



COWS CROPS & CRITTERS



A partnership between Cornell University & the
CCE Associations of Allegany, Cattaraugus,
Chautauqua, Erie & Steuben Counties.

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Southwest New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Program



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Photo by: Kelly Torrey

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By law and purpose, Cooperative Extension is dedicated to serving the people on a non-discriminatory basis. Newsletter layout and design by Kelly Torrey.

For accommodations or accessibility concerns, please contact our specialists at least one week prior to the scheduled event. If you need information provided in a different format, call 585-268-7644 ext. 10.

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I've been lucky to spend a good chunk of my summer becoming a drone pilot for the team, and we're finally starting to get some opportunities to fly our drone out to fields and collect some data from our neonicotinoid research plots. As we learn more and gain a better understanding of how drone imagery can help growers make management decisions, I plan to share it all in articles like this one.

Drone Imaging Technology:

Our main goal when using drone imaging technology is to get a spatial snapshot of the health of a field, identifying which areas are doing well and which areas are in need of some help. This snapshot map is created by combining different types of camera technology with different measurement metrics called vegetative indices. A vegetation index (VI) is a calculation that takes photographic information about different wavelengths of light reflected by plants in order to estimate the health of those plants.

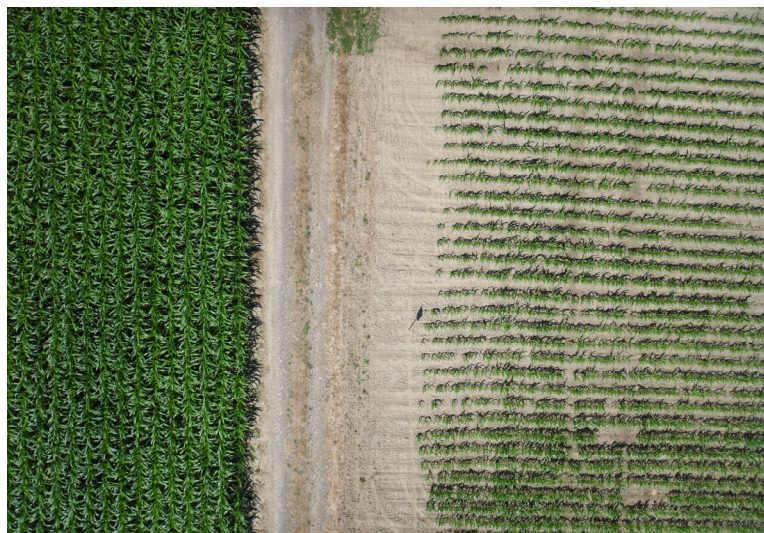


Photo credit: John Pirrung

Compared to satellite or tractor-mounted imaging technology, drones have several advantages. They can be flown close to the ground and can capture very high-resolution images while still staying above the plants and out of the field. They are also generally easier to deploy and can have more flexible timing, though strong winds can delay flights and heavy cloud cover can make it more difficult for aerial cameras to take accurate photographs.

There are two main types of camera technologies used when imaging field crops:

- **RGB:**
 - Standard red-green-blue digital camera technology, like the kind your phone camera uses
 - Good for scouting and identifying basic issues like water pooling, stand gaps, or patches of weeds
- **Multispectral:**
 - Captures near-infrared and red-edge wavelengths of light that human eyes can't see
 - Necessary to calculate vegetative indices like NDVI or NDRE, which can help you measure canopy vigor

Generally speaking, healthy plant tissue will reflect near-infrared light and absorb red light. Vegetative indices like NDVI and others measure the contrast between the amount of reflection and absorption identified in the aerial imagery. Different indices excel in different situations; for example:

- **NDVI** - Measures plant vigor, vegetation density, overall "greenness"
- **GNDVI** – Measures nitrogen status and chlorophyll levels, helpful for early stress detection
- **NDRE** – Measures vegetation health and chlorophyll levels, and can handle dense canopies

There are many other indices that can be used depending on the imaging technology (ex. satellites) but these are ones you're most likely to see chosen in agricultural contexts. For the most comprehensive results, multiple flights can be taken with different cameras attached and analyzed with different methods, providing as much information as possible to inform management decisions.

