



North Country Ag Advisor

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"Your trusted source for research-based knowledge"



Cornell Cooperative Extension North Country Regional Ag Team

February 6-7, 2018
Cow Comfort Conference
Holiday Inn, Liverpool

February 20, 2018
Calf Meetings
10-3pm Papa's Dairy, North Bangor

February 21, 2018
Calf Meetings
10-3pm Best Western, Canton

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 2

February 2018

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North Country Ag Advisor

Cornell Cooperative Extension of
Clinton, Essex, Franklin,
Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence
Counties

Ag Advisor is published by the North Country Regional
Ag Team collaborating with Harvest NY

Layout/Design: Tatum Langworthy

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

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."

Field Crops and Soils

Interpreting Soil Test Reports for Best Results

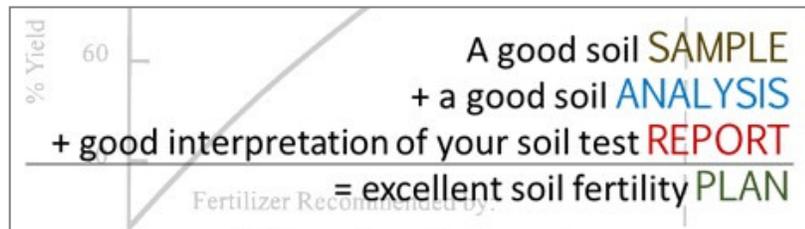
By Kitty O'Neil

Though we don't picture it this way, a lot of crop farming takes place in the off-season, at the kitchen table, in front of the computer, or as one tends to doze off in an armchair in front of the TV in the evening. Pouring over soil test reports tends to happen this way and it's a great time to do it.

Regular soil testing is an excellent habit. Cornell Cooperative Extension promotes regular soil testing for all commercial crop production. Fields should be sampled every 3 years to detect trends over time and comply with regulations. Sampling every 4 or 5 years may be sufficient for pastures or low intensity hay production. Definitely sample fields when cropping plans change or to bring an old field back into production. In the grand scheme of things, a soil analysis is both valuable and inexpensive information. Wonder why that hay field across from the neighbor's house isn't what it used to be? Where should you spread manure to get the most out of it? How often should you apply lime to the back pasture? Why did this field get so darn weedy? Is this a good spot for blueberries? An hour or less of soil sampling and a \$10-20 analysis fee will answer all of these questions and more.

The first step is a good, representative soil sample. Guidelines for soil sampling for field crops, horticultural crops, and fruits are available from various Cornell University websites. Links to a few are listed at the end of this article. Samples should be taken according to guidelines to ensure accurate interpretations and recommendations.

In NYS, Cornell uses the Morgan test for field crops and the Modified Morgan test for horticultural crops. These tests were originally developed in the early 1930s at the University of Connecticut for climate and soil types common the Northeast. Several state universities in the Northeast use these Morgan protocols because they are well-suited to the range of glaciated soil types encountered in the Northeast, and because we've since generated almost 90 years of crop performance data based on these soil tests. Labs in the Midwest, Southern US, and Western US typically use different analytical methods for those regional soil types and therefore recommendations based on those results may not translate well to Northeast farms. CCE usually recommends the DairyOne Lab in Ithaca and that landowners request Cornell analyses and recommendations to take advantage of the wealth of research contributing to NYS guidelines. Other labs



can provide quality analyses as well, but remember to inquire with any lab you choose about their soil testing methods to ensure you can accurately interpret those results for your fields and farm here in New York.

The results and recommendations provided on your soil test report are highly valuable and, for many crops, are based on decades of research. Data and graphs on the report reflect a combination of the chemical properties of the sample you submitted and the testing procedures used, within the context of the crop you intend to produce. Your report will list extractable P, K, Ca, Mg, Fe, Mn, Zn, and Al, along with pH and percent organic matter. The results of a soil test are of little use as raw analytical data. To relate your soil test results to the nutrient needs of your planned crop, the soil tests are effectively calibrated, using nutrient response data from research trials. Recommended fertilizer applications are also listed on your soil test report. In NYS, Cornell fertilizer recommendations are based on decades of research results for a wide range of crop plants under relevant Northeastern climatic conditions and on soils ranging from deficient to sufficient for each individual nutrient. Your soil results are compared to historical fertility trials conducted on similar soils in the Northeast. Lime recommendations are calculated similarly. Recommendations provided on your soil test report are tailored to the cropping plan that you included on your soil sample submission form. If you change your plan, you can often ask for new recommendations to be generated using the same soil test results. Beyond 2-3 years though, new samples and results would be best. These recommendations are equally important for conventional or organic farms, whether you're using synthetic fertilizers, manure, or compost. Organic farms simply choose permitted sources of nutrients under their certification while most conventional farms may use anything commercially available.

