



Small Farms Update

January, 2006

Small Farms Update is intended as a resource for farmers and agricultural service providers in New York, and is provided to you by Cornell's Small Farms Program. Our mission is to foster the sustainability of diverse, thriving small farms that contribute to food security, healthy rural communities, and the environment.

Happy New Year!!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Small Farms Program Welcomes New Staff Member Erica Frenay

This month, the Small Farms Program welcomes Erica Frenay to our team. Erica is a Cornell alum ('98) with a background in educational farms, non-profit management, and ecological design. Her agricultural tendencies first manifested themselves while in college. In the summer of 1998 she co-managed Dilmun Hill, Cornell's student-run farm. After that she left Ithaca for the wild Northwest. Erica spent 5 years in Portland, OR, directing a new urban educational farm there (www.zengerfarm.org), before heading to Orcas Island, WA for a year to get her hands dirty at a Permaculture Farm and Nursery. One year, four moves, and several internships later, Erica has returned to Ithaca with her husband to settle down. She will be working on our new Beginner Farmers program to support and enhance the work that Cooperative Extension agents are doing in this area (more on this next month!) Erica says she is thrilled to join the Small Farm Program and excited to dive into the work. She can be reached at 607-255-9911 or ejf5@cornell.edu.

New Class Offered for Cornell Students: Exploring the Small Farm Dream

This new one-credit course offers Cornell students an opportunity to explore different types of small farm operations through an experiential service-learning process. The course is the result of a collaborative effort involving the Cornell Small Farms Program, students in the Cornell Small Farms Club, farmers throughout Tompkins County, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County. It grew out of our initial efforts to launch a student farm-sitting service, which proved to be unfeasible -- at least for now -- due to liability and scheduling problems.

In the class this spring, students will work in teams with local farmers, both learning about the specific farm operation and providing some beneficial service to the farm, in return. This might include farm sitting for a weekend, or having work days on the farm. Students will meet weekly as a group on campus in addition to participating in the on-farm trainings and duties. Each student will also complete a final project based on his/her experiences, which might include a presentation, portfolio, project brochure, case study, or farm plan of their own. Instructors for the class are Anu Rangarajan, Director of the Small Farms Program, and Joanna Green, Extension Associate.

Small Farm Risk Management Communications Project

With support from the NY Crop Insurance Education Program, the Small Farms Program recently began producing a series of articles devoted to risk management strategies for small farm operators. This "Small Farm Risk Management Communications Project" is being headed up by Craig Cramer, Communications Specialist in the Department of Horticulture and former Editor of *New Farm* magazine. You may have noticed the first fruits of his efforts in the Fall and Winter issues of *Small Farm Quarterly* magazine. Over the next year

Craig will work with authors around the state to generate additional articles focusing on the variety of ways that small farmers mitigate risk. They will appear in *Small Farm Quarterly* as well as other publications, and will be available for downloading at a special risk management page on our website: www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/resources/businessmanage/risk.cfm.

January 14 Symposium on Reclaiming Fallow Land

How many times have you traveled around this region and noticed idle pasture land going back to goldenrod and brush? Are there opportunities we are missing as landowners and farmers? What are the benefits and challenges to our area to revive this once highly regarded resource?

The Small Farms Program is pleased to be a cosponsor of the "Turning Goldenrod to Green" Symposium to be held Saturday, January 14th, from 8:30 to 4:00 pm at Morrisville State College. The symposium will address a variety of timely topics including: using grazing and livestock management to tap into the natural seed bank; carbon sequestration and grass pellet bio-fuels; effects of improving fallow land on the wildlife community; contract grazing beef; using sheep and goats to reclaim land; and Ag property tax benefits and their respective programs. We will also explore the opportunities for landowners to partner with farmers to reclaim fallow land.

A highly respected and seasoned group of speakers will present this informative program. They include: Mark Twentyman, NYS Office of Real Property Services; Paris Reidhead, sustainable farming activist and writer; Matt Sanderson, USDA/ARS Pasture Systems & Watershed Management; Darrell Emmick, NYS Grazing Land Mgt. Specialist; Dr. John Addrizzo, Meat Goat Specialist; Phil Metzger, USDA/NRCS/CNY RC&D Coordinator; Bee Tolman, sheep grazier; and Troy Bishopp; contract beef grazier and Madison County SWCD Grazing Specialist. Special Guest New York State Senator David J. Valesky will be making a lunch time presentation.

