



## CORNELL NWNY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS APRIL – JUNE 2017

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### **Dairy Farm Business Summary Cooperators, a Significant Source of Economic Activity in 2016**

Applying financial management skills, owners of 40 dairy farm businesses from the region cooperated with regional specialists, PRO-DAIRY staff, and agribusiness consultants to complete DFBS's for 2016. Cooperators learned about the strengths and weaknesses of their businesses using their summary and analysis results, DFBS data for the Western New York region as a whole, and by using DFBS data for a group of most profitable businesses by size using the two page Comparison Report. Research studies conclude that producers using DFBS with analysis achieve greater levels of profit compared to producers that do not. Greater profitability contributes to enhanced economic viability, increasing the likelihood that businesses have the capacity to invest in replacement and, or expansion assets, and maintain and, or increase employment levels. Estimates using DFBS results suggest that the 40 cooperating businesses invested a total of \$20.3 million in land, buildings and improvements in 2016, and a total of \$9.2 million in machinery and equipment. Estimates suggest that the 40 farms employed a total of 828 worker equivalents, excluding operators, where an equivalent represents 230 hours worked per month for 12 months, and generated a total of \$227.9 million in cash farm receipts from milk, cattle, crops and other receipt items.



### **1<sup>st</sup> Cutting Alfalfa Monitoring for Optimum Forage Quality**

First cutting represents a significant portion of dairy farms total hay crop for the year and has the potential to be a very high quality feed when harvested at the correct time. To help dairy producers monitor that optimal timing, the NWNY Team participated in a statewide weekly monitoring program through the months of May-June and provided field updates to NWNY producers.

#### Alfalfa Height

Alfalfa height has shown to be a great indicator of harvest timing for alfalfa, grass and mixed stand fields. Forage stand heights were measured weekly at five farms across the NWNY region to predict Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF) for alfalfa, alfalfa/grass mixed and grass stands. Alfalfa height has proven to be a reliable indicator of NDF values in the field.



#### Why is it Important to Look at NDF Digestibility in Dairy Nutrition?

Neutral detergent fiber digestibility will give dairy producers a more accurate estimate of total digestible nutrients (TDN), net energy (NE), and feed intake potential. An increase in NDF digestibility will generally result in higher digestible energy and forage intakes ultimately leading to an increase in milk production. High producing herds, herds that maximize forage feeding, and high-group cows will benefit most from forages with high NDF digestibility.

#### Height Recommendations of Alfalfa and Grass for Optimal NDF Content

In general, 100% grass stands should be cut when nearby alfalfa is 14 inches tall to achieve the desired 50% NDF. Producers should begin cutting 50/50 mixed alfalfa and grass stands when nearby alfalfa is 22 inches tall for the desired 44% NDF. Producers should begin cutting 100% alfalfa stands when alfalfa is 28 inches tall for desired 40% NDF.

## Reproduction School Targets Beef Producers

Many beef farms in the NWNY region are small, part-time operations with an average of 13 cows and have a short breeding season. A bull with quality genetics is needed to raise a quality calf. This makes it costly to afford to purchase and keep a bull throughout the year. Some farms would rather not keep a bull on the farm for safety reasons. Beef producers have started utilizing artificial insemination as an option, though technicians are not always available to service a few cows.



While proper artificial insemination technique is important in any farm's reproductive program, understanding the cow's anatomy and physiology are also essential. Participants learned the biology of bovine reproduction, giving them a better understanding of the whole reproductive system. The training was held on a dairy farm in Ontario County where there were a number of cows available for hands-on practice to gain experience with proper insemination technique. The training consisted of both classroom sessions and hands-on practice on both days. Genex Cooperative, Inc. along with NWNY Team offered instruction for this training.

Over the course of two days, students learned the basics of bovine reproduction. The course offered as much hands-on practice as possible, though it was a beginner's course meant to teach the basics of artificial insemination. Participants were expected to practice inseminating cows on a regular basis on their own farms in order to become proficient. The course also reviewed options for heat synchronization, so with proper application of a synch program cows could be bred on the same day.

## Twilight Tour Showcases Small Grain Variety Options

Small grains play an important role in crop rotation for most NY farms. Each season the Cornell Plant Breeding Program travels across NY in search of cooperating farms to plant their small grain variety trials. Cornell plants these plots into a corner of the grower's small grain field and they are treated agronomically (fertility and pest control) the same as the whole field. Cornell then evaluates multiple parameters from disease resistance to sprouting and finally yield.



On June 22, a "Small Grain Twilight Tour" was hosted by CCE and Ron Breslawski and family in Hamlin. Twenty producers and industry representatives were guided on a variety tour of malting barley, red and white winter wheat and hybrid rye. The team discussed current small grain research and agronomic and pest management topics that have been learned through our work with local small grain producers. Dr. Gary Bergstrom was on hand from Cornell to review the major small grain diseases and current control recommendations.

Variety selection is one of the cornerstones of good crop and pest management. Participants were able to view how the different varieties performed in their region under very wet growing conditions. This is a big advantage when choosing a variety to plant next season. Results of all the Cornell winter and spring small grains regional trials and the cumulative summaries over several years can be found at <https://plbrgen.cals.cornell.edu/research-extension/small-grains/cultivar-testing>.

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