Continued on page 4

Fertilizer recommendations are given in the pounds of N, P₂O₅, and K₂O you should apply each year. Those 3 numbers correspond to the 3 numbers on your fertilizer bag. For example, 0-0-60 is potash, 46-0-0 is urea, or 11-52-0 is monoammonium phosphate. Your soil test results are indices that help determine if the soil supply of each nutrient is in low, medium, or high amounts. Your soil test report will not tell you how much of which specific types of fertilizer to buy at the seed and feed store, but that is easily calculated with soil test info. The report may give some guidance about how or when to apply recommended fertilizers. Guidance with these topics, if you have questions, can be provided inside some of the Cornell manuals listed below and/or by your local CCE Ag Educator or Regional Specialist.

A simple chemical soil test certainly doesn't tell you *everything* there is to know about your soils, but it does tell you which main nutrients are needed to meet the goals of your cropping plan. Armed with the information in a \$10-20 soil test, you're prepared to manage your crops for optimal yields, whether conventional, no-till, organic, or somewhere in between.

Additional resources:

- Soil Sampling for Field Crops. 2008. Keryk et al., Cornell University Nutrient Management Spear Program.
- Directions for Soil Sample Collection. 2017. Cornell Nutrient Analysis Laboratory.
- 2018 Cornell Guide for Integrated Field Crop Management. 2018. Cornell University Cooperative Extension.
- 2018 Cornell Integrated Crop and Pest Management Guidelines for Commercial Vegetable Production. 2018. Cornell University Cooperative Extension.



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Proper Weed Identification - Why Should You Care?

By Michael Hunter

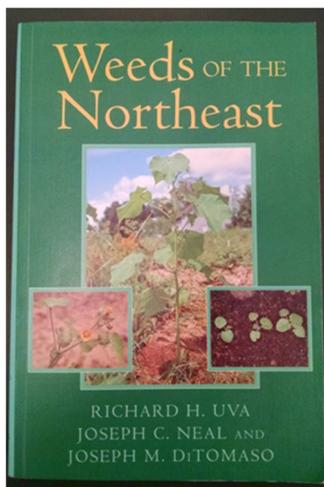
Proper weed identification is the first step in effectively managing weeds on your farm. If you are not exactly sure what weeds you are dealing with you may not be using the best control strategies for a particular weed. Weed identification is not always easy. It is even more difficult when you are asked to identify weeds at a very early growth stage. In most cases we need to control weeds when they are small and less competitive with the crop.

It is impossible to know all of the weeds found in our area, but you should at least know the major ones. Here is a list of the weeds that you should be familiar with: Redroot Pigweed, Common Lambsquarters, Common Ragweed, Velvetleaf, Wild Mustard, Barnyardgrass, Large Crabgrass, Foxtails (yellow, giant, and green), Fall Panicum, Witchgrass, Quackgrass, and Yellow Nutsedge. Three additional weeds of concern include Marestalk (horseweed), Tall Waterhemp, and Palmer Amaranth. Marestalk can be found in NNY. Tall Waterhemp and Palmer Amaranth are both members of the pigweed family. Tall Waterhemp is found in certain areas of NYS. While Palmer Amaranth has yet to be found in NYS, it is a weed to watch for as it is considered to be the most troublesome or difficult to control weed in the United States.

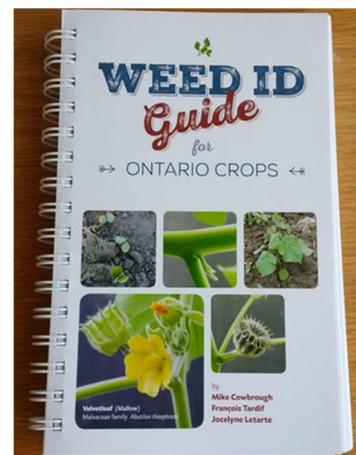
There are many weed identification tools available, but not all of these are easy to use or even applicable to our region. The following are two good weed identification field guides to consider adding to your resource list: *Weeds of the Northeast* and *Weed ID Guide for Ontario Crops* (see below).

Weeds of the Northeast contains 299 weeds found in the Northeastern United States. It is a great resource that is used by many field agronomists (ISBN 0801483344).