This event is supported by the Madison, Onondaga and Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Cornell Small Farms Program, NRCS, The GRAZE-NY Program, CNY RC&D, NYGLCI, CADE, NYS Chapter of the Wild Turkey Federation, CCE of Madison, Oneida and Onondaga Counties, Morrisville State College, Oneida County Agriculturr Economic Development, Madison Co. Planning Board, and William's Fence Company.

Seats are limited and pre-registration is required. The Symposium fee is \$10.00 and includes lunch. For more information contact Troy Bishopp at 315 824-9849 or troy.bishopp@ny.nacdnet.net

**January 20 VideoSeminar Features Collaborative Marketing in Action:
The Good Natured Family Farms Story**

This live videoconference-seminar-discussion will be held Friday, January 20, 9am-11am, at four locations in Tompkins, Saratoga, St. Lawrence, and Cattaraugus Counties. Diana Endicott, farmer and Farm to Market Coordinator of the Kansas-based Good Natured Family Farms marketing alliance, will be presenting their model of collaborative marketing, followed by discussion and questions. All are welcome, and there is no registration fee.

Good Natured Family Farms is an alliance of 40 local family farm members, farming 16,000 acres and serving 1,800 customers. In 2004 the alliance grossed \$2.5million under their all-natural, branded food product line. All of their products come from small family farms surrounding the Kansas City area. In addition, Good Natured Family Farms has developed comprehensive USDA Quality System Verification Program (QSVP) Manuals for all-natural beef and free-range chicken. The QSVP model provides comprehensive standard operating procedure for identification, traceability, and label claim verification for production, processing, and retail sales.

Their line of products includes all-natural beef, free-range chicken, free-range brown, eggs, all-natural pork, sausage, farm-house cheese, glass bottle milk and fresh-squeezed orange juice. For more information about Good Natured Family Farms visit www.goodnatured.net.

Pre-registration: Please pre-register at the site which you wish to attend:

- Tompkins County. Cornell University - 300 Rice Hall, Tower Road, Ithaca NY. The speaker will be located at this site. If attending this site, please pre-register with Jude Barry Email: jab267@cornell.edu or Telephone: 607-254-4741.
- Saratoga County. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County - 50 West High Street, Ballston Spa, NY 12020. If attending this site, please pre-register with Ellie Hackett 518-885-8995. Directions to the site can be found on: www.ccesaratoga.org
- St Lawrence County. Call Anita Morrill, Telephone: 315-379-9192 x 234 for pre-registration and location in Canton, NY.
- Cattaraugus County. Call Desiree Otley, Telephone: 716-699-2377 x 125 for pre-registration and location in Ellicottville, NY.

Cosponsors: Small Farms Program; Agricultural Innovations Center; Community, Food and Agriculture Program; Agricultural Marketing and Agribusiness Management Program Work Team; Agricultural Community and Economic Development Program Work Team; Cornell Cooperative Extension NWNYS Team/ProDairy Program; Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence, Cattaraugus/Allegany, and Saratoga Counties.

The 2006 Low Input Sustainable Farming Conference January 21

We are also pleased to be a cosponsor for "Profiting from Responsible Farming: The 2006 Low Input Sustainable Farming Conference," which takes place 9 AM to 2:45 PM at Jordan Hall, NYS Experiment Station at Geneva. Says organizer Bill Henning, Small Farms Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension's NWNY Team/ProDairy, "In a world seeking shortcuts within commodity production there are still opportunities for the small family farm to do well. Whether you're interest is dairy, produce, or sheep production, there are lots of ideas flowing through the soil to the kitchen table. Farmers inspire this conference, and it is planned and promoted by farmers for farmers. Almost all of our speakers are farmers."

Two General Session speakers are featured this year. Diana Endicott, farmer and Farm to Market Coordinator of the Kansas-based Good Natured Family Farms marketing alliance, will be presenting their model of collaborative marketing. Paul Hepperly, the Director of Research for the Rodale Institute in Kutztown PA, will describe results of their research comparing regenerative and conventional farming practices for the last twenty years. During that time they have discovered cost effective cultural practices overlooked by conventional agriculture.