Who Can Actually Fly?

Any flight used to monitor anything about your farm (stand counts, weeds, wet spots, etc.) all count as commercial flights, even if no money changes hands. In order to fly a drone for commercial purposes in the US, you must be certified as a commercial drone (UAV) pilot under FAA Part 107. This involves completing a course, passing an exam, and registering your drone online with the FAA, all of which have associated fees and recurring requirements. And of course, the drones and cameras vary wildly in price, but most cost several thousand dollars for a full kit, and recent FCC rulings have complicated the market by banning certain foreign-made drones. With all that being said, many farmers will likely find it much more convenient to hire a local drone service instead of operating their own. Though, if you are interested in using a drone yourself, supplemental grants may be available depending on your use case.

WHEN IMAGING FIELD CROPS, THERE ARE TWO MAIN TYPES OF CAMERA TECHNOLOGIES: RGB AND MULTISPECTRAL.



DRONES CAN WORK HAND IN HAND WITH SCOUTING EFFORTS, HELPING PRIORITIZE AREAS IN NEED OF ATTENTION.

Turning Images Into Data and Decisions:

Once you have the raw images taken by the drone camera, the images can be stitched together with software to create large, high-resolution, color-coded maps. The final product will look different depending on the vegetative index used, but generally you'll be left with a heatmap showing healthier areas in green and stressed/less healthy areas in red.

It's important to know that the maps created through drone imaging can be extremely detailed, but in the end they can only show you **where** a field is struggling, not **why** it's happening. Most of the time a drone can tell you specific areas of your field that you should take a closer look at, but it can't replace boots-on-the-ground scouting when it comes to actually diagnosing the cause of the issue. For many growers, drones can work hand in hand with ground scouting for certain issues, saving time by helping you prioritize which areas need more attention.

So, what issues can drones help you identify? Basically, anything that visibly reduces chlorophyll content, canopy density, or plant height. This includes:

- Water-related stress (ponding, drainage issues, drought stress)
- Nutrient deficiency (nitrogen deficiency is particularly visible)
- Mechanical issues (uneven fertilizer applications, gaps from planter skips)
- Soil issues (compaction, erosion, variation from soil types within a field)
- Pests and disease (insect feeding, disease pressure, weed patches)

In all of these cases, the drone imaging, whether you're using NDVI maps or just regular RGB photos, can help you identify areas where crops are struggling, and can maybe even give you some idea of the cause. However, you'll still want to check out the area in person to ensure that you've properly confirmed the cause yourself. This may involve collecting additional data like soil samples to understand why the plants are struggling.

Either way, by narrowing down specific areas facing issues, you can be sure that you aren't wasting time or resources by treating areas that are doing fine. Like most precision ag technology, drones allow you to identify specific areas that need specific inputs, instead of just doing a blanket treatment. And in cases that involve spray treatments, it doesn't matter what you're spraying, you can save time and money by only treating the areas that need it

The Big Picture:

Drones and drone imaging can provide a whole new view of your fields and can generate massive amounts of data to help inform your decisions. However, like most new technology in ag, drone imaging will be most helpful when used in tandem with traditional scouting on-foot, helping you scout more efficiently and highlighting problem areas you may not have been aware of.

Personally, I find it really fun to just be able to see everything from a bird's-eye view. Even with modern satellite mapping, nothing beats a live feed from a drone flying 100 feet above a field. It provides a whole new perspective and makes it easier to see large-scale differences that would be almost impossible to see at ground level.

Resources:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2773126X23000667>

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/whatscroppingup/category/precision-ag/>

<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/farm-coach/2023-03-22-faa-enforces-requirements-farmers-operating-drone>

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/SPES/spes-752.html

PEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES SURVEY FOR FIELD CROPS

Cornell University and Cornell Integrated Pest Management are seeking input from New York field crop producers to better understand current pest management practices, the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and how growers make pest management decisions. The survey also asks about growers' expectations regarding future pest management challenges and management options.

Your responses will help identify research priorities, guide Extension programming, and improve the information and decision-support resources available to New York producers.

The survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and is confidential.

https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6hZGmKLv5REYciW

OUR TEAM IS USING DRONES TO CAPTURE DATA ON OUR REGION'S RESEARCH PLOTS AS PART OF THE STATE-WIDE NEONICOTINOID RESEARCH.



THE PEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES SURVEY IS ANONYMOUS.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation have announced a second round of funding through the NYS Meat Processing Expansion Grant. This program funds the expansion and retention of existing licensed meat processing facilities and the establishment of new licensed meat processing facilities in the state to increase opportunities for beef, pork, small ruminants, poultry, and other meat farmers to process meat within the state. The goal is to increase the market viability of NYS sourced meat.

Program Overview:

- \$4.7M in funding is available.
- Projects can range from \$50,000 - \$250,000.
- There is a 20% match requirement for this program.
- It is a cost-reimbursement grant.
- Both established and new enterprises can apply, including for-profit businesses currently operating under USDA-Inspected, NYS 20C, or NYS 5A 20,000 Bird Small Enterprise Exemption licenses or who will secure such licensure during the grant period. Start-up enterprises must demonstrate sufficient financial and land resources and technical knowledge at the time of the application.
- The application deadline is September 23rd, 5pm.

What can be funded (not limited to):

- Renovation of buildings or facilities
- Rehabilitation of buildings or facilities
- Purchase, shipping and installation of equipment
 - Equipment that increases the safety of processed meat products, such as metal detectors, is eligible
- Acquisition of equipment or pre-fabricated facilities
- Expansion of buildings or facilities
- Professional Services: design, legal, permitting and other professional services related to assessing, designing, or approving the proposed project after grant award (pre-award costs are NOT allowable)
- The cost of training requirements for 144 annual hours of Related Instruction for Apprenticeships as required by the NYS Department of Labor.

For more information and to apply, visit: <https://www.hvadc.org/nys-meat-processing-grant>

There will be a virtual office hours on Wednesday, August 26th from 12pm – 1pm. You can register for this webinar here: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IVk3udi3TpW-iiGvnnaOnw#/registration



Photo credit: Amy Barkley

OUR TEAM CAN HELP REVIEW BUSINESS PLANS AND IDEAS FOR STARTING OR EXPANDING A PROCESSING FACILITY FOR THIS GRANT PROGRAM.



FOR HELP REGISTERING FOR THE OFFICE HOURS, REACH OUT TO AMY.
AMB544@CORNELL.EDU
716-640-0844

I've had an Apple smartwatch for years, and I really only used it to track my workouts. I never actually did anything with the workout data, but it felt like the "right" thing to do. I got into the mindset that if I didn't log my workout on the watch, it didn't count—which obviously isn't true. I just liked collecting as much data as possible. Over time I finally started using that information differently. Instead of just collecting numbers, I spent time looking at trends and using the data to make more informed lifestyle decisions. As a researcher, I don't think there's anything wrong with collecting lots of data. However, data is ultimately meaningless if we never do anything with it.

With so many emerging technologies in the dairy industry, it's hard not to be drawn in by the promise of collecting more information on your cows. The question I would ask is: Are you currently using the data you already collect to its fullest potential, and will the new data actually allow you to do something you can't already accomplish with your existing information?

One thing we want to avoid is data fatigue, collecting so much information that we don't know where to start or simply aren't using all of it. A 2022 paper published by researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison surveyed dairy farmers about data management and governance and reported some fascinating results (Fadul-Pacheco et al., 2022). They found that while 63% of farmers relied on the data they collected for daily decision making, 62.5% of them reported that they spent less than an hour a day exploring and analyzing the numbers. The authors hypothesized that high workload, lack of time, and lack of tools to provide farmers with relevant info in a user-friendly way could be the reasoning behind the low data engagement. In other words, most farms probably don't have a data collection problem. They have a data utilization problem.