Weed ID Guide for Ontario Crops features over 120 common weed species found in and around agricultural crops. This guide is available in multiple formats including ePub format, downloadable PDF, print ready PDF, and print copy (<http://bit.ly/2qWTn4I> ISBN 9781366262394).

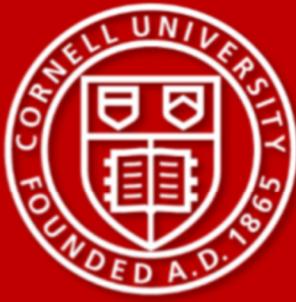


Available to buy online at:
<http://bit.ly/1JcrW8K>



Available to buy online at:
<http://bit.ly/2AtQTCP>

If you find a weed in your field that you cannot identify with certainty and would like assistance feel free to contact either Mike Hunter (315-788-8450) or Kitty O'Neil (315-854-1218).



Hay/Pasture School

Dates and Locations:

March 2, 2018

Farm Credit East, Burrville

Cost \$25.00

March 3, 2018

Best Western, Canton

Cost \$25.00

March 9, 2018

Miner Institute

Cost \$12.00

Time: 10-3pm

Farm Credit East, Burrville

- Choosing livestock for a Grazing System
- Pasture Management/Part 1-What should I plant
- SWCD or NRCS opportunities; Grazer Apprentice Program, Farm
- Pasture Management/Part 2-How should I plant
- Pasture Management/Part 3-Hay and other forage storage options

Best Western, Canton

- Choosing livestock for a Grazing System
- What to plant (soil sampling, look at what's there, do I need to re-plant?, using a mix to cover your bases) Does not have to be all one person – could be good to break into short topics – that applies to all of these).
- How to plant (inter seeding, frost seeding, over seeding, cover crops)
- other than dry hay bales

Miner Institute, Chazy

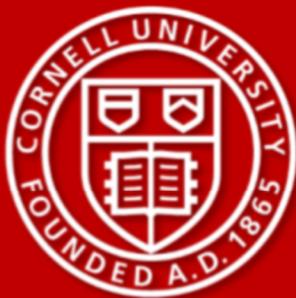
- How to store – storage
- What to plant
- Strategies for planting
- Hay and other forage storage options
- Partial Budget analysis of options
- SWCD- New GPS units and pasture management



Lunch is included.

Please call and register with Tatum Langworthy
at 315-788-8450 or tlm92@cornell.edu
or your local Ag Educator in your county.

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.



Dates and Locations:

February 20, 2018

Papa's Dairy, North Bangor

February 21, 2018

Best Western, Canton

February 22, 2018

CCE of Lewis County

Time: 10-3pm

Upcoming Series of Calf Meetings

Topics:

- A day in the life of a Calf - Dr. Trent L. Lartz, D.V.M. Milk Specialties
- Covers: colostrum management, nutrition, calf health and general calf management aspects
- Local calf research updates - Kim Morrill, Ph.D - Regional Dairy Specialist

Hands-on activities:

- Evaluating total protein and IgG in calf serum
- Evaluating colostrum quality
- Evaluating cleanliness of feeding equipment
- Calf necropsy

Please feel free to bring blood samples, colostrum samples and/or feeding equipment from your own farm to evaluate.



Trent L. Lartz, D.V.M.

Dr. Lartz grew up in northwest Illinois working on dairy farms at an early age. He graduated from the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine in 1998. After working for a couple mixed animal practices in Pennsylvania, he and his wife, Amy Hinton, D.V.M., started Mountain View Veterinary Services in 2003. This is a mixed animal practice with four veterinarians in Shippensburg, PA. Dr. Lartz's focus was on dairy herd management, health and profitability. Since 2008, Dr. Lartz has been providing independent consulting to dairy and beef operations across Pennsylvania. In 2016, he joined Milk Specialties Global Animal Nutrition as a Dairy Technical Specialist and continues to be a managing part of the mixed animal practice with his wife.

NO COST. Lunch is included.

Please call and register with Tatum Langworthy
at 315-788-8450
or tlm92@cornell.edu

or online at https://reg.cce.cornell.edu/2018calfmeetings_10512

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Providing Science Based Solutions

Dairy Farming: It's a Passion, but it's Hard.

By Kimberley Morrill



This cow, Cinnamon, she got me hooked. She was my gateway drug. She was my 4-H project that turned into my college fund, that became a career. She continues to be my inspiration and dedication (my kids will always be my motivation).