Produce Breakout Session includes: *Produce without Pesticides* with Mark Stoll of Stoll Family Farms, which markets produce from this Amish community throughout Ontario via super markets; *H.O.P.E. Produce* with Ira Stoll from Aylmer, Ontario who has played a key roll in the formation and management of H.O.P.E., a cooperative of family farms specifically for marketing organic produce throughout Ontario; *Produce Pollination* with Mike Griggs, beekeeper, USDA entomologist and president of the Finger Lakes Bee Keepers Association; and *Producer Panel* -- Bring your produce questions for a panel of the day's speakers plus local growers.

Dairy Breakout Session includes: *What, How, and Why, on an Organic Berks County Farm* with Forrest Stricker, dairy grazier in Wernersville, PA; *Flexible Farming on a Pennsylvania Dairy* with William Lescher, who combines grazing with more traditional dairying; *Grass Management* with Ron Stutzman, agronomist and independent farmer-researcher; and a *Dairy Grazing Panel* -- Bring your questions for these speakers along with local farmers.

Sheep Sessions include *Grass Management* with Ron Stutzman, agronomist and independent farmer-researcher; *Why Sheep?* with John Oswalt who farms in Vicksburg, MI where he is also the director of the American Lamb Board; *Low Input Sheep Production* with Mat Wiley, retired sheep farmer from Schoolcraft, MI; *Managing The Sheep Grazing System* with Joe Rook, State Sheep Veterinarian for Michigan State University.

Sponsors of the Conference include the Cornell Small Farms Program; Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program; USDA NYS Grazing

Lands Conservation Initiative; and CCE NWNYS Team/ProDairy. Pre-registrations must be in by January 17 to receive the \$15 discount. Registration at the door starts at 8:15 and costs \$40 (includes lunch). Conference adjourns at 2:45. For details call (315) 539 9251.

Strengthening Cooperation: A Workshop for New and Emerging Farmer-Owned Businesses, February 21-22

There are a number of new and emerging businesses owned by groups of farmers across the Northeast that face similar challenges as they start-up new ventures. This important 2-day workshop will be held at the Holiday Inn Carrier Circle in Syracuse, New York. Explore:

- Creating a Common Vision for the business
- Developing a Strategic Plan. Including feasibility analysis and managing risk
- Understanding Finance and member/stakeholder equity
- Building board and management capacity
- Developing effective marketing strategies.

In addition the workshop will provide an opportunity for producers from different groups working in cooperation to share experiences and to network. To view the program agenda, registration details, lodging information, directions etc, visit:

http://aem.cornell.edu/special_programs/business_workshop_2006.pdf For more information contact Jude Barry, 607-254-4741 or jab267@cornell.edu.

Sponsored by the Department of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University.

Public Seminar Series Will Bring Models of Sustainable Agriculture Education to Cornell

The Small Farms Program is pleased to cosponsor Issues in Sustainable Agriculture Education, a new seminar series that will examine and discuss multi-disciplinary approaches to sustainable agriculture education at colleges and universities in the U.S. The seminars are free and open to the public. Guest speakers will share how their home institutions are developing curricula and degree programs, blending student organic farm management with educational goals, and fostering interdisciplinary agriculture education. The following speaker schedule is subject to change:

- Ricardo Salvador – Feb 10; Iowa State University; founding faculty and coordinating committee member for ISU's Interdepartmental Major in Sustainable Agriculture; Program Director for Food Systems and Rural Development at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Karl North – Feb 17; Northland Sheep Dairy, Freetown Corners NY; innovative local NY dairy farmer and inspiring philosopher dedicated to blending on-the-ground farming issues and political-ecology with sustainable agriculture education.
- Martha Rosemeyer - March 3; Evergreen State College; faculty at the Center for Ecological Living and Learning, a farm and experiential learning

center providing opportunities to students and local community hat link theory to practice.

- Jennifer Wilkins - March 17; Cornell University Senior extension associate in the Division of Nutritional Sciences and Director of the Farm to School Program at Cornell University. Research involves community food security and food system programming.
- Mark van Horn - April 7; UC Davis; Director of The Student Farm, offering a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about and explore the many aspects of sustainable agriculture, including internships, formal courses and research projects.
- John Reganold – April 14; Washington State University; faculty leading the effort to implement an Organic Agriculture Systems major at WSU involving the student organic teaching farm
- Helene Murray – April 23; University of Minnesota; Executive Director Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), a partnership between the University, growers, and non-profit organizations coordinating UMN's minor in Sustainable Agriculture Systems.

