

AGR190 Western New York Agriculture

Changing Perceptions

The Need

In the U.S. we enjoy the safest, most abundant food production systems in the world. In addition to being a food source, agriculture is also important to us economically and socially. Currently, the USDA estimates that agriculture accounts for more than 15 percent of our gross domestic product and 1 in 6 jobs are related to agriculture in some way. However the improved production efficiencies have greatly reduced the number of people working on farms. As a result the average U.S. consumer is often completely disconnected from modern agricultural practices. Recently, special interest groups have exploited this disconnect using misinformation to negatively influence consumer perception of the agricultural sector.

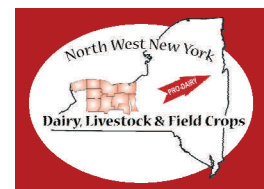


Extension's Response

In collaboration with Genesee Community College, the NWNY team developed a 3 credit course introducing the diversity of agriculture in Western New York, its economic impact in the region, and the challenges and changes that need to take place to meet future food demand. Twenty students learned about conventional and organic production systems, environmental issues, technologies, bioengineering, integrated pest management, animal care, labor issues and economics. Group discussion was encouraged. The course included multiple tours of dairy, fruit, and vegetable farms allowing students to connect first hand with producers and discuss challenges and opportunities within the industry. The final class provided students with an Agri-Business Career Exploration forum where industry representatives highlighted their careers and job opportunities within agriculture.

The Results

Providing students with the opportunity to learn from industry experts and interact directly with producers on farm changed some attitudes towards production agriculture. One student had the impression that farms were reckless with the environment, cruel to animals and run by large corporations. After completing the course she admitted that it seemed most farms are actually family-run businesses looking out for long-term soil and animal health. Other environmentally focused individuals with skepticism towards modern agriculture remarked favorably towards what they experienced on evaluations. Four students from Genesee Community College continued to pursue their interest in agriculture by later attending a Reproductive Anatomy & Artificial Insemination class put on by the NWNY Team.



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