



Cornell University Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

Serving Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties.

Program Highlights April - June 2017

Community Connections:

Specialists help facilitate stronger bonds and better conversations between dairy farmers and the public.

The average American is several generations removed from the farm, and has little to no experience on commercial dairies. However, there has been a trend lately for consumers to be asking more questions about where their food comes from and how production animals are housed and treated. Often consumers turn to social media or the internet to get this information. This means the dairy industry needs to continue to tell its story and highlight the care and dedication that goes into producing a healthy, wholesome, and safe product by keep cows healthy, comfortable, and productive.



The regional dairy team has taken an active role in promoting the dairy industry by helping NNY dairy producers tell their story. This June, Windsong Dairy hosted Jefferson County's Day on the Farm, and welcomed hundreds of members of the public to learn about what happens on a local dairy. There were several stations set up around the farm to talk about the many jobs that happen on a dairy and how the animals are cared for. Similarly, Poppydale Farms was one of two farms that hosted Franklin County's Sundae on the Farm. A regional dairy specialist was active at both events leading tours, and answering questions from the public. Additionally, the dairy team helped with open house tours at Porterdale Farms where second graders came to learn more about dairy production, and at North Ridge Dairy/Locust Hill Farm that hosted an open house so the public could come see what happens behind closed doors and have the chance to talk directly to their farmer neighbors.

Another critical area to be actively promoting dairy is on social media. As part of the American Dairy Association North East's DairyFAN group, our dairy specialists work with other producers and industry members across the state to have a presence on social media (including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). This group's activities include posting informational sheets about hot topics like dairy nutrition, GMO's,

antibiotics and cow care, as well as hosting Twitter parties on specific topics where questions from the general public about the industry are answered.

It is also important to learn from other producers that have had negative experiences with the public. At the Dairy Cattle Welfare Symposium in Wisconsin this spring, the dairy team heard from dairy producers who had experiences with animal activists and abuse allegations. These producers shared how to overcome the negativity, and come out stronger as a dairy. One of the conference speakers shared the fitting quote that "if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. Get engaged. Be present. Build trust."



*"...if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. Get engaged. Be present. Build trust."
- Farmer on dealing with activists*

The New Frontier:

Harvest NY takes the lead on expanding winery establishment in NNY



Northern New York currently has 19 wineries across the six counties and the industry is slowly growing. Our wineries are not yet widely recognized as tourist destinations as they are in other parts of New York State (Finger Lakes, Long Island, etc.) or the world. By increasing the number of wineries, more tourists will likely visit the area specifically for the wineries. According to the New York State Wine and Grape Foundation in 2012 the wine tourist industry increase “13-fold since 1985 from 384,000 to 4,986,000 in 2008 and 5.29 million in 2012.” With this significant increase it has also increased the number of sales in the wine industry as much as “total increase of sales (and sales taxes for the state and local governments).”

Harvest New York and Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Science summer intern Ryan Graff have been working on a project to determine the establishment and expansion cost of a winery using cold climate grapes in northern New York. The outcome with this project is that more people will be able to determine if starting a winery is economically viable to their goals and to increase the number of wineries across northern New York.

The information collected from this project will help to determine the establishment cost and challenges of the wine industry in northern New York. This project is intended to help people considering putting in a winery, established wineries, and wineries considering expanding have a better understanding of cost, equipment, and space needed for a winery.

*“Northern New York currently has 19 wineries across the six counties and the industry is slowly growing.”
-Lindsey Pashow*



Innovation and Experimentation:

Specialist assists farmers in exploring NY's newest crop: industrial hemp

New York became the 19th state to legalize industrial hemp research trials back in 2015. This year, Governor Cuomo has kicked off a new phase of the initiative - connecting New York farmers to that growing market potential, and he's looking to Cornell Cooperative Extension for both research and technical expertise.

NYS Ag and Market's initial pilot program enabled Cornell University and SUNY Morrisville to obtain research permits in 2016. These permits initially restricted hemp cultivation to university research farms and a very small handful of partnered New York farms. This spring, an Industrial Hemp Summit was held at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, where new plans were announced to foster growth and propel the hemp industry across the state. Mike Hunter, North Country Regional Field Crops Specialist, attended the Hemp Summit and heard researchers, farmers, manufacturers, government officials, and economic development leaders assess and discuss the benefits and address challenges hampering growth of the industry. New programs in 2017 opened the way a bit further to a few more farms to try a few acres of hemp.

The state also announced that a Hemp Technical Team would be established to support optimal growing and processing of industrial hemp. The technical team will consist of three Cornell Cooperative Extension educators and a State Department of Agriculture and Markets liaison.

Mike Hunter and Kitty O'Neil, both North Country Regional Field Crops Specialists, were named to the technical team along with Janice Degni, Field Crops Specialist in Central NY. Christopher Logue is the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation officer tasked with managing the permitting process for potential growers. Already the three field crops specialists have fielded inquiries from interested farmers in the North Country and assembled information to facilitate decision-making and planning for hemp production.