The seminar series is co-sponsored by: New World Agriculture and Ecology Group (NWAEG) at Cornell, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences; Department of Horticulture, Cornell Small Farm Program; the Community, Food and Agriculture Program; the Community Food Systems Program; the GPSAFC, and the Community and Rural Development Institute. For more information contact Julie at jmg225@cornell.edu or Allison at alh54@cornell.edu.

Cornell Colleagues Awarded National Research Initiative/Small Farm Grant
Congratulations to our colleagues Gary Fick, Professor in Crop and Soil Sciences, Arther Lembo, Senior Research Associate in Crop and Soil Sciences, and Jennifer Wilkins, Senior Extension Associate in the Division of Nutritional Sciences for their new grant award for "Mapping Local Food Systems Potential in New York State: Spatial Modeling of an Emerging Opportunity for Small Farmers and Local Consumers." The USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) is awarding funding to this team of researchers to evaluate consumer needs affecting farmer understanding of regional food production. The award is among more than \$5 million in National Research Initiative grants for integrated research, education and extension projects for small and mid-sized farms.

OPPORTUNITIES

Cayuga Nature Center (Ithaca) seeks proposals for its Farm Facility

The Cayuga Nature Center (CNC) is soliciting proposals to use all or part of its 40-acre farm facility in a manner consistent with the Nature Center's mission to facilitate awareness, appreciation, and responsibility for the natural world through recreation and environmental, agricultural and outdoor education. Possible uses include: Farm, Community Supported Ag (CSA), Cooperative Farm, Horse Stables/Riding, Sustainable/Green Energy Facility, Demonstration Facility, Tourist Destination, Outdoor Education Facility, or other use consistent with the CNC's mission. CNC would enter into a single-year or multiple-year agreement and would retain ownership of the property and facilities.

The CNC Farm is located just west of the main CNC facility on Route 89, six miles north of Ithaca, NY three miles south of Taughannock Falls State Park. Zoning is mixed agricultural, and buildings include: Farmhouse (3 bdrm, 1 bath, 1680 sq. ft.), Garage/Workshop, Large Morton Building (9600 sq. ft), Small Morton Building (1836 sq. ft), and Two Wooden Barns (1400 & 2720 sq. ft). The farmhouse and wooden barn are vacant and are surrounded by several paddocks and two ponds. The land has not been actively farmed in 20 years and could be farmed organically. Maps and photos: available at www.cayuganaturecenter.org/farm.

Timeline: Monday, January 16, 2006, noon-3pm --Open House/Tours of CNC farm facilities; February 3 -- Deadline for Letter of Interest; Friday, March 3 -- Deadline for Full Proposal; Early April -- Decision by CNC Board of Directors regarding partner selection. For more information contact: Doug Weeks, Director, Cayuga Nature Center, (607) 273-6260, director@cayuganaturecenter.org.

Poughkeepsie Farm Project seeks participants for "City Seeds" 2006!

The Poughkeepsie Farm project seeks participants for City Seeds, a new project PFP launches in 2006 in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Green Teen Program which involves youth ages 14-24 in growing food and seeds, participating in workshops on food and farming, and sharing their new knowledge and skills with the communities of Poughkeepsie and Beacon, NY through community events, farmers market and community supported agriculture (CSA).

Community Food Fellowships: The PFP seeks three community food fellows ages 20-24 for an 11 week program from late May through mid August, 2005. The fellows are involved in growing food, learning about the food system, and providing leadership in activities which aim to increase awareness of, participation in, and capacity for a healthy and just food system in the Mid-Hudson Valley. Farming activities include greenhouse work, planting, cultivation, harvest, washing, weeding, maintenance, weekly farm staff meetings, seed saving and working with volunteers in the field. Other activities may include

teaching high school students about food and farming, preparing food for soup kitchen deliveries, assisting at the farmers market, giving farm tours, attending the CSA distribution room, participating in workshops and field trips on food and farming, and helping to put on community events. We're seeking good-natured interns with an active interest in farming, dependability, good communication skills, and a desire to be a part of bringing about positive community change. Applications are being accepted now through April 1.