The dairy industry as a whole does a great job at collecting data and a recent Hoard's Dairyman article by Kylene Anderson, "Humans have a fraction of the data," highlighted the potential that could be realized if data are leveraged together across the industry. Unfortunately, there tends to be a gap between the amount of information available and our ability to effectively use it on farm. This is where collaboration with your community is key. Dairy farmers have access to their veterinarian, nutritionist, sales representatives, and extension professionals who all care deeply about the success of the farms they work with. While these partnerships can help lessen data fatigue, it's important that producers understand how their data are being managed and shared.

There seems to be a lack of transparency surrounding data-sharing protocols with only 34.3% of farmers knowing who has access to their farm data and only 19% of farmers reporting they signed a data sharing agreement in the last 5 years (Fadul-Pacheco et. al, 2022). As an industry, we should continue striving to improve data transparency and increase education around data governance on farm so producers can feel confident and informed about how their data are being used.

If you have ideas about how you'd like to better utilize your farm's data—or you're not sure where to start—feel free to reach out. I'd be happy to help develop a data utilization plan and even explore grant opportunities that could help you make better use of your data and improve decision-making on your farm. Katie Callero – 607-422-6788 – krc85@cornell.edu

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Southwest New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Program

Got Data? NOW WHAT?



WHEN NEW TECH STARTS GETTING OLD: DATA FATIGUE

References:

- Anderson, Kylene. (2026). Humans have a fraction of the data. Hoard's Dairyman.
- Fadul-Pacheco, L., Wangen, S., Da Silva, T. E., & Cabrera, V. (2022). Addressing Data Bottlenecks in the Dairy Farm Industry. Animals : an Open Access Journal from MDPI, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12060721>

DATA FATIGUE IS MENTAL EXHAUSTION THAT COMES FROM EXCESSIVE DATA AND IMPAIRS MANAGEMENT DECISIONS.



REACH OUT TO OUR DAIRY SPECIALIST KATIE CALLERO FOR A FARM DATA CONSULTATION.

DETERMINING CORN SILAGE PRICE

Each year, weather conditions present challenges to farm business owners working to implement cropping programs as planned. Depending upon adjustments being considered, farm business owners seek expected price information for relevant crop alternatives. For example, dairy farmers, and cash grain farmers, when faced with a need to consider changes to cropping programs due to weather and, or markets, seek expected corn silage price information when deciding upon buying, selling agreements.

The farm business owner can examine how much corn silage the owner would be willing to supply to a market at a given price. Analysis of the farm business' cost structure for corn silage production combined with consideration of other factors help define the supply relationship. The seller can develop a target based upon the above, but actual market conditions provide no guarantee that a buyer will purchase quantities desired at prices that achieve the producer's target.

Some farm business owners might approach the task of determining corn silage price from a value in production, or input demand perspective. Amounts of corn grain and corn stover in a ton of corn silage, relevant output and input prices, and corn silage's place in the milk production process relative to other inputs are key factors. The buyer can develop a price target based upon the above, but actual market conditions provide no guarantee that a producer will sell the quantity desired at a price that matches the buyer's willingness to pay target.

Although factors in price determination, the two approaches described above in isolation, don't completely determine price, and quantity. Supply and demand relationships work simultaneously in markets to determine price, and quantity. Empirical price analysis brings supply, and demand relationships together to determine price.

Empirical price analysis suggests that corn silage price is a function of corn silage quantities, alfalfa hay price, the price received by farmers for milk sold, and corn grain price. An ordinary least squares regression model expresses corn silage price as a linear function of the above variables. The statistical analysis used here is fairly basic. However, readers of the original work, and annual update articles note that the analysis, and estimates help farm business owners price corn silage.

CORN SILAGE PRICE ESTIMATES – INITIAL FALL 2026 ESTIMATE

The ordinary least squares regression model originally reported in August 2012, updated annually to reflect additional data available, and changes in other underlying factors, produces corn silage price estimates for NY. Estimated corn silage price is a function of alfalfa hay price, and corn grain price with other factors (corn silage production, and milk price) fixed at expected levels. Expected corn silage quantity is set at 8,600 units (one unit = 1,000 tons), the approximate state average for the period 2023 through 2025.