New Ideas:

Specialist facilitates farm businesses plans to promote increased profitability

With a new year brings in new ideas, and inspired individuals. The continued incentives and encouragement from the New York state along with cultural trends emphasizing local foods has led to more people trying to start farm businesses. Where there are new businesses, there is a need for business planning! A focus of the Farm Business Mgmt Specialist over the last six months has been to work with those individuals looking to start or evolve farm businesses through tailored planning and budgeting. Over the last three months, 10 specific individuals across the six county region have submitted their businesses plans for feedback or assistance: from the beginning stages to diversification to existing businesses (the preferred to remain unnamed to protect relationships and ideas). Of these there are four operation that are already in business two that are in the process of starting and two that are still evaluating their options. More than half of these individuals would be considered young, beginning or small farms. The Specialist notes that in her experience of business planning is, surprisingly not completed by many farmers. Although the exercise can be tedious, those that have completed the process with say it is definitely worth it.

The first meeting with these individuals involves going over the narrative portion of the business plan along with overall vision and mission statement of their business. The Specialist focuses on being a facilitator, reviewer, and resource of accountability to aid in the progress of completing the plan. One individual remarked, "I have been running this business for two years and I know what I want to do and accomplish, but I haven't ever put it on paper." His reason for completing the plan now is that his father transfer the farm to him, and that to move that process along he wants to have a written plan to propose.* So beyond just organizing ideas and evaluating risk, business plans can often be the conversation starter or vehicle for farm transfer discussions.

The second meeting with these individuals is focused on review and working through the 12 month budgets. Another individual that utilized by assistance organizing the financials remarked, "It was a bit of a shocker, we really liked this business idea but to see how much cash it was going to lose in the first three years was scary". The financial complexity of farming can be overwhelming, the business plan helps refocus individuals: what is their mission and visions, is the purpose of the business to make money, or is it to fulfill a moral or ethical goal? In order to get more farm businesses off the ground, they need to be financial sound to gain access to funding.

The third meeting is to polish and follow up on any financial changes made. The impact of these projects reach far beyond just the individual as well. Most plans include the creation of 1-3 jobs and the continued preservation or restoration of agricultural land in the six counties. The hope is that the Specialist can continue to work with more individuals going forward to promote new farm business development and improve profitability through the exercise of working through detailed business planning and budgeting.

*"I have been running this business for two years and I know what I want to do and accomplish, but I haven't ever put it on paper."
-Farmer on working through the plan*



This photo is of an operation that worked with the specialist on business planning this winter and started up this spring/summer.



The Next Generation:

Specialists collaborate and lend expertise to high school senior Ag Tech Program

The North Country Regional Ag Team extended their impact in NNY by sharing their expertise with students in the St Lawrence-Lewis BOCES Agricultural Studies Academy (ASA) during the 2016-17 school year. This was the inaugural year for the ASA, a pilot program launched through the BOCES system for senior high school students seeking a broad introduction to ag business management. The Academy operates in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County and uses their Extension Learning Farm livestock and facilities outside Canton, NY. The program provides students with a daily experience on the Farm exploring agricultural careers and completing core educational requirements through the lens of agriculture. Our Regional Specialists shared time and expertise with the eight students in the program to further develop and expand their knowledge of agriculture.



Kelsey O'Shea, our Ag Business Management Specialist, worked with the ASA students over the course of 2 lectures and 1 workshop to guide them through development and evaluation of their own agricultural business plan. The first lecture presented business plan basics and helped students think critically about what makes a successful business. The concept of diversification and the impacts of national and global economic trends were emphasized. Kelsey found the entire experience to be very rewarding and appreciated engaging with students to expand their perspectives beyond the farms they know personally, to include numerous career options in agriculture outside the traditional role of farmer/farm owner. The students quickly delved in and explored different business options. Three students even changed their primary business choice based on their research after the first lecture. Business plans in hand, the students moved on to budgeting monthly cash flow. At this point, students were able to put their ideas and dreams to the test. One student volunteered to use her business idea as an example for class discussion. As the group evaluated the plan and variable expenses, she realized her business was not profitable. The group also discussed the real cost of living, how to manage economic risk, and doors out strategies. These exercises brought the financial realities of running an ag business to the forefront. Finally, students presented their plans to a panel of industry professionals for additional input and did very well. Kelsey looks forward to similar interactions in the future and says, "I really believe these exercises in financial planning, critical thinking, and strategic decision-making are very

impactful for high school seniors and I look forward to watching this program expand so we can all continue to promote new agriculture endeavors for the next generation in the North Country."

ASA students also regularly participated in management of livestock and forages on the Farm. The Extension Learning Farm has a commercial flock of 75 Dorset ewes, a small flock of layers and a few pigs. Milking goats are also on site from time to time. With the occasional tutelage of Betsy Hodge, Regional and County Livestock Specialist, students were exposed to daily management of each species. Betsy has taught ASA students about forage testing round bales used on the farm, lambing and kidding and even led the group through a necropsy on a large lamb. Betsy occasionally presented lectures but also involved the students in ordinary farm operations. Lambing season included both lectures and hands-on participation. Students also learned meat cutting and sausage-making in the Farm's large commercial kitchen. Students raised broilers in a few batches, learning about feeding, watering, pen cleaning, and the slaughter and processing steps. With instruction from Charlie Hitchman, farm manager, and Kitty O'Neil, Regional Field Crops and Soils Specialist, students were exposed to grazing management, forage harvesting and operation of tractors and forage harvesting equipment on the Farm.



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."

Contact us directly through our website: <http://ncrat.cce.cornell.edu/>

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.