2006 Farming Internship: The PFP is seeking one farming intern age 20-24 from approximately April 1 through October 31. The intern will work with PFP staff, members, and youth participants in City Seeds to grow food and facilitate learning about sustainable agriculture. Activities include greenhouse work, tractor work, transplanting, cultivation, harvest, working with volunteers, maintenance, and participation in farm staff meetings. Other activities may include teaching visiting youth about farming and the food system, attendance at monthly PFP board meetings, participation in CSA member events, helping with the City of Poughkeepsie Main Street Farmers Market, attending the CSA distribution room, participation in the CRAFT program (the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training), participation in workshops and field trips on food and farming, and bringing food to local charities. We are seeking a good-natured, responsible individual with a keen interest in farming, good communication skills, curiosity, commitment to positive social change, ability to work with people of all ages, and the ability to take initiative. Prior experience on a farm is a plus but not a pre-requisite. Applications are being accepted now through February 15.

For more information: Please see our website at www.farmproject.org and contact Wendy or Asher Burkhart-Spiegel at directors@farmproject.org or (845)453-6349.

SARE Seeks Exemplary Northeast farmer

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program is seeking nominations for the Patrick Madden Award. This award recognizes a farmer who is living the SARE mission by practicing agriculture that is profitable, good for the environment, and beneficial to the wider community. Offered in memory of Patrick Madden, the first national director of SARE, it comes with a \$1000 cash award and an expense-paid trip to the SARE conference in Wisconsin in August of 2006.

The most recent Madden Award winner was Jean-Paul Courtens of Kinderhook, New York. Courtens runs a community supported farm and is recognized throughout the Northeast as an expert on soil fertility. His 7-acre Roxbury Farm is now part of a land trust--a useful provision in an area of rapidly rising land values--and on it Courtens runs an apprentice program that emphasizes mentoring and the achievement of educational goals.

Nominations for the Madden Award should consist of a brief profile of the nominee, including contact information, a description of the nominee's farm and its operations, and a detailed statement of why the nominee should be considered for the award.

Nominations can be sent via e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu or by regular mail to Northeast SARE/Madden Award, Hills Building, 105 Carrigan Drive, Burlington, VT 05405-0082. The deadline for receipt of nominations is February 1, 2006.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Toward Sustainability Foundation Organic Farming Grants - Due Feb 1

Cornell's Department of Horticulture is seeking competitive grant proposals for research, teaching and outreach in organic farming during 2006. Short proposals are requested from Cornell staff and students, extension educators, and New York organic farmers. All funded proposals must include a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences faculty member as a principal investigator or co-principal investigator. Goals of the TSF Organic Grants Program are to:

- Develop, evaluate, strengthen and disseminate the scientific knowledge base for organic gardening and farming.
- Establish and/or conduct systems-level comparative studies of the agro-ecological, environmental and economic processes and impacts of organic farming systems.
- Improve and expand the dissemination of organic farming knowledge and information through the Cornell Cooperative Extension system, within departmental teaching programs, and at farms, public gardens or agricultural facilities.
- Promote innovative approaches for research, extension and teaching in organic farming.

Contact Wendy Wirth at waw3@cornell.edu for additional information and to request a copy of the RFP. The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2006.

Pest Management Alternatives Research Grants - Due Feb 1

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) has released a Request for Applications to the Special Research Grants Program: Pest Management Alternatives Program (PMAP). PMAP is a national program supporting projects that develop and implement IPM practices, tactics and systems for specific pest problems while reducing human and environmental risks. The due date for applications is February 1. Applications may be submitted by state agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, other research institutions and organizations, private organizations or corporations, and individuals. You can find the RFA through a link on the Northeastern IPM Centers web site, <http://NortheastIPM.org> or access it directly on the CSREES web site, www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/fundview.cfm?fnum=1114

Pest Management Needs of Minor Specialty Crop Growers – Due Feb 21

EPA has announced the availability of up to \$615,000 in grant funds to support projects addressing critical pest management needs of U.S. minor and specialty crop growers. The Agency anticipates funding up to five projects. The project period of performance is three years, with the possibility of extension. Examples of activities that may be funded include (1) projects that enable minor and/or specialty crop producers to take advantage of technical assistance and/or USDA Farm Bill or other conservation programs that can address critical pest management needs by using IPM tools and techniques and (2) those that develop and demonstrate reduced-risk IPM techniques and tools that address critical pest management needs on commercial farms. Additional examples are provided in the Request for Proposals document entitled "Minor and Specialty Crops Integrated Pest Management Special Projects." You may access the full text of the grant announcement at www.epa.gov/pesticides/grants/index.htm. For more information, contact Pat Cimino at 703-308-9357 or cimino.pat@epa.gov.