SUPPOSE

- NY alfalfa hay price is \$237 per ton, the most recent value reported, (USDA/NASS. Agricultural Prices. Washington, DC: National Agricultural Statistics Service. QuickStats website. 2025-07-13 access date.), and
- corn grain price is \$4.85 per bushel, an approximate value based upon reported bids for fall 2026 (Western NY Energy. "Corn Bids." Website. 2025-07-13 access date)

Using the estimating equation, and the above prices for alfalfa hay, and corn grain as expected prices, estimated corn silage price is about \$61 per ton. The estimate represents the expected value of corn silage post harvest, in the bunk, wet, for the fall months of mid September through mid December, 2026. Compare this to last fall's estimate of about \$63 per ton. Growing conditions, other agronomic factors, and market conditions will affect estimates through the fall of 2026.

A variety of seller, buyer scenarios exist for different corn crop end uses. In addition to corn silage price, evaluation of alternatives benefits from the following information:

- expected price received for corn grain, for example, \$4.85 per bushel
- expected yields of corn grain, and corn silage
- corn grain harvesting and hauling, and drying costs, for example, \$90 per acre
- corn silage chop, haul, and fill costs, for example, \$197 per acre

Buyers, and sellers use an estimate as a base, typically adjusting for quality and, or harvest, hauling and storage costs based upon the situation, for example, when pricing standing corn for silage. Price estimates, combined with understanding of relevant supply, and demand factors from an individual farm business owner's perspective can aid decision making regarding corn silage price, while also aiding in the pricing of other forages.

ESTIMATED CORN SILAGE PRICE IS A FUNCTION OF ALFALFA HAY PRICE AND CORN GRAIN PRICE WITH OTHER FACTORS FIXED AT EXPECTED LEVELS.



USING THE ESTIMATING EQUATION, ALFALFA HAY PRICING, AND EXPECTED GRAIN PRICES, ESTIMATED CORN SILAGE PRICE IS ABOUT \$61/TON.

On July 21st, tar spot was identified for the first time this growing season in WNY. Last year, it was July 30th, and years previously, it was not identified until mid-August. With disease pressure appearing to arrive sooner, along with other foliar diseases like northern corn leaf blight and gray leaf spot, the question remains: Does it pay to spray a fungicide?

The goal of a fungicide application is to protect the ear leaf and the leaves above it, which are most critical to grain production. Based on research from a variety of universities (Michigan, Purdue, etc.) the best time to apply fungicides to protect against disease pressure is between tasseling (VT) and milk (R3) stages. While the research shows that this is the most effective time to spray, it doesn't mean the decision to do so is economically justified. There are a variety of factors that impact ROI on a fungicide application.

PLANTING DATE

Much like last year, our planting dates were quite extended, and our later planted fields could be at risk for increased disease pressure. Research out of Iowa State University (ISU) has shown that corn planted in mid-May has more severe pressure from diseases than corn planted in mid-April.

HISTORIC DISEASE PRESSURE

We can't discuss diseases and forget about our disease triangle: host, environment, and pathogen. For a disease to infect a host crop, all three pieces have to be present. If we are referencing tar spot specifically, we have the host (corn) in spades, and the disease is classified as endemic to WNY, meaning that we have the spores present locally that can infect our crop. The biggest question is will the weather conditions be ideal for disease development. We have to consider other weather patterns in this too, such as large storms. Wind currents can move pathogens as well, as is the conversation with southern rust, which hasn't made its way to NY yet technically, but could under the right conditions.

EQUIPMENT ACCESSIBILITY

Equipment access is one of the largest hiccups, in my opinion, to fungicide adoption here in SWNY. There is limited access to tall-boys, and while crop dusters are available for hire, many of our fields are too small and/or are in too populated of areas to justify. This is one of the reasons why drone spraying has taken off in many circles with multiple startups here in WNY.

DISEASE RESISTANCE & SEED TREATMENTS

Genetic resistance is designed to curtail disease, not eliminate it entirely. Many hybrids have moderate resistance to common leaf diseases, which is often sufficient in years with lower disease pressure. Susceptible hybrids should be monitored for disease symptoms before making a fungicide decision. Most corn seeds also come with fungicide seed treatment. While these protect the seedling from possible fungal issues, they will not have extended protection into later vegetative and reproductive stages.

