommend the course to others.

Forage produced on the farms who participated in the course feed more than 8,990 cows and 7,850 replacement heifers. These managers control over \$100 million dollars in crop and machinery expenses. They are responsible for protecting the environment while growing forage crops on 14,900 acres.



The team's bilingual dairy specialist Libby Eiholzer translates for a group of Spanish-speaking feeders.

Photo source: Sarah Carlson



Noblehurst Farms

Photo source: Sarah Carlson

Dairy Acceleration Program Leads to New Dairy Investment in NWNY Region

The Dairy Acceleration Program delivered consulting services to 37 dairies in the Northwest New York Region. With funding from the New York State Departments of Agriculture and Markets and Environmental Conservation, Cornell University's PRO-DAIRY Program partners with local Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators to provide business, facility and comprehensive nutrient management planning and engineering for implementation of best management practices to protect the environment.



Photo source: PRO-DAIRY

Through the project, Northwest New York Team Specialists have worked with 15 farms that have been awarded \$72 thousand for business or facility planning. At this writing, eight of these farms have reported new investment in their dairies of \$6.1 million dollars in new barns, real estate and renovating existing facilities. Statewide staff has worked with 2 additional farms who have invested \$2.95 million in facilities. For each \$1,000 of New York State investment in planning through the project, these farms have invested \$84,000 to improve their infrastructure.

Ten of these same farms have been awarded \$62 thousand in environmental planning funding to either develop a comprehensive nutrient management plan or design structures required for implementation of best management practices to protect the environment. Another 15 farms, who are participating in only the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning or Best Management Practice Design, have received \$117 thousand. Once planning and engineering is complete these farms will seek grants and invest business resources to install systems to protect the environment from runoff of nutrients and recycle farm produced nutrients to grow future crops for feeding their dairies.

The Dairy Acceleration Program is stimulating reinvestment in dairies across the Northwest New York Region. The Northwest New York Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Team is a gateway that producers are using to learn about and access these funds. These investments will lead to increased production and profits for farm owners and additional dairy related employment. At the same time, the program is helping farms to improve environmental protection practices through nutrient management planning and design of environmental protection facilities.

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