Cinnamon was born on January 1st (year is not of importance), and I claimed her as mine. She was the first Red & White born on the farm. Being daddy's little girl, Cinnamon got put in my name and she became my project. Cinnamon spent many hours on a halter being led around the dooryard, and then to every 4-H fair.

Cinnamon's first calf was a heifer "Cameo" who, similar to her dam, would be treated like a new puppy. Cinnamon was sired by a "jumper bull", but became something special, and in 1999 she was Grand Champion at the International Spring R&W show. For a teenager this was the most exciting thing in the world. When we got home, Cinnamon was dried off, calved in again (for the last time), and went on a flush program. Cinnamon made lots of embryos, and had numerous daughters, but eventually that came to an end. My dad has a 3 strikes rule, and after 3 failed flushes Cinnamon's name appeared on the cull list. It was springtime, so I bought a little leeway and she was able to live out the spring and summer in the dry cow lot - not the most profitable or realistic business decision, but I wasn't ready to say goodbye. As fall came to a close and winter was upon us, the barn was full and Cinnamon wasn't paying her way. Her time had come to take one more trailer ride. That Monday night I said goodbye to a cow that gave me lots of memories, opened many doors, built lifelong friendships, and provided me with opportunities I never knew existed. Cinnamon may have been seen as "just a cow" but she was mine. We had a history together and she was responsible for the start of my love of the dairy industry.

Now, every day I get to work with dairy farmers and it is the most rewarding job. I love my farmers, I love seeing them make progress, and I love seeing their dreams come

to fruition. Over the last couple of years my job has shifted. We might still be working on projects and ideas for the future, but more and more often I'm someone to talk to, someone to vent to, or someone to commiserate with. It is no secret that dairy farming is a stressful business and times are tough. These farmers have put everything into their businesses and their cows are part of their family. Frustrations range from current milk price to labor to consumer demands and more. Depression, exhaustion, mental illness, and suicide have become topics of conversation. Farming is a stressful occupation because many of the factors that affect agricultural production are beyond the control of the producers. Emotional well-being of farmers and their families is often intertwined with these changes. Many people believe these topics are taboo, and shouldn't be talked about. However, we need to be talking about these issues. We need to normalize these topics and support each other.

Depression, stress, anxiety, financial worries, marital difficulties, alcohol consumption, drug addiction, and gambling additions have increased in farmers over the last couple years. In December I had a farmer tell me that he thinks he needs to talk to someone. He was frustrated with the hours he was working, but he wasn't seeing any progress, and his returns were getting smaller and smaller. He was starting to take his frustrations home with him and it was impacting his relationship with his wife and children. He didn't think talking to a doctor would help; last time he told his doctor he was stressed out the doctor told him to go on vacation for a week, or maybe it was time to take a sabbatical from work. Unfortunately, most doctors don't understand farming. After a long conversation, and a pot of coffee later, it was decided that he would reach out to his doctor to talk about depression and take his wife out to dinner. I recently spoke to this farmer and he said he and his wife went out to dinner and decided they needed to make more time for each other, as well as time to talk about the farm and time to talk about everything but the farm. He also reached out to his doctor, who referred him to another doctor who understood agriculture and has been able to help him work through his feelings and better communicate what is going on.

Depression is not one size fits all, but at the end of the day it needs to be addressed. Reaching out for help may seem like the hardest step, and it often is, but it's the most important.

No one can help you if they don't know you are struggling. Reaching out can be done over a cup of coffee with a good friend, a trusted colleague, or spouse. Maybe you feel more comfortable reaching out to a medical professional and for some, remaining anonymous and reaching out to a hotline may be the first step.

The U.S. suicide rate in agriculture (farmers, laborers, ranchers, fishers, and lumber harvesters) are nearly 5 times that of the general population. This is even greater than veterans, and unfortunately echoes trends observed globally. In Australia, one farmer commits suicide every 4 days, while in the UK one farmer takes his life every week. Why are the rates so much higher in farmers? Suggested causes include: social isolation, potential for financial losses, barriers to and willingness to seek mental health services, and access to lethal means.

What can you do?

- Start the discussion. Have a family meeting, a partners meeting, or a team meeting. How is everybody doing, what are your concerns, do you have ideas you want to share? If it's easier, have people put things in writing. There are lots of ways to have positive communication so find one that works for you. Work with a moderator to help the flow of the conversation and to prevent one person from taking over or shutting others down. The moderator could be a trusted business consultant, an extension educator, or a member of the clergy.
- Be a friend, a neighbor, a caring person. If you know someone who is struggling, let them know you are there for them. We all need some encouragement, someone to vent to, and some who cares about us. Be that person.
- Reach out for help. FarmNet, 1-800-547-FARM (3276), Cornell Cooperative Extension, and local clergy are all options to reach out to if you want to have a one-on-one conversation.



- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or Live Online Chat. If you or someone you know is suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When asked why they are still farming? Most farmers will tell you, it's their heritage, a love of the land, a passion for working with animals, the feeling

of feeding the world. What ever it may be, farmers are some of the most honest, dedicated, hardworking, and caring groups of people in this world.

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Our associates love what they do. How about you? Send us your selfie at FarmCreditEast.com/WeAreYou

Calf Treatment Protocols

By Kimberley Morrill

The U.S. dairy industry is committed to producing safe, abundant, and affordable milk and dairy beef of the highest quality. Healthy animals mean safe food, and disease prevention is the key to keeping calves and cows healthy. Among the measures available to treat and prevent the outbreak and spread of animal diseases in the nation's dairy cattle, the responsible use of antibiotics has a positive effect on animal health and well-being while keeping the milk supply safe for everyone. When dairy animals get sick and treatment is necessary, producers and veterinarians use drugs judiciously. Antibiotics should be used appropriately to prevent residues from occurring in milk or dairy beef sent to market.

According to the most recent USDA – National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) report, 12.5% of pre-weaned heifers in the U.S. are affected by respiratory illness, with 93.4% of these calves being treated with antibiotics. To provide local data, 13.3% of calves in the 6 Northern New York counties had a respiratory challenge in June, 2015, while 14.5% of calves had a respiratory illness in the winter of 2016 – 2017. During both of these studies respiratory illness affected up to 50% of the calves on a per farm basis.

Calf respiratory disease is associated with decreased average daily gain, increased age at first calving, decreased milk production in first lactation, and increased culling in the first 30 days. All of these factors lead to an increased cost of production and decreased revenue. Often times we do not think about the treatment protocol or the cost of treatment and the long-term impact this may have on an operation. Treatment protocols ensure that cattle are treated in a manner that is legal, minimize the risk of residues, and treat the illness. Unfortunately, protocols do not always match up to what occurs at the time of treatment. This can lead to an increase in residue risk, an increase in cost, an increase in time treated, and overuse of antibiotics. In developing any type of treatment protocol it is important to work with your herd veterinarian. Treatment protocols should include:

- Disease identification
 - ⇒ It is important for everyone who has animal care responsibilities to have the same classification system. Is it respiratory challenges, pneumonia, or an “off calf”. At some point in time we’ve all commented “that calf looks off”. “Looking off” is not a diagnosis.
- Treatment protocol
 - ⇒ How should the animal be treated and with what?
 - ⇒ What is the duration of treatment?
- Record keeping
 - ⇒ Treatment records need to be kept for all classes of animals on a dairy farm, not just the lactating cows.
 - ⇒ Treatment records should include: animal ID, reason for treatment, drug administered, amount administered, route (IV, IM, etc...), date, duration of treatment, withdrawal times, and who administered the drug.

In 2018 we will be conducting a calf treatment study across Northern New York to evaluate protocol compliance for calfhoo illnesses, and the treatment cost associated of calfhoo illness. If you are interested in participating in this study please contact Kimberley Morrill (603-568-1404; kmm434@cornell.edu).



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prodairy.cals.cornell.edu/dairy-acceleration/

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DAIRY WELLNESS MAKES A DIFFERENCE™



Dairy Cattle Behavior in the Maternity Pen

By Lindsay Ferlito

Designing a good maternity area is a crucial part of minimizing transition cow issues, calving complications, and calf health. There are multiple designs that can provide cows what they need, from individual box stalls to a group bedded-pack. Regardless of style, however, a maternity pen should provide the following: 12x12 square feet per cow, a quick release headlock to restrain cows, access to feed and water, deep bedding that is soft, dry, and cleaned regularly, good lighting and ventilation, and located near a vet-room or office for storage of supplies.



Another feature of maternity pens that has been receiving a lot of attention is providing cows shelter or privacy. Dr. Katy Proudfoot (The Ohio State) and researchers from the University of British Columbia and Denmark's Aarhus University have conducted several studies to better understand dairy cattle maternal behavior and how to best provide cows what they want and need at calving.

One study housed cows alone or in pairs in a large maternity pen where they could calve in an open bedded-pack or they could enter an enclosed "shelter" area (see picture to the right). Individually-housed cows calved more in the shelter, especially when the calving took place during the day. Pair-housed cows didn't show a strong preference, but did try to distance themselves from their pen mate before calving.

In a follow-up study, cows were moved to a sheltered calving pen that was adjacent to the group pen they came from. The sheltered pens had one half that was enclosed and another half that provided them a window to see their previous pen mates. Cows preferred to calve in the enclosed side, not the half with the window. A third study provided 3 levels of isolation by changing the size of the window/opening in the isolated pen. They didn't find a

major preference between treatments, but did note that cows with longer calving times chose to calve in the most secluded pen. This is not indicating what the cause and effect is, but does suggest certain cows have different calving needs and behaviors.

Overall, the data suggest that cows will seek isolation or seclusion when calving, especially during the day. Dr. Katy Proudfoot will be presenting data from her latest study looking at cow behavior in the maternity pen at the 2nd annual Cow Comfort Conference, in Syracuse, NY, Feb 6-7, 2018. Visit the website below for more information on how to register or contact Lindsay Ferlito (607-592-0290, Lc636@cornell.edu).

<https://ncrat.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=622>



Photo courtesy of the University of British Columbia Animal Welfare Program.

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Farm Business

Farm Finance 101

By Kelsey O'Shea

Ever wish you paid more attention in that accounting class? Maybe you're a bit rusty on financial ratios, or looking to learn something new. Each month I will go over an accounting or finance topic as it relates to your farm business, so stay tuned.

This month is on tax terms:

- **Gross Farm Income** is the total of the following amounts from your tax return. This value is used in the calculation and tests for a number of federal and state credits.
 - Gross farm income from Schedule F (Form 1040).
 - Gross farm rental income from Form 4835.
 - Gross farm income from Schedule E (Form 1040), Parts II and III.
 - Gains from the sale of livestock used for draft, breeding, sport, or dairy purposes reported on Form 4797.
- **Adjusted Gross Income** is defined as gross income minus adjustments to income. Adjustments to income reduce the amount of income you have that will be taxable. Adjustments to income could include: IRA's, alimony, bad debt reduction, moving expenses, student loan interest, tuition and fees, and educator expenses.
- **Taxable Income** is your adjusted gross income less the standardized or itemized deductions and exemptions. This is the number that your federal income tax is calculated from.

You must evaluate your particular situation to determine whether the standard or the itemized deduction is larger and then take the designated number of exemptions. Once federal income tax is calculated, nonrefundable credits are applied. Then any additional taxes (self-employment tax, AMT, household employment tax, etc.) are added back to arrive at your total tax, to which refundable credits are applied.

- **Refundable v. non-refundable credits:** Non-refundable credits will only detract from taxes owed, so you can only utilize the credit to the extent that there is tax owed. Whereas refundable credits will detract from tax owed and any additional amount of credit left over is returned to you as a refund.

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Crop Insurance is Cost of Business in New York Crop Farms

By Kelsey O'Shea



Cornell University

"My favorite time of year is harvest time. I enjoy running the combine and harvesting crops," said David Jordan, of Union Springs, NY. Jordan was raised on a dairy, crop, and vegetable farm in Cayuga County, NY. He left agriculture for a time, returning in 1992. He hasn't looked back.

"Being your own boss I like," he said. "The physical work I like."

He operates Jordan Farms with his wife Donna and their son, David, who joined the operation in 1994. They grow corn, soybeans, and hay on 1,250 owned and rented acres. The farm grows certified organic, non-GMO, and conventional crops. As changes come to agriculture, the Jordan family is ready to adapt. Along with a growing number of farms across the United States, Jordan Farms now considers crop insurance part of the routine of running a business. Crop insurance is available for more than 100 crops in the United States. Farmers buy insurance through private companies. In some cases, the federal government subsidizes a portion of the premiums. Insurance may be paid out for yield or revenue loss to crops, at rates based on the amount of insurance purchased.

"In today's economy, crop insurance is a necessity," Jordan said. "We use crop insurance as a financial tool. By the time you pay for seed, fertilizer, and chemicals, you've got quite a lot invested. It doesn't take long at all. Input costs are so much," he continued. "If you have one bad year where you don't get a crop, you may be out of business."

As Dave and Donna took over the farm from Dave's parents, they will one day see their son David at the helm. Leaving the farm in healthy financial shape is important to the family. They have expanded the business to include a custom crop operation that plants from 1,000-1,500 acres of soybeans and harvests some 4,000 acres of wheat and other small grains, soybeans, and corn for farmers in central New York.

"We need to find time to get our own crops done," Jordan joked. He added that business innovation and financial management, including crop insurance, "is kind of a necessity if you are going to continue to grow the business, especially with today's prices."