APPLICATION COST & CROP VALUE

All products and their associated costs are not equal. You need to, at minimum, cover applications costs with the associated yield response of applying the product. The more expensive the product, the bigger the yield response needs to be to justify it. Overall yield potential also plays a role, as poorer stands (ie population concerns, weather, compaction) have lower potential and are less likely to pay.

In Indiana, fungicide trials for tar spot have shown both healthy gains and losses depending on disease severity. Under high severity, yield responses ranged from 0.1 bu/A to 20.7 bu/A and returns of \$11.9 loss to \$83.9/A gain. Under low severity, yield responses ranged from -7.5 bu/A to 1.3 bu/A and returns of \$46.5 loss to a \$5.8/A loss.

As per the Western NY Energy, October 2026 corn futures are sitting at approximately \$4.80 as of July 28th. It goes without saying that the amount of yield you need to get at \$5 corn looks different than \$7 corn. The Crop Protection Network (CPN) has a fungicide ROI calculator that can be used to help make a fungicide decision based on market prices, input costs, and production outcomes that you may find useful: <https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/roi-calculators>.

With our first reports of foliar diseases coming in this season, some of you may be considering making a fungicide application to protect yield. Making this decision, however, is not a clear go or no go, and depends on a variety of factors.

Resources:

- <https://www.farmprogress.com/management/yes-you-can-lose-money-applying-a-fungicide>
- <https://wnyenergy.com/corn-bids/>
- <https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/publications/multi-state-fungicide-efficacy-trials-to-manage-tar-spot-and-improve-economic-returns-in-corn-in-the-us-and-canada>

THE BEST TIME TO APPLY FUNGICIDES TO PROTECT AGAINST DISEASE PRESSURE IS BETWEEN VT AND R3 STAGES.



THERE ARE A VARIETY OF FACTORS THAT IMPACT ROI ON A FUNGICIDE APPLICATION.



CCE PRESENTS:

Poultry Processing Workshop

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH
5:30PM - 8:30PM

This program is one of four statewide roadshow stops, offering farmers a full poultry processing experience. The class will teach skills that build confidence, reduce costs, and strengthen your farm's independence. This hands-on workshop gives farmers the chance to process a bird from start to finish, learning every step of the workflow used by small farms across the state.

You will learn:

- ✓ Humane handling and proper dispatching
- ✓ Scalding and plucking using correct temperatures and timing
- ✓ Evisceration techniques with sanitation checkpoints
- ✓ Chill tank management for food safety
- ✓ Shrink-bag packaging and labeling
- ✓ Safe transport and storage of your finished bird



Location: The Woods, 6021 State Rte 21, Naples, NY 14512

Event Cost: \$50 per person

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/PoultryProcessingNaplesNY>

For questions or help registering, reach out to Amy Barkley at amb544@cornell.edu or (716) 640-0844

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Improving Production Outcomes and Reducing Internal Parasite Resistance in Small Ruminants

Tuesday, September 8, 2026
6:00pm - 7:30pm

One of the most challenging and financially impactful aspects of raising sheep and goats in New York State is internal parasite pressure. All flocks and herds are infected and managing these parasites through integrated pest management (IPM) including fecal egg count reduction testing (FECRT), FAMCACHA and 5-Point Check© scoring, strategic use of dewormers, and pasture rotation is essential for enterprise viability. This final report discusses these concepts in detail as well as the outcomes of 10 farms that went through one-on-one whole farm evaluations in 2025 to understand internal parasite burdens in their sheep and goats and presence of dewormer resistance.

Location: Zoom Webinar

Event Cost: Free

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/InternalParasites2026>

For questions or help registering, reach out to Amy Barkley at amb544@cornell.edu or (716) 640-0844



This work is supported by the Northeast Extension Risk Management project award no. 2024-70027-42540, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.



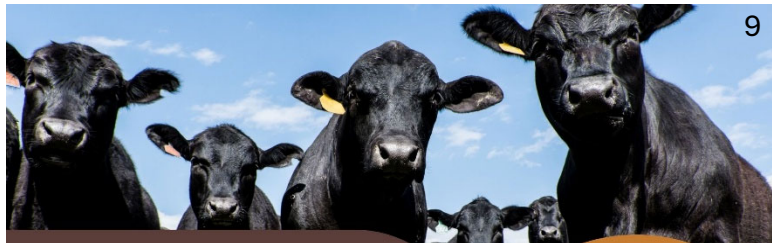
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9



JOIN US ON A FIELD DAY LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

Horizon Ridge Farm & Troll Bridge Farm in Western NY

Saturday, August 29

3:00 - 5:30pm at Troll Bridge Farm

6:00-8:30pm at Horizon Ridge Farm



What You'll Learn During This Field Day:

- ✓ How to raise and manage beef cattle, chickens, turkeys, and pigs for meat production.
- ✓ What is needed to process and sell meat in New York.
- ✓ How to set prices and find local markets.
- ✓ Learn directly from small-scale producers who raise livestock for meat and sell their products.

Enjoy a farm-fresh dinner prepared by HRF
Register TODAY — Limited Space Available!



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Program

CONTACT US

(607) 793-4969

futuro@cornell.edu



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CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN FARMER

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Program

TRACTOR SAFETY WORKSHOP



POSTPONED
NEW DATES: OCT 30-31

MORE INFO TO COME IN SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

ANTICIPATING LOCATIONS IN CHAUTAUQUA AND ALLEGANY COUNTY

This summer, our team has been fielding forage reports for dry hay that have been coming in at moisture levels above our standard 20%. Dry hay with an increased moisture level is a concern not only from a quality perspective, leading to increased dry matter losses and mold growth, but is also at an increased risk for heating, and subsequently fires. With reports of hay fires hitting the news, we think it's a good time to dive into what causes the hay to heat, how to decrease the risk of hay fires, and the hazards associated.

Scientifically speaking, when forages are baled above 20% moisture, it's the ideal environment for mesophilic bacteria, a warm temperature bacterium that traditionally plays a role in forage preservation. It is this bacterium that releases heat, driving temperatures to 130-140°F. The heat provided by this bacterium creates a breeding ground for thermophilic bacteria, which when multiplying, can raise interior bale temperatures above 170°F. It's at these temperatures that spontaneous combustion can occur.

The best way to decrease the risk of hay fires is to bale below 20% moisture, as this results in reduced microbial activity. Weather obviously is one of the biggest factors that plays into moisture content. We can also decrease risk using preservatives, such as propionic acid during baling, which will help inhibit/reduce growth of bacteria in the hay. The effectiveness of these preservatives is often good for up to 25% moisture but can have variable results up to 30%.

Another preservation method that we have heard is salting hay. The belief is that spreading salt between layers in a loft would draw moisture out of the hay, therefore stopping mold and preventing this heating (and possible combustion). Though salt does serve as a mild desiccant (absorbs moisture), there are a few things that do not allow it to properly serve as an emergency preservative. This mostly comes down to distribution and quantity. Sprinkling salt on the surface does not reach the internal parts of the bale where this microbial action is occurring. Additionally, the amount of salt you would need to actually absorb enough moisture is cost-prohibitive, as mass quantities would be needed, which would also reduce feed palatability.

If you are concerned about baling at too high moisture, the highest risk for heating and combustion is within the first six weeks after baling. You can monitor the temperature for that period twice daily. The National Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service [NRAES] developed a temperature chart outlining further actions that may need to be taken depending on the temperature of the hay.

There are some hazards with a hay fire that need to be considered, the first being a flare up. When hay heats, moving it to cool can be a good strategy. However, exposing the bale to oxygen could cause a flare up to occur. Additionally burned-out cavities or toxic gas could be produced from fires. Burned out cavities occur when a fire has started deep within the hay but may not be openly visible from the outside. Extreme caution should be used if performing activities that require you to get on the hay, such as temperature checks. It is advised not to monitor alone. Lastly, gases such as carbon monoxide, or vapors from chemically treated hay are dangerous to inhale.

In the unfortunate event of a fire, contact the fire department immediately. As farmers, your priority is to protect the farm animals, inventory, buildings, but you should be the number one priority to protect.

In an ideal world, hay will never be baled above 20% moisture, but trying to produce dry hay here in SWNY with our humidity is a challenge. If you find yourself in a position with high moisture, some strategies to mitigate and reduce the risk of fire include:

- If you find that windrows aren't drying down, there are other forage alternatives such as baleage
- Use a tested preservative
- Monitor the temperature of bales to catch excessive heating sooner rather than later
- Store bales separately to reduce potential losses

Understanding how these fires start and learning how to reduce fire hazards will protect your feed supply, the loss of time and money associated with fires, and your family.

Critical Temperatures and Action Steps

Temperature (°F)	Condition and Action
125	No action needed.
150	Hay is entering the danger zone. Check temperature twice daily. Disassemble stacked hay bales to promote air circulation to cool the hay.
160	Hay has reached the danger zone. Check hay temperature every couple of hours. Disassemble stacked hay bales to promote air circulation to cool the hay.
175	Hot spots or fire pockets are likely. Alert fire services to the possible hay fire incident. Stop all air movement around the hay.
190	With the assistance of the fire service, remove hot hay. Be aware that hay could burst into flames.
200 or higher	With the assistance of the fire service, remove hot hay. Most likely, a fire will occur. Be aware that hay could burst into flames.

Resources:

Preventing fires in baled hay and straw. (2012). Farm and Ranch eXtension in Safety and Health (FReSH) Community of Practice. Retrieved from <http://www.extension.org/pages/66577/preventing-fires-in-baled-hay-and-straw>.

<https://wayne.osu.edu/news/wet-forages-pose-risk-barn-fires>

TRYING TO PRODUCE HAY IN SWNY CAN BE INCREDIBLY CHALLENGING. IDEALLY, DRY HAY SHOULD NOT BE BALES AT A MOISTURE ABOVE 20%.



THE HIGHEST RISK FOR HEATING AND COMBUSTION IS WITHIN THE FIRST SIX WEEKS AFTER BALING.

Stakeholder Notification

USDA Designates Multiple New York Counties as Natural Disaster Areas Due to Weather

This Secretarial natural disaster designation allows the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend much-needed emergency credit to producers recovering from natural disasters through [emergency loans](#). Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or to refinance certain debts. FSA will review the loans based on the extent of losses, security available, and repayment ability. Of the triggering disasters that have occurred this year affecting NYS, farming residents in our SWNY Region qualify for the following disasters: 1.) Frost and Freeze from 4/19/2026-4/21/2026 and 2.) Excessive Rain, Flooding, and Flash Flooding from 3/31/2026-4/1/2026.

Triggering Disaster #2

Impacted Area: New York

Triggering Disaster: Frost and Freeze from 4/19/2026-4/21/2026

Application Deadline: 03/23/2027

Primary Counties Eligible:

- **New York:** Broome, Cayuga, Chemung, Columbia, Cortland, Dutchess, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Ontario, Orange, Orleans, Oswego, Putnam, Rockland, Saratoga, Schuyler, Seneca, **Steuben**, Suffolk, Tompkins, Ulster, Washington, Wayne, Westchester, Yates

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

- **New York:** Albany, **Allegany**, Bronx, Chenango, Delaware, **Erie**, Essex, Genesee, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Oneida, Otsego, Queens, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Schoharie, Sullivan, Tioga, Warren
- **Connecticut:** Fairfield, Litchfield, New London
- **Massachusetts:** Berkshire
- **New Jersey:** Bergen, Passaic, Sussex
- **Pennsylvania:** Bradford, Pike, Potter, Susquehanna, Tioga, Wayne
- **Rhode Island:** Washington
- **Vermont:** Addison, Bennington

Triggering Disaster #5

Impacted Area: New York

Triggering Disaster: Excessive Rain, Flooding, and Flash Flooding from 3/31/2026-4/1/2026

Application Deadline: 03/23/2027

Primary Counties Eligible:

- **New York:** **Erie**

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

- **New York:** **Cattaraugus**, **Chautauqua**, Genesee, Niagara, Wyoming

More Resources

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).



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