USDA Value-Added Producer Grants – Due Mar 31

In last month's update we highlighted two small farm recipients of this funding, which is one of USDA's most important grant opportunities for innovative small farm operators. The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) has now announced the availability of over \$19 million in competitive grant funds for fiscal year (FY) 2006 to help independent agricultural producers enter into value-added activities. Of this amount, \$1.5 million is set aside for applicants requesting \$25,000 or less. Awards may be made for planning activities or for working capital expenses, but not for both. The maximum grant amount for a planning grant is \$100,000 and the maximum grant amount for a working capital grant is \$300,000.

For details visit the USDA Rural Development Program Web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm which contains application guidance, including Frequently Asked Questions and an Application Guide. Applicants are encouraged to contact their State Offices of USDA Rural Development well in advance of the deadline to discuss their projects and ask any questions about the application process. Also, the Rural Business Cooperative Service has posted two new templates for applicants to use in filling out their applications for the Value- Added Producer Grants. There is a template for planning and feasibility grants and one for working capital grants. You can find the templates at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/templates.htm.

USDA Community Food Projects Grants – letter of intent Due Feb 13

Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program provides the major funding source for community-based food and agriculture projects in the U.S. The Request for Applications (RFA) has just been released January 12, and \$4.6 million in funds is available for 2006. There is an important change in the

application process this year: brief letters of intent will be due on February 13, with full proposals due April 13. The letters will be reviewed and applicants with relevant project outlines will be asked to submit a full proposal.

The CFP Program supports projects that: Help meet the food needs of low-income people, Increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, Promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues, and Meet specific state, local, or neighborhood food and agriculture needs for infrastructure improvement and development, long-term planning, or the creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers. The 2006 Request for Applications (RFA) is at: www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/fundview.cfm?fonum=1080.

The non-profit Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) offers free assistance to help you develop a successful proposal. CFSC's technical assistance specialists can help you decide whether or not to apply, clarify CFP program guidelines, address technical questions, provide feedback on program plans or proposal drafts, and help you develop an evaluation plan. CFSC will sponsor up to 75 minutes of one-on-one assistance per grant applicant at no cost. See www.foodsecurity.org/cfp_help.html for details.

RESOURCES

NY Farms! "News to Share" Newsletter

NY Farms! is a broad based statewide coalition of organizations, individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions, committed to the future of New York's farms and families. As one of its many worthy activities, NY Farms! offers an outstanding email newsletter with a wealth of news and information of interest to farmers and those who work with farmers. Over seven thousand people subscribe to "News To Share" and find it's a great way to keep up to date with state and national ag news, policy issues, consumer trends, research reports, food for thought, and events. It's a long newsletter, but easy to navigate and very timely. Martha Goodsell, NY Farms! Executive Director, does an outstanding job keeping readers up to date and informed.

There is no subscription fee and at any time you can subscribe or unsubscribe through an email to: nyfarms@baldcom.net. News is compiled on a bi-weekly basis. Articles are posted for informational purposes and do not necessarily reflect the opinions/stance or unanimous consent of the Board of Directors of NY Farms! and its members. NY Farms! also keeps two extensive online calendars of events, one aimed at the non-farming public and one for farmers and ag service providers. To learn more about NY Farms!, or to become a member, send an email to nyfarms@nyfarms.info, or visit www.nyfarms.info. If you're not a member of NY Farms! it's easy to join online, although the newsletter is available to non-members.

FEATURE

Farmer-To-Farmer Learning: New Roles for Extension Educators

By Anu Rangarajan and Joanna Green

The Cornell Small Farm Program was established in 2000 with the mission to “Foster the sustainability of diverse, thriving small farms that contribute to food security, healthy rural communities, and the environment.” In support of this mission we provide information to producers and their extension educators via Small Farm Quarterly, our website www.smallfarms.cornell.edu, and our email newsletter; we conduct meetings and focus groups with producers to gather information about their research and extension needs; and we foster teams at Cornell and with our community partners to conduct research and extension projects focused on small farm viability. We also put a lot of energy into professional development for Extension educators to support them in their work with small farms.