Another driver of the decision to buy crop insurance is farmers' longtime friend and foe – the weather.

"The weather patterns anymore swing so much. One year it is dry as a bone. The next, you can't shut the faucet off," Jordan said.

The farm has been buying crop insurance since the 1990s, and has had only four years of payouts, all weather-related. In fact, three of the payout years occurred from 2015-2017. In 2015, the farm received insurance payments for yield loss after heavy rain left corn underwater. In 2016, there was a drought. In 2017, the farm collected prevented planting losses after heavy rainfall kept the farmers off the fields too long to plant crops.

"The way the weather has swung from year to year drives the need for prevented planting," Jordan said.

A farmer cannot control the weather or the global economy, but crop insurance offers one tool for controlling profit and loss at the farmgate.

"Farming is a lifestyle," Jordan said. "It's a good life. It's not real profitable, but it's a good life."

This material is funded in partnership by USDA, Risk Management Agency, under award number RM17RMETS524020.

Cornell University delivers crop insurance education in New York State in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency.

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Groundhogs

By Paul Hetzler, CCE St. Lawrence County

Researchers are still puzzling over the age-old question, “How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” but I may have an answer. Re-brand the woodchuck.

Like the words skunk and moose, woodchuck (*wojak*) is a Native American term, Algonquin in this case. I don’t know its literal translation, but I suspect it means “fat fur-ball that can inhale your garden faster than you can say Punxsutawney Phil,” or something pretty close to that.

Too bad that to English speakers the name woodchuck implies the critters are employed in the forest-products industry. They haven’t the teeth for chewing wood, nor do they have any use for wood in their burrows (exhaustive studies have concluded woodchuck dens aren’t paneled).

Much as I respect the origin of “woodchuck,” I’m in favor of sticking to one of its other names, groundhog, which is more descriptive. Not only do these rotund herbivores reside underground, they’re such gluttons that I’m pretty sure even swine call them hogs. Tellingly, another moniker is “whistle-pig,” referring both to groundhogs’ warning call and their voracious appetites.

Native to most of North America, from southern Alaska to Georgia, groundhogs are a type of rodent called a marmot. They’re related to other marmots and to ground squirrels out west, but in the northeast they have no close kin. Given what a marmot can eat, that’s a mercy.

They may be gluttons, but they’re not lazy. Groundhogs dig extensive burrows up to 5’ deep and 40’ long, each having two to five entrances. Supposedly, the average groundhog moves 35 cubic feet of soil excavating its burrow (I’d like to know who measures these things).

Mature groundhogs in wilderness areas typically measure 15-25” long and weigh 5-9 lbs. Given access to lush gardens or tasty alfalfa, though, they can reach 30” long and weigh as much as 30 lbs. Now that’s a ground *hog*. Needless to say, their habit of vacuuming up fields and gardens has given them a bad name in some circles.

Leaf rustling is bad enough, but this hole-digging hobby really riles farmers. Groundhog holes and soil piles can injure livestock, weaken foundations and damage equipment. Many a farmer trying to mow hay has cursed the groundhog when

the haybine “finds” a soil pile. Hard to appreciate their cuteness while you replace cutterbar knives for the third time in a day.

True hibernators, groundhogs usually den up in October, with their winter body temperature dropping to 50F and their heart slowing to a few beats per minute. Groundhogs might emerge in February in Pennsylvania, but up north you won’t find one blearily sniffing around for a mate that early. In the southern Adirondacks in late March I once saw a burrow entrance with a halo of dirt scattered on the snow from where the critter had recently burst out, a squint-eyed dust mop looking for love. Who knows if it went back in for a nap after seeing winter had not yet departed.

The notion that sun on February 2 means a late spring began in ancient Europe. That date marks the pagan festival of Imbolc, halfway between winter solstice and spring equinox. Imbolc was supplanted by Candelmas as Christianity spread, but both traditions reference the “sunny equals more winter, and cloudy means spring” idea.

Mostly because Europe lacked groundhogs, Groundhog Day was invented in the New World, first popping up among Pennsylvania Germans in the mid-1800s. Though Punxsutawney Phil was the original prognosticating marmot, others like Warton Willie in Warton, Ontario, Jimmy the Groundhog in Sun Prairie, WI, and General Beauregard Lee of Lilburn, GA, followed.

We know how much ground a groundhog can hog: a lot, especially if beans and peas are growing on said ground. I say we pull those researchers off the perennial Woodchuck-Chucking Quantification Project and have them find a way to ensure that Groundhog Day is overcast so we can get an early dismissal from winter.

BATS! BATS! BATS! - Good for the Environment

By David Komorowski, NRCS

What do inmates at the Watertown Correctional Facility and Boy Scout Troop 586 from Adams, NY, have in common? They both worked together to build 20 bat houses that will be given away for free at a meeting on March 1st at 6:30pm.

What is a bat house? An artificial “house” made of wood designed to allow bats to live in and have babies during the non-winter months.

Please join us to learn about the importance of bats in our environment, their amazing ability to eat thousands of mosquitos at night, and why their insatiable appetites for agricultural pests can help limit the amount of pesticides being sprayed on farmland.

Robin Niver, US Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Biologist, Kim Farrell, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Biologist, and Angie Ross, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation Biologist, will all join forces to educate and field questions from the audience about anything and everything related to bats.

There will be a drawing to see who wins each of the 20 bat houses. The meeting is free, open to the public, and takes place Thursday, March 1st, 6:30pm, at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County, 203 North Hamilton St., Watertown, NY. Light refreshments will be provided.

Please RSVP by February 16th to David Komorowski, USDA-NRCS Resource Conservationist, 315-221-5869.





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Retirement Announcements



Ron Kuck, Dairy and Livestock Educator, Jefferson County

After 11 great years, I have decided to transition to a part time position with Jefferson County Extension. I would like to thank all of you for allowing me to be a small part of your farming business. I would like to give special thanks to Art Baderman, Mike Hunter, and Peggy Murray, who from just working with them, gave me instant credibility among the agricultural community of Jefferson County. The farmers and producers of NNY can feel very fortunate to have such stellar support from their local ag professionals and Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators.

As dairy farming has become more difficult and challenging, I would like to leave you with an appeal for 2018. Some are my own words and some are remarks from former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, which I found very suitable for today's world.

Animals have two emotions that drive their decision in the face of stress: Fight or Flight. You make every effort so they do not exhibit these emotions that will impact the well-being of your animals. We humans have two emotions that drive our decisions in the face of stress: Love and Fear. Love has many manifestations: compassion, gratitude, kindness, and joy. Fear often manifests itself as cynicism, anger, jealousy, and anxiety. Promote positive emotions for ourselves and the animals we are tasked to care for. Emotional well-being is a resource we can draw upon to do more and perform better. It allows us to be resilient in the face of adversity.

Keep in touch. Emails, phone calls and texts are welcomed. All the best in 2018.
Ron Kuck



Harry FeFee, Ag Outreach Educator, Franklin County

Good Luck, Harry! Harry Fefee has been the face of CCE Franklin to dairy farmers for the past 6 and a half years. He carried updates from the office, research findings, and program announcements out to the farms and returned with questions and needs of the farmers. Harry took the "new" specialists, Kim Morrill and Kitty O'Neil, and then Lindsay Ferlito, under his wing. He introduced them to farmers, guided them around the county, and assisted them with research trials.

Harry's friendship with the Amish and Mennonite farmers who have moved into the area aided our understanding of their needs and helped CCE bring information to them. When Harvest New York began the process of starting a Produce Market, it was Harry who aided in connecting them with the right people.

Over the years, Harry has been a member and/or officer of just about every agricultural and farmer organization in the region. With those connections, he was a turn-to guy for knowledge of who, when, and where to go for tips and leads on just about anything to do with farming in the North Country.

Harry was brought in to CCE Franklin on a very temporary assignment to help in the transition when a long-time dairy educator retired and new dairy and crop specialists were brought on. Six months turned into over six years. Harry may be retiring, but we can all be certain he will still be involved in some way with farming. We wish him all the very best.

CCE North Country Regional Ag Team
203 North Hamilton Street
Watertown, New York 13601

What's Happening in the Ag Community

2018 Cow Comfort Conference, February 6-7, 2018, call Tatum Langworthy to register, 315-788-8450.

Value-Added Meat Series, February 3-April 21, 2018, St. Lawrence County.

Value-Added Dairy and Meat Production, February 12, 2018, 10am-2pm, Lewis County CCE office, Lowville, NY.

Basic Farm Finance Program, February 12, 2018, 7-9pm, Clinton County CCE office, Plattsburgh, NY.

Calf Program, February 20, 2018, Malone; February 21, 2018, Canton; February 22, 2018, Lowville, NY.

Hay/Pasture School, see page 6 for more information.

Herdmanager Training Program, March 12+19, 2018, Malone; March 13+20, 2018, Burrville, NY.

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