



Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

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

Program Highlights

October-December
2017

Preparing for the National Dairy FARM Program Evaluation

Kimberley Morrill

Cow comfort and lameness continue to be key areas of focus for research and discussion on dairies. On-farm cow comfort evaluations have found higher prevalence of hock injuries (81% overall, 5% severe) and lameness (55% overall, 8% severe) in the Northeast. With one case of lameness estimated to cost \$170-\$470, this quickly becomes a costly problem for Northern NY farmers, especially in times of low milk prices. Additionally, consumers are becoming more aware of where their food comes from and they want assurance that the animals were raised humanely, and the product was processed safely.

One way the dairy industry is proactively working to promote and ensure healthy and comfortable cows, and safe and wholesome milk is the National Dairy FARM Program, administered by the National Milk Producers Federation and Dairy Management Inc. Dairies are evaluated at least once every 3 years, and there is the potential they will be one of the few randomly selected for a 3rd party evaluation. Therefore, nearly all dairy farmers in NNY will have at least one evaluation completed on their farm in the near future. On January 1st, 2017, the National FARM Program released Version 3.0 which included no longer allowing tail docking and requiring a documented VCPR (veterinarian client patient relationship). In late 2016 and early 2017, it became clear that many NY producers were not fully aware of these changes or what the FARM Program evaluation consists of, and therefore they are unaware of how to best prepare for an evaluation. This is a challenge, because if criteria set in the FARM program are not met, the producer could potentially lose their milk market.

In February 2017, we received a grant from NYFVI to work with 16 NNY farms to help prepare them for their FARM evaluation. Participation in this project was voluntary, and open to all dairy producers in Northern NY. Producer meetings were held in the spring to share information about the FARM program, as well as to answer questions. Over 100 producers in NNY attended the various meetings, and at these meetings producers had the opportunity to enroll in the project. Once a producer was enrolled, a farm visit was scheduled. The visit consisted of three components: a document review, producer interview, and animal observations. During the document review we worked with each producer to go over what was needed during an official evaluation in terms of paperwork, SOPs, and record keeping. Many farms had some documents available, but few had everything needed. The interview portion consisted of a series of questions that focused on best management practices. The animal observations included scoring a percentage of the herd for lameness, hygiene, body condition, and hock and knee injuries, and then determining if the herd met the industry guidelines.

Each participating farm received an individualized report that provided more details as to what was needed for documents (templates were included if applicable), if all management practices fell within industry guidelines, and if animal observations fell within industry guidelines. All farms received custom recommendations for areas of need. All farms have reached out for additional information and follow-up visits are being scheduled.

This project helped producers understand the FARM program, get questions answered, and then receive individual feedback. We are currently working on a second round of funding, but will continue to offer this as a service to producers in NNY.

Tiestall Research Project Monitors Lameness and Cow Comfort on North Country Dairies

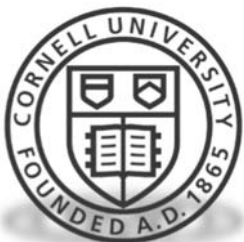
Lindsay Ferlito

Cow comfort is essential to maximize cow health, production, profitability, and ensure positive consumer perceptions of the dairy industry. A lot of research continues to be done on cow comfort and lameness, but most of it focuses on freestall systems. Although a lot of farms have transitioned to freestalls, 39% of the barns in the U.S. that house lactating cows are tiestalls, with the majority of these barns being in the East (USDA NAHMS, 2014). The North Country is no different, with tiestall barns still very prevalent in some counties. It is important for these producers to have research that directly applies to their management and housing system.

Through a collaboration with the Cornell South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops team, funding was secured for 15 months through a NY Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI) grant. The objective of the grant is to monitor lameness and lying behavior on 10 dairies (5 in both the northern and southern regions) and relate these back to housing and management factors on each farm. The ultimate goal of the project is to help producers identify possible changes that can be made to reduce lameness and increase profitability on farm.

In the first 9 months of the project, each farm received an initial assessment, looking at lameness, injuries, lying behavior, and housing and management factors, and they received a report from the assessment. Reports highlighted the data specific to each farm, while showing how the farm compared to the 10-herd benchmark. Producers were very receptive and excited to receive their results. One producer stated “This is so neat, I’m glad you did this”, and another noted “It’s good to know what you are doing well, and what you need to work on”.

During the report delivery, areas of opportunity were identified for each farm and producers were encouraged to make changes to address these challenges. Another round of assessments will be completed in the spring of 2018 to track improvements due to these changes. Data from the initial assessments will also be shared with other producers at meetings across the North Country and NY state this winter.



Shared Trucking through Hub on the Hill

Kelsey O'Shea



The Farm Business Management Specialist was approached by one of the directors at Hub on the Hill in Essex County for assistance with a new project they had taken on. This project was the purchase and management of a transport truck for moving local Essex County products to the city. When the truck arrived, they were very excited to start using it and started making trips with it right away. What they realized, however, was that they needed a method to record, price, and schedule trips with the farmers in the community. The Farm Business Management Specialist was brought on to help the Hub design a model that could record, price, and schedule the truck.

After the first meeting, the Business Specialist worked on building a simple model through the use of the online platforms Google offers to ensure ease of accessibility by the farmers and Hub on the Hill. The first attempt proved to be not quite complex enough for the pricing model. There were many factors to consider including the distance traveled, the time at each stop, the shared portions of the routes, the back haul, and the amount of product per farm on the truck. All of these factors were worked into the pricing model to ensure that farmers are paying proportionally to their route and content, but also gaining the benefit of sharing portions of the route. After two additional meetings, both the Specialist and Hub on the Hill felt that a model had been reached that factored in everything that was needed. When asked about the experience, Jori Wekin, Director of Hub on the hill said "my work with the Farm Business Specialist on this project was crucial in helping to determine how we set up our delivery service model. We were able to work through the process to see what was feasible and make adjustments - her knowledge and experience gave me confidence that we were setting up our forms and billing matrix appropriately."

Right now this truck is making one to two trips a week to various locations serving at least four farms per trip. The goal of the truck was to provide farmers in the area with an affordable way to distribute their products and ultimately expand their businesses. By sharing this resource, farmers are able to save up to 37% on the cost of transportation through group usage. The hope is that even more farms participate, enough to have the truck running more often than once a week. This service allows these farmers to reach a completely new market, and increase their personal brand visibility. Now, invoicing and paying for this service is streamlined allowing Hub on the Hill more time to focus on other ways to help farmers in the area. In addition, since the model is available to farmers on the online platform, they can see and understand how their pricing is arrived at and how much is saved by sharing the loads with other farmers. The use of technology ultimately is providing more transparency for both the farmers and the service providers.

From these meetings to discuss and work on this pricing model, an idea was hatched to create "financial office hours". This is where the Regional Farm Business Management Specialist takes one day a month to sit at Hub On the Hill and offer walk-in services to farmers on all matters of Farm Business Topics. This allows farmers to come in as needed and also creates efficiency in serving the area. These office ours also allow individuals to email or leave questions at the Hub that are then answered when the specialist is in house and returned to the list serve to provide the knowledge to numerous farmers in the area.

On-Farm Research Examines Bird Repellent for Corn Seedlings

Kitty O'Neil

In 2017, the North Country Regional Ag Team and NNY farms participated in a statewide, multi-farm research trial to examine the efficacy of a seed treatment to limit bird damage to corn seedlings. Bird damage can be very serious in some fields. Crows, ravens, geese, turkeys, and blackbirds have all been known to cause significant economic damage in newly planted corn fields from time to time. In problem fields, damage is often persistent, where birds return to feed on corn seedlings year after year. A pilot study was conducted in 2016 with farmers in Delaware County. In that study, a bird repellent seed treatment (Avipel Shield) significantly reduced bird damage to newly planted corn. Avipel treatment resulted in an average of 2,629 more plants per acre compared with no seed treatment. Avipel Shield is classified as a non-toxic bio-pesticide and has been registered in NY as a 24(c) Special Local Need Registration since June 2017. Its active ingredient is anthraquinone, an extract from the rhubarb plant, and is designed to deter birds from feeding on treated corn seed by causing temporary digestive distress. Grant funding was secured from New York Farm Viability Institute for additional trials in the 2017 and 2018 seasons.

In 2017, trials were planted in 12 fields across the state, including 4 fields on 2 farms in Franklin County. North Country Regional Team and local association staff worked together to count populations while the plants were small, and at the end of the season to measure silage yields. Data from these 4 Franklin County fields was combined with data from 5 other farms to evaluate overall effects on the corn crop. The impact of Avipel on corn populations was significant, but slight. Avipel seed treatment resulted in an average of about 600 more plants per acre compared with no seed treatment, but the effect on yields was too small and not statistically significant. The trials will be repeated across NYS and NNY in 2018. CCE researchers hope to place these trials on farms with recurrent and important bird pressure.



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.”

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