What farmers want from Extension

Over several years of listening to farmers, we have found some key themes for how extension can serve small farms. These needs include the usual technical assistance roles for extension and research. But increasingly, small farm operators are also asking Extension to play an organizing and community development role, beyond the usual duties of agricultural educators. They want Extension to:

- Help build bridges with other farmers, to overcome the isolation small farmers experience and build more connection and cooperation
- Facilitate networking among farmers on a county or multi-county basis
- Develop farmer-to-farmer mentoring and apprenticeship programs
- Play an active role in developing local/regional marketing systems and processing infrastructure, such as slaughter facilities
- Help groups of farmers develop more coordinated marketing and purchasing systems, e.g. farm-to-restaurant, marketing cooperatives, group purchases
- Advocate for small farm needs by summarizing their interests, sharing these interests in various communities and helping link producers with leaders

Within the mission of the Cornell Small Farm Program, we have some larger goals that build upon these needs. We seek to develop greater leadership among NY’s small farm operators, to do the needed advocacy and promotion work for their sectors. This is challenging given that most small farms have limited flexibility in their management and schedules to allow for greater off-farm involvement.

We recognize that technical information is not scale-neutral, and to be effective, our educational approach must meet more than one need for these busy operators. We seek to increase the amount of research and extension focused on small farm by Cornell and Cornell Cooperative Extension. While doing this, we focus very heavily on building CCE capacity for facilitation and leadership development, since strengthening the ties among farms will help meet several of the needs expressed by farmers as well as help cultivate the leadership needed within the small farm community.

To achieve these goals, the Cornell Small Farm Program has invested the New York State allocation of USDA Small Farm funds, about \$25,000 per year, into an “Innovative Small Farm Education Grants” program for extension educators. All projects must cultivate farmer-to-farmer educational strategies to help build local learning networks. These educational strategies may be structured numerous ways including:

- Farmers as Examples, as workshop speakers, case profiles, or farm tour hosts
- Farmer Networks, both informal (occasional meetings, listserves, newsletters) and formal (regular meetings)
- Farmer Discussion Groups, in which a local group of farmers meets several times over a period defined by them
- Farmer Mentors, involving pairing of experienced producers with those needing training in a one-on-one relationship
- Farmer Mentor Training, to help these experienced farmers become more effective teachers
- On-farm Internships/apprenticeships, to provide on-farm experience and mentoring
- Farmer Cooperation, in which a group of producers set some specific goals to work together

Farmer Discussion Groups

In the last three years we have focused a lot of effort on fostering farmer discussion groups. These groups, with careful facilitation, can evolve to be self-directed, with farmers setting the agenda and goals. Discussion groups, by their nature, foster peer-to-peer learning, brainstorming and analysis of information. Farmers trust other farmers’ experience, and by evaluating how technologies or practices fit on a farm-to-farm basis, these discussions cultivate systems thinking.

Some of the most important benefits, however, are the networking and socializing that occur. Educators are sometimes surprised to find that farmers will stay well past the end of the meeting just to carry on their conversations. Through our grants program, we have sponsored at least 19 discussion groups around NYS, focusing on numerous areas, including livestock (e.g beef, sheep, goats), dairy (conventional and organic), organic vegetables, marketing, grazing, agri-tourism, labor, and women in agriculture/farm spouses.

The success of these groups depends, in part, on good facilitation skills, especially early on. The facilitator serves as a “neutral process guide.” This is a new role for most Extension educators. The facilitator’s goal is not to be the expert but to help the group of farmers have a constructive discussion. This involves making the process easier by encouraging participation, creating ownership and cultivating decision-making by the members, and ultimately, serving the group.

The ideal is to see a discussion group move from being one where the primary responsibility and leadership rests with one person (for example the Extension educator) to a group where the members share responsibility for peer teaching, logistics and problem-solving, and perhaps even group action. To cultivate this type of shared leadership requires solid facilitation skills and good planning, often beyond most Extension educators’ training.

Building Facilitation Skills in Extension

Given our larger goal of increasing small farmer leadership, we realized that supporting educators to host discussion groups was not enough. We needed to help educators be successful facilitators and help them understand group process. So we initiated a professional development program two years ago specifically focused on these skills. Thus far, about 85 agricultural professionals have been through a basic training on facilitation offered through the Small Farm Program.

These programs are taught by professional facilitation trainers, skilled in all types of group process. The training goals include enhancing strategies for getting groups started, understanding group process and development, exploring ways to change roles and transfer leadership, and trouble-shooting for difficult situations. We purposely have structured the trainings to balance theory with practice. After learning some aspect of group facilitation, the trainees practice new skills in small groups with other educators. In each small group, roles include facilitator, time keeper, recorder and process observer. Thus, each individual can practice skills for group facilitation in a safe and supportive environment.

Given the strong interest expressed thus far, we have assembled a professional development team to help plan for additional training. Our team includes groups that focus on all aspects of community development. Future trainings include advanced facilitation skills, team-building, working constructively with conflict, and collaborative problem-solving.

Thus, to help build leadership and stronger networks among NY’s small farm operators, we have focused on strengthening our educators’ abilities as facilitators. We believe that by fostering ongoing discussion and interaction among local farmers, educators can play a key role in helping farmers overcome

isolation, learn from each other, and ultimately develop collaborative efforts that will increase small farm profitability and viability in New York.

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Sidebar:

Working With Groups of Farmers: Facilitation Skills for Success

- Understand Group Evolution. Groups are dynamic and go through an evolution over time (forming, storming, norming, performing, maybe adjourning). A facilitator should be flexible and adjust their role based upon the group and its stage.
- Communicate Clearly. Be an active listener. Ask open questions to encourage people to share their ideas and keep discussion rolling.
- Maintain Clear Logistics. Help the group start and end its meetings on time. Make sure the room is comfortable. Help them set clear agendas with goals. For example, is an agenda item for Announcement, Discussion, or Decision?
- Keep Focused on Process. Monitor group dynamics, and help maintain an open environment for discussion, with participation from all. Help the group stay on task but not at the expense of good communication.
- Intervene When Needed with difficult or dominating people, or to clarify viewpoints or conflicting information.
- Develop Working Agreements. This is a list of simple agreements that the group makes, defining how members desire to interact with each other. They help create and maintain an environment of respect. Examples might include "Speak for Yourself," "Participate Fully," "Respect Risk Takers," "Listen for Understanding," or "Share the Air Time."
- Cultivate Ownership and Leadership by Group. This can occur by making the group responsible for agenda setting, and sharing roles for meeting management (chair, notes, time keeper, process observer). Request regular feedback on group process and facilitation. Rotate snack responsibilities or even meeting site to different host farms. On an individual basis, be supportive and coach/mentor farmer leaders in the group.
- Let go of being the expert.

NY FARMS! CALENDAR OF AGRICULTURAL EVENTS

www.nyfarms.info/calendar.html

The Calendar of Agricultural Events is produced by NY Farms! in cooperation with the Cornell Small Farms Program; Cornell Community, Food and Agriculture Program; Regional Farm and Food Project, and other organizations. NY Farms! is a broad based statewide coalition of organizations, individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions, committed to the future of New York's farms and families. The calendar is online at www.nyfarms.info/calendar.html.

For additional ag-related news and events by email:

- Agricultural community and economic development news and events: Community Food and Agriculture Program, hmm1@cornell.edu
- Consumer and public education news and events: NY Farms! News To Share, NYfarms@baldcom.net
- Eastern NY, MA and VT news and events: Regional Farm and Food Project, farmfood@capital.net
- Policy-related news and alerts: National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, campaign@sustainableagriculture.net

Cornell Small Farms Program

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Working Together to Promote Sustainable Food and Agriculture Systems for Healthy Communities

The following programs are actively working together to help develop new agriculture and food system opportunities for NY. **Small Farms Program** enhances research and extension support for New York's smaller farms. **Community, Food and Agriculture Program** conducts research, education and training for community-based and regional agricultural economic development. **Community Food Systems Program** is a resource for consumer education and farm-to-school marketing systems development. **Community and Rural Development Institute Program** conducts research, education and training for local government leaders, community organizations, policymakers. You can access these programs at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu.