Happy Holidays, everyone!

Winter is upon us, and that means two things: seed catalogs will be coming and the months will be full of workshops for farmers! This issue is chock a block full of workshops that can help your farm have a stellar 2017. Take some time to go through the listings at the back--what can you attend that will take your business to the next level?

As you plan your holiday meals, consider buying local produce and meat. Our counties have wonderful farms that produce healthy, delicious food--and I think your meals will be even more special knowing you helped support a local farmer and the farming community in our area.

Finally, take some time to watch the Our Farms, Our Stories film that is now posted on YouTube. (See page 7) It is a beautiful, quiet celebration of farming in Tioga county. I know that you will enjoy it--watch it with your kids or grandkids and share the love of our rural area with the next generation.

Cheers.
Workshops and Events in Our Region

Save the Dates! Farming 101 Workshop

CCE Chemung and CCE Tioga will be hosting a Farming 101 in the spring.

Learn more about how you can maximize the land resources that you have, how to market your product, and more! Is farming something you have thought about? Plan to attend!

Dates:

Chemung County: March 11th
Tioga County: March 18th
Attracting Birds to your Landscape

By Barb Neal, CCE Tioga

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the Cornell Botanic Gardens (formerly Cornell Plantations) lecture given by Doug Tallamy, noted entomologist from the University of Delaware. I had heard Professor Tallamy lecture many years before and it had a huge impact on my professional life and outlook.

In his book, *Bringing Nature Home*, Tallamy discusses the evolutionary link between native plants and the caterpillars that grow and thrive on their leaves. Plants, of course, do not wish to be devoured by caterpillars, so over millennia have developed compounds that make their leaves unpalatable to the munching mouthparts of caterpillars. Of course, nature abhors a vacuum, and certain caterpillars co-evolved to be able to tolerate the toxic compounds. An example that is often cited is the milkweed—toxic to most caterpillars, but not to the caterpillar that, after pupating, becomes the monarch butterfly.

So what does this co-evolution have to do with attracting birds? It turns out that while birds appreciate the sunflower seeds you put in your feeder, to raise a healthy clutch of baby birds, to raise a healthy clutch of baby birds, the little ones require protein, and lots of it. Caterpillars, when fed to hungry baby birds, fill the bill. So, bottom line—to have birds nesting in your property, you need a whole lot of caterpillars! And native plants offer the greatest variety and quantity of caterpillars.

When Tallamy traveled the nation with this simple, but revolutionary, message—people heard. Native plants have been a main focus of many sustainable landscapes ever since (including mine).

I was eager to hear how Tallamy has changed his lecture over the years. His photos are extraordinary in their beauty—both the bird photos as well as the caterpillar photos cannot help to inspire an appreciation for nature in all its variety.

Tallamy has continued to research this native plant/caterpillar relationship and he has learned that about five species of native trees provide the bulk of "caterpillar food." These species are (in order): Oaks, native cherries, willows, birches and poplars. Also good are crabapples, maples and blueberries.

His advice was to help birds by planting at least one of the top five species in your property. Doing so will help provide the protein (via caterpillars) that birds need to raise their young.

You may wonder, "Why would I plant a tree only to see it eaten?" Well, except for a few notable, and usually invasive, caterpillars like the Gypsy moth, trees are well able to tolerate some feeding by a myriad of caterpillars. I see many more problems with poor soil conditions, poor planting, and the like, and rarely do I see caterpillar damage as doing any lasting harm to the canopy of a tree.

So as you plan next years’ gardening tasks, consider adding one more: plant an oak or native cherry. You will be planting a bird-friendly legacy for our Southern Tier.

White oak leaves, Photo source: University of Georgia
Recalling That Evergreen Smell

By Paul Hetzler, CCE Jefferson

Speaking as a guy who can hide his own Easter eggs and still not find them, I marvel how Father Christmas, who is at least several years older than I, still manages to keep track of all those kids and their presents. Lucky for us that the most enduring memories are associated with smell. If it was not for the fragrant evergreen wreaths, trees and garlands (and possibly a hint of reindeer dung), Santa probably would have long ago forgotten his holiday duties.

Of all the memorable aromas of the holiday season, nothing evokes its spirit quite like the smell of fresh-cut pine, spruce or fir. Although most American households which observe Christmas have switched to artificial trees, about eleven million families still bring home a real tree.

Every type of conifer has its own mixture of sweet-smelling terpenols and esters that account for their “piney woods” perfume. Some people prefer the fragrance of a particular tree, possibly one they had as a child. A natural Christmas tree is, among other things, a giant holiday potpourri. No chemistry lab can make a polyvinylchloride tree smell like fresh pine, fir or spruce.

The origins of the Christmas tree are unclear, but evergreen trees, wreaths, and boughs were used by a number of ancient peoples, including the Egyptians, to symbolize eternal life. In sixteenth-century Germany, Martin Luther apparently helped kindle (so to speak) the custom of the indoor home Christmas tree by bringing an evergreen into his house and decorating it with candles. For centuries, Christmas trees were brought into homes on December 24th and were not removed until after the Christian feast of Epiphany on January 6th.

In terms of New York State favorites, the firs—Douglas, balsam, and Fraser—are very popular aromatic evergreens. Grand and concolor fir smell great too. When kept in water, firs all have excellent needle retention.

Pines also keep their needles well. While our native white pine is more fragrant than Scots (not Scotch; that’s for Santa) pine, the latter far outsells the former, possibly because the sturdy Scots can bear quite a load of decorations without its branches drooping.

Not only do spruces have stout branches, they tend to have a strongly pyramidal shape. Spruces may not be quite as fragrant as firs or pines, though, but they’re great options for those who like short-needle trees.

The annual pilgrimage to choose a real tree together is for many families, mine included, a cherished holiday tradition, a time to bond. You know, the customary thermos of hot chocolate; the ritual of the kids losing at least one mitten; the time-honored squabble—I mean discussion—regarding which tree is best—good smells and good memories.

Not only are Christmas trees a renewable resource, they boost the local economy. Even if you don’t have the time to cut your own from a Christmas tree grower, do yourself a favor this year and purchase a natural tree from a local vendor, who can help you select the best kind for your preferences and also let you know how fresh they are. Some trees at large retail outlets were cut weeks, if not months, before they show up at stores.

For the best fragrance and needle retention, cut a one- to two-inch “cookie” from the base before placing your tree in the stand, and fill the reservoir every two days. Research indicates products claiming to extend needle life don’t work, so save your money. Tree lights with LED bulbs don’t dry out the needles like the old style did, and are easier on your electric bill too.

Whatever your traditions, may your family, friends, and evergreens all be well-hydrated, sweet-scented and a source of good memories this holiday season.

Want to find a Christmas Tree Farm near you?

Check out the Christmas Tree Farmers of NY website: http://www.christmastreesny.org/ to find a Christmas tree grower near you!

Support your local tree farm grower and make family memories as well!
Kale Cultivars

By Matt Hayes, Cornell Chronicle

Hundreds of different kale cultivars are bred at Cornell to identify and select different traits to meet consumer preference.

Hannah Swegarden, right, and technician Matt Wavrick transplant a kale cultivar from a research field at the Homer C. Thompson Vegetable Research Farm in Freeville, New York. Photo: Matt Hayes/College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

As part of the program, Swegarden has been gathering feedback from seed producers, growers, supermarket managers and consumers. She plans to use the information to breed for consumer quality traits.

She is partnering with Cornell’s Sensory Evaluation Center to perform consumer trials to develop a consumer kale lexicon and establish a trait hierarchy that can be used to guide the breeding program. This data will determine which hybrids and breeding lines to select in the field. Swegarden predicts that in the next few years consumers will see an even richer diversity of leafy greens available to them.

“We are connecting with consumers to find out exactly what they want, and, if successful, we will be able to deliver marketable cultivars that appeal to both a consumer’s eyes and taste buds,” she said.

The research is supported by the New York Farm Viability Institute through the specialty crop block grants program.

Portuguese Kale Soup

Ingredients:
- 1 large onion (1 cup chopped)
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 carrot (1/2 cup sliced)
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 8 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon hot pepper flakes
- 1 pound potatoes (3 cups cubed)
- ½ bunch kale (4 cups chopped)
- ¼ pound reduced-fat turkey kielbasa sausage (1 cup sliced)
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Directions:
- Chop onion. Mince garlic. Peel and slice carrot.
- Heat oil in large pot on medium. Add onion, garlic, and carrots. Sauté 10 minutes.
- Add water, salt, and hot pepper flakes. Cover and bring to a boil.
- Wash and peel potatoes. Cut into ½ inch cubes.
- Add potatoes to boiling water. Cover and cook 10 minutes.
- Wash kale, remove tough stems, and chop finely. Slice sausage.
- Add kale and sausage to soup. Cook uncovered 5 minutes.
- Add pepper to taste.

Yields about 6 servings
FRISBIE FARMS
CUB FRISBIE

A native of Halsey Valley, Cub Frisbie grew up on the family’s dairy farm but vowed he’d “never be a dairy farmer” when he left for college. After studying mechanical engineering, he found the work unappealing and returned to run the farm in 1977. A few decades later, he sold his “home-bred herd” to his nephews, but kept right on farming. For the past six years, he has grown and mixed feed rations for other farmers in the area, and currently serves as the President of the Farm Bureau chapter in Tioga County.

Through his involvement with Farm Bureau, Cub has worked to bridge the divide that exists between farmers, consumers and legislators. He notes the lack of agricultural knowledge among the general public and how important it is to educate consumers about how their food is grown and raised. As an advocate for all farmers, Cub works to amplify their voices through meetings with state and local legislators, and in op-eds for local newspapers. “It’s important work,” he notes, “considering how much farming is done right here in New York State.” He finds it important for people to remain aware of their connection to the farmers who grow their food. Cub explained that “when they lose that connection”, a farmer’s labor goes unnoticed.

Fortunately, his advocacy has begun to pay off. After making numerous connections with legislators in the local and state government, he is now one of the first people they call when they want to learn more about agriculture or the perspective of farmers in New York State. And no matter what he ends up doing on a given day, Cub says he enjoys what he does, whether it be his work with Farm Bureau, or growing and mixing feed for other farmers in Tioga County. While Cub jokes “my wife wants to limit me to [working] twelve hours a day,” he notes that his work is rewarding, allowing him to connect with farmers and work to protect their interests.

AT A GLANCE
YEARS OF OPERATION: 6
OPERATION TYPE: CONVENTIONAL
PRODUCTS: ANIMAL FEED
PRIMARY MARKET: OTHER AG PRODUCERS
Our Farms, Our Stories Film Released

Our Farms, Our Stories---A documentary that highlights the stories of Tioga County farmers. This little gem of a film, twenty minutes long, lets you "visit" with five county farmers and hear their stories: why they farm, how they farm, a typical day on the farm, and more.

A product of the Our Farms, Our Stories project, the film highlights farming in rural Tioga County, and gives us insight into farmers and their connection to the land they love. The film is a companion piece to the public report that features farmer profiles (like the one on the previous page) and the academic report that includes research methodologies, findings, and more.

All of these are available through the CCE Tioga website page entitled Our Farms, Our Stories http://tioga.cce.cornell.edu/agriculture/our-farms-our-stories

Here is the link to the film on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3LtATNZzdw
14 Million Pounds of Food Lost on Vt. Farms

Leon Thompson, Vermont Correspondent of Lancaster Farming


MORRISVILLE, Vt. — Fall harvest has arrived in Vermont, but jaws are still dropping over a summertime study that revealed farms are losing more than 14 million pounds a year in marketable food.

In the first empirical study of food loss on Vermont farms, Salvation Farms and Isgood Community Research estimate that 14.3 million pounds of wholesome vegetables and berries grown in Vermont go uneaten each year.

Salvation Farms began the study last year in order to understand the scope of food loss — defined as edible, quality crops that are neither sold nor donated. The Morrisville-based non-profit has worked with farmers for more than a decade to capture and distribute unmarketed crops.

Theresa Snow, executive director of Salvation Farms, initially projected somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million pounds of edible or salable crops were lost on an annual basis.

“I never anticipated it would be that much,” Snow said of the study during a phone interview earlier this month.

Working with Elana Dean of Isgood Community Research, Salvation Farms designed a survey with farmers and administered it to 58 farmers in 13 of the state’s 14 counties. Farmers provided their own estimates on crop loss at two points: in the field and after harvest.

Dean worked with Salvation Farms and agriculture specialists from the University of Vermont and Johns Hopkins University to review the study and vet the per-acreage yield numbers used in the final calculations. The analysis combined their estimates with the U.S. Census of Agriculture land-use data.

The study found that 4.6 million pounds of produce in the state goes unpicked and is left in fields. Of the crops that are picked, 11 percent are not sold or donated, according to the study. Nearly half the farms reported leaving edible produce in their fields simply because it is blemished.

According to the 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Vermont farmers harvest 3,897 acres of vegetables annually — about 84.9 million pounds. They harvest 601 acres of berries a year, or about 3.9 million pounds.

Still, a huge bounty never gets harvested. Farmers said they pick, on average, 85 percent of the vegetables and berries they grow. While some of the unpicked produce is inedible because of animals, insects, disease or weather, plenty of it is still good for market — about 34 percent of vegetables and 25 percent of berries.

Some of that produce may be blemished or farmers might think they won’t sell it. Some farmers don’t have enough labor, storage space or time to harvest all their decent crops, according to the study.

“While some of the edible produce that is left unpicked by farmers is captured by gleaners, a large percentage is turned under in the field or fed to pasturing animals,” according to the study. “It is this food, which never makes it onto people’s plates, that we consider food lost in the field.”

The fact that 68 percent of the 14.3 million pounds is actually harvested but not offered in the market “is concerning,” according to Abbey Willard, head of the food systems section at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

The remaining 32 percent of blemished or imperfect produce that doesn’t emerge from the field presents a promotional opportunity for producers, support organizations and the Agency of Agriculture, Willard said.

“The opportunity that VAAFM sees is around marketing the blemished products and engaging with Salvation Farms in their ‘Naturally Beautiful’ campaign,” Willard said. “There are buyers who are interested in the cosmetically imperfect produce, as its intended use is for further processing and cooking before it reaches the end user consumer. We believe there is both a market opportunity for the producer, a market sector for this blemished product, and opportunity to see less food
loss and more local food being consumed. It seems to be an ultimate win.”

Salvation Farms is already talking with the Agency of Agriculture, producers and others about phase two of the study, which will likely involve Isgood Research again. The goal is to take the report from observation to real theory, from a paper survey to on-farm studies.

“We’re really going to start talking about farm surplus management, which is really limited to a community-based effort right now,” Snow said. “We need to start thinking outside the box, when it comes to gleaning, and figure out, on a statewide level, how farmers can get help with food loss and what makes them uneasy about getting it. We need more minds doing this and an increase in funding, multiple dollars.”

The Healthy Roots Collaborative, based in the Northwestern Medical Center in St. Albans, was involved in the study and will continue to work with Salvation Farms moving forward. Data from Salvation Farms’ study shows that nearly 680,000 pounds could have been gleaned from just Franklin and Grand Isle county farms alone over the past year.

“This type of hard evidence is not only validating for organizations like ours, but it’s also crucial for funders to be able to see,” said Johanna Setta, healthy roots specialist for the Northwestern Medical Center.

There is another aspect to all this, not mentioned in the study. Over the past couple of years, other studies out of Vermont have shown there is still a lack of access to healthy food for many low-income Vermonters. Meanwhile, the state is showing record numbers in job growth in the agricultural sector, yet sky-high numbers in farm food loss.

Snow said those facts make three dots on a piece of paper, but the lines that connect them are not straight, and more people need to be talking closely if the lines are to straighten.

“We have more food on this planet to feed every-body, yet we have food loss in Vermont, the leader in the locavore movement,” Snow said. “When we think about what food ‘profit’ means, it doesn’t always mean monetary. It can be about equity, too.”

Leon Thompson is a freelance writer in Vermont.
Bringing Cycles to Light: Phenology, Gardeners, and Nature’s Notebook

Phenology is a rather clinical-sounding word that describes a passionate field of study. The word comes from the Latin root “pheno,” meaning “to appear” or “to bring to light,” and it refers to the timing of seasonal changes and life cycle events in the natural world. New York Phenology Project (nyphenologyproject.org) Founder and Project Manager Kerissa Battle says, “Gardeners are intuitive phenologists—even if they don’t know it! Skilled gardeners closely track seasonal change—their success in the garden depends on it.”

“Phenophases” are distinct life cycle events; for plants, they include such things as fall color emergence, fruiting, budding, flowering, and leafing out. “When gardeners start seeds, plant, harvest, or collect seeds, they are essentially tracking phenophases in order to grow what they want,” Battle says. “Gardeners also tend to keep records year to year of when things happen in their gardens. This is the essence of tracking phenology—paying close attention to seasonal change and keeping records.”

Across the country, more than 15,000 citizen scientists are tracking phenological data for a proscribed set of plants and animals. Many of them are gardeners collecting data from plants in their own gardens; others are going to designated “phenology trails” and other sites in the community. Many of them are entering their data in an elegant national endeavor utilizing Nature’s Notebook, a data-collecting tool of USA National Phenology Network (usapn.org). In 2015, New York Phenology Project (NYPP) observers contributed more than 10% of the national dataset. The national total number of observations recorded in Nature’s Notebook in 2015 was 1.8 million!

The mission of Nature’s Notebook is to encourage close observation of nature, both for the joy of it and the data that results. Theresa Crimmins is assistant director at USA National Phenology Network. “As climate changes, the timing of these life cycle events also changes for many species. However, not all species are exhibiting changes, and the changes that are occurring are not all in the same direction or of the same magnitude.”

Crimmins says that the implications for this are wide-ranging and not yet completely realized, but include mismatches in the timing of open flowers and the arrival of pollinators, spread of invasive species, and changes in species ranges. “Local observations of phenology can provide critical data for scientists studying the effects of changing climate,” she says.

When Lilac Leaves Unfurl…

One of those data collectors is garden writer, speaker, and photographer Marie Iannotti (gardeningthehudsonvalley.com), whose name may sound familiar because she is the gardening expert for About.com. She has written three books, including The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Northeast. Iannotti remembers getting phenology-based planting advice from an older gardener who advised her to “plant your potatoes when you spot the first dandelion.” She says, “I started poking around to see if this kind of advice was just folklore or if there was some research behind it. When I found out the research on phenology is ongoing and anyone could participate in tracking, I jumped in, and I started collecting all the tips that had to do with gardening.”

Iannotti takes part in the New York Phenology Project through Nature’s Notebook. She says, “Tracking phenology is a great way for gardeners to get to know the cycles of nature and which things tend to occur at the same point in time. I started by tracking lilacs and know that when the lilac leaves first start to unfurl, I can plant lettuce and carrots, and when the lilac blooms, it’s safe to plant cucumbers and beans. When the forsythia blooms, I plant peas. It’s not an infallible system, but it’s a great tool for planning and for increasing your knowledge of natural phenomena. And since weather can be so variable, it’s more accurate than counting backwards from your last expected frost date.”

According to Iannotti, phenology makes us more aware of not just the changes, but also when something is wrong. For instance, why would we suddenly be seeing so many grasshoppers, or an increase in poison ivy? When should we be on the alert for Japanese beetles? When will cabbage worms be hatching, so we remember to go looking for them? “I’m also tracking my garden nemesis, the groundhog,” she says.

Trails and Sites Near/By You

Kerissa Battle says that one of the great things about the New York Phenology Project (NYPP) is that anyone can create a monitoring site almost anywhere. “Even if you only have space for a container garden outside of your house, or you just tag one red maple on the street in front of your house, or you get permission from the town to mark plants on your favorite local trail—you can join this effort,” she says.

Currently most monitoring sites are situated downstate. Battle would like to see more phenology trails and monitoring sites get established in central and northern New York. “Phenology data has been used mostly to monitor long-term patterns,” she says. “However, if monitoring sites are situated along a gradient—such as north to south or urban to rural—the data collected becomes relevant in the short-term as well.” How does urbanization affect the timing of flowering? Are the same pollinators being seen along an urban-rural gradient? Battle says that an array of monitoring sites that represent all of New York’s diverse ecosystems would allow these types of ques-
tions to be addressed.

In addition, central and northern New York are home to some of our State’s finest organizations and academic institutions—many of whom are already well-positioned to set up a site and engage students and the public in citizen science. “Indeed some of the most beloved nature preserves and institutions in New York are already involved—and new monitoring sites pop up every year,” Battle says.

Lime Hollow Nature Center in Cortland recently established a one-mile phenology trail with a focus on five woody plants: red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sugar maple (*A. saccharum*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), and eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). They are also tracking the wonderful herbaceous woodland forb, skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*).

The Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT), based in Ithaca, recently established a phenology trail in Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, where they are monitoring red and sugar maple as well as black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). They are looking for more volunteers to get involved with this phenology trail. The FLLT has an intimate history with phenology; one of its founders and its first president was Carl Leopold, son of beloved naturalist and author Aldo Leopold, who was an avid phenology data collector. According to the FLLT website:

> While Aldo is well-known for his phenological observations at his farm and shack in Wisconsin from 1935-1948, the whole family participated in observing nature … those observations have proved extremely important … years later, Aldo’s children Carl and Nina used Aldo’s records to publish a new study on record-breaking early flowering in 2012. Just think—the observations you contribute today could lead to an important scientific paper down the road!

### A Bustling Play

Battle set up a phenology trail around her property (which includes her garden) and checks her plants nearly every day when she takes her dogs for a walk. “I get my exercise and slow down my mind while I take in everything I am observing,” she says. “It is meditative and enlivening all at the same time. What could be better?”

“Beyond the pure pleasure of phenology monitoring, you can also craft your garden or yard within the larger context of the surrounding ecosystem,” Battle says. She goes on:

You begin to notice the same pollinators on your tomatoes that you are observing on the milkweed in the field. You begin to notice that the red maples in your yard are flowering later than the red maples in town. You start wondering if the heavy fruit set on the mountain laurel near your garden is because your garden is so lush this year that native pollinators decided to nest nearby and are now pollinating everything in sight. What insects are arriving and when; what birds are hanging around your gardens; what else is in bloom near your garden that might be attracting pollinators?

Suddenly you realize that the pollinators are not just servicing your garden—you are actually feeding them. And then they are moving from your garden to the patch of wild bergamot down the road and the fertilized seeds of the wild bergamot are feeding the birds at the end of the summer, and bam! Your intentional watching has placed your garden in the center of a bustling play—with you as both actor and audience.

Battle encourages those who are interested in creating a new NYPP site—which could be in your backyard—to visit [nyphe-nologyproject.org](http://nyphe-nologyproject.org).

Michelle Sutton (michellejudysutton.com) is a horticulturist, writer, and editor. Reprinted from Upstate Gardener with permission.
FARM SERVICE AGENCY ANNOUNCES SIGN-UP FOR EMERGENCY CONSERVATION PROGRAM (ECP) FOR TIOGA AND CHEMUNG COUNTIES

Waverly, N.Y., November 21, 2016 – Jamie Earl, County Executive Director for USDA’s Farm Service Agency in Tioga/Chemung County, announced FSA is now accepting applications for farmers who were affected by the severe drought.

For producers to be eligible, the severe drought must have impacted farmland over an extended period of time. A severe drought condition exists when available water from sources currently being used for livestock or orchards and vineyards irrigation have been reduced below normal and survival it unlikely without additional water.

The ECP practice provides water conservation and enhancement measures to:

- Permit grazing of range, pasture, or forage by livestock
- Supply emergency water for existing irrigation systems serving orchards and vineyards
- Provide emergency water for confined livestock operations.

The ECP sign-up is under way and will run through December 16, 2016 for anyone who has not already signed an applications with the Tioga/Chemung FSA office. If you have already reported the drought damage to FSA, you should still contact the office to ensure that your application is complete prior to the December 16 sign-up deadline.

USDA offers additional programs to help farmers and ranchers recover from damages caused by natural disasters. These programs include the Emergency Loan Program, Federal Crop Insurance and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

More information on ECP and other disaster assistance programs is available at local FSA service centers and online at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov.
Cornell Small Farms Program Offers a Wide Range of Courses for the Beginning Farmer

The Cornell Small Farms Program offers over twenty courses to help farmers improve their technical and business skills. Students connect with other farmers, work on farm plans, and gain practical tips without leaving their home. Course content can be accessed anywhere with a high-speed internet connection.

Most courses are six weeks long. Each week features an evening webinar and follow-up readings, videos, and activities. Students and their instructors connect through online forums and live chat. If you aren't able to attend the webinars in real-time, they are always recorded for later viewing.

Classes starting the Week of January 16 include:

BF 102: Markets and Profits
Have an idea for a farm enterprise but not sure if it's feasible? This course will help you explore the potential markets and profitability of your ideas. Its perfect for beginning farmers in their first few years of production, who are looking for help exploring marketing, development of budgets, and tools to help achieve profitability. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/bf-102-markets-profits/

BF 107: Climate Smart Farming
The earth's climate is always in flux, but today's rate of change is far beyond what previous generations of farmers have had to face. This course equips farmers with the knowledge to understand their risk to climate change and extreme weather, empowering them to implement measures that address changes and also raise their bottom line by promoting sustainability, preparedness, and best management practices. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/climate-smart-farming-bf-107/

BF 120: Veggie Farming 1 - From Planning to Planting
This course helps new and aspiring vegetable producers answer basic questions about site selection, crop rotation, seeding and transplanting, and financial aspects of veggie production. Topics including variety selection, pre-plant preparation, and cultivation will be covered. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/bf-120-growing-a-veggie-farm

BF 152: Introduction to Maple Syrup Production
The production of maple syrup is growing rapidly around the Northeast and offers a sound financial opportunity to utilize woodlots. This course explores the range possibilities of maple sugaring on your land - be it for supplemental income or for your livelihood. Students learn many practical skills. Also discussed are "alternative" trees for production, including Birch and Black Walnut. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/maplebf152/

BF 203: Holistic Financial Planning
If you've been struggling to make your farm operation profitable without driving yourself into the ground, this financial planning course is for you. Ultimately, this course will help you with the delicate balancing act that all farmers must succeed in: balancing healthy profits with healthy land and a healthy farm family and personal life. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/holistic-financial-planning-bf-203/

BF 223: Tree Fruit Production
Tree fruit are an important component of the agricultural and homeowner landscape. This course trains beginning tree fruit growers in fundamental concepts in orchard planning and management. Content will include site selection and management, rootstock and cultivar selection, orchard systems, pest management, nutrient management, and harvest considerations for commercial orchards tailored to the northeast U.S. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/tree-fruit-production-bf-223/

BF 232: Commercial Sheep Production
Have sheep or thinking about getting a flock? Producers of all experience levels will find something for them in this lively, wide-ranging course. This course is designed for commercial producers seeking to build their knowledge in production, marketing, processing, and sales of lamb and sheep products. We will cover management styles and marketing for different types of sheep farms, focusing on meat production. www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/commercial-sheep-production-bf-232/

Each course is $250, which entitles two people from a farm to attend. Discounts for early sign up and multiple course sign ups are available.

Check out the listings at http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/ for more information on a particular course and the instructors.

Questions? Contact Erica Frenay, ejf5@cornell.edu or Steve Gabriel, sfg53@cornell.edu or call 607-255-2142.
Marketing locally-raised meats outside of traditional commodity outlets

A current slump in commodity prices has many livestock producers searching for more stable and profitable alternatives for selling their animals.

Join the Tri-county graziers on Wednesday, December 7th from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Bath Civil Defense Center (SR 54 Bath, NY) to hear about the positive experiences and learning curves of direct marketing by Pennsylvania producers Dave Albert and Ted Barbour (bios below).

This event is free and open to the public. Sponsored by the Tri-county graziers, with support from Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Steuben, Schuyler and Allegany Counties, and Penn State University Extension.

For questions or more information, please contact Brett Chedzoy of Schuyler CCE at bjc226@cornell.edu, or by phone at: 607-742-3657.

NYS New Farmers Grant Fund: Applications Now Open!

New York State has allocated $1 million in the 2016-2017 State budget for the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund. Administered by the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development (“ESD”) in consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Markets (“Ag & Markets”), its purpose is to provide grants to support beginning farmers who have chosen farming as a career and who materially and substantially participate in the production of an agricultural product within a region of the state. Supporting beginning farmers will result in the growth of agricultural business and the concomitant tax revenues within the state. Grants may provide a minimum of $15,000 and a maximum of $50,000 for up to 50% of total project costs. The remaining 50% must be matched by the recipient. Eligible sources of recipient match are limited to cash, lines of credit and loans. Other grant funds may not be used as matching funds. The minimum grant award is $15,000 and the maximum is $50,000. For any award the total project cost must be at least twice the grant award request.

Grant awards will be announced in the Spring of 2017.

Contact Information
Questions should be sent to Bonnie Devine at nyfarm-fund@esd.ny.gov

Application
The application form, guidelines, amendments to these guidelines and additional information about the program can be accessed on the New Farmers Grant Fund website: http://esd.ny.gov/BusinessPrograms/NewFarmersGrantFund.html

Applications must be postmarked by January 27, 2017.

Applications postmarked after such date will not be accepted. Based on interest in the program and the availability of program funds the deadline for submission of applications may be extended by ESD at its discretion.

Profitable Meat Marketing! You are selling local meat—but are you making money?

Join Ag. Marketing Specialist Matt LeRoux at a Profitable Meat Marketing workshop at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County on Tuesday December 6th from 5:30-8:30 pm to find out if you are covering all your meat marketing costs—including your TIME—and bringing in a profit.

In the workshop, you will learn how to develop your farm’s marketing strategy and how to set specific marketing objectives to make your job easier. In addition to marketing tips, you’ll learn about Cornell Cooperative Extension’s NEW Meat Price Calculator.

The calculator uses your farm’s data to develop pricing for meat sold by the hanging weight or by the cut. It accounts for processing and marketing costs, allows you to build in a profit, then lets you adjust the pricing of each cut until you reach your goal.

Finally, you will learn more about navigating the Meat Suite, a free website to help your farm reach consumers seeking local meat in bulk.

The cost to attend is $10 to cover handouts and refreshments. The link to register and pay securely online is: https://reg.cce.cornell.edu/profitablemeatmarketing_203.

To get the most out of the workshop, producers should prepare some information in advance. Also, if this date does not work, there will be workshops across NYS throughout the winter which may fit your needs. Email Laura Biasillo at lw257@cornell.edu to inquire.

2 Day Intensive Farm Food Safety Workshop
Tuesday, December 6, 2016, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM and Wednesday, December 7, 2016, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

In recent years, produce related foodborne illnesses have hit the media and impacted fresh fruit and vegetable growers.

One of the impacts is a new food safety law that will bring changes to the fresh produce industry and likely affect producers both large and small. Many producers are nervous about what this could mean for their farm business.

Join
Gretchen Wall of Cornell University’s National Good Agricultural Practices Program and the Produce Safety Alliance for a 2-day intensive workshop that will help you understand food safety risks and implement food safety practices on the farm.

This training is for any fresh produce grower interested in taking a proactive approach to food safety, and especially useful for anyone who is interested in selling to large retailers, institutional markets, or other buyers who require GAPs certification.

On Day 1, Gretchen will offer growers an in-depth look at GAPs, how and where microbial contamination can occur, and how to use the GAPs standards to write a farm produce safety plan. Also on Day 1, an inspector from the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets will describe the GAPs audit and answer your questions about this procedure, should you choose to participate in an audit in the future. On Day 2, we will break out the laptops and help you write your own farm produce safety plan. Ag & Markets personnel will be back on Day 2 to field more questions about audits as you work through your plan.

For Day 2, you will need to bring a laptop with Microsoft Word. If you do not have a laptop, there will be a limited number of computers available for you to use in the computer lab - please let us know as soon as possible if you need to borrow one!

If you would like to bring along a more computer-savvy employee of your farm to help on Day 2, you are welcome to do so; the cost for each additional farm representative is $20 (to cover their lunch), and you can bring up to 2 additional representatives. Your registration includes lunch, snacks, and coffee, as well as a packet of food safety reference materials and digital files of food safety resources.

Fee: $65
Location: CCE Broome, 840 Upper Front St, Binghamton, NY 13905
Learn More: https://reg.cce.cornell.edu/2016gapstraining_203

Developing your Farm or Food Business

Tuesdays, January 24th, 31st, February 7th, 14th, 21st, 6:00-9:00 PM Ithaca, NY 14850 Fee: $150

This 5-session course is specifically for people in the early stages of developing a farm or food business, whether you are just launching your business or have been operating a few years and want to become more strategic in how you move forward, expand and increase viability.

This course covers:

The local farm and food sector including unmet needs, opportunities and niche markets.

Equity issues and justice in the food system including examples of realistic ways to approach these within the scope of your business model.

Experience from farm and food entrepreneurs about business startup and lessons learned.

Tools for business assessment, strategic planning, understanding liabilities and legalities.

Setting business goals and taking stock of resources and progress to date.

Accounting and financial planning concepts and tools.

Develop a marketing plan and marketing channels.

Instructors: Leslie Ackerman, independent Business Consultant formerly with the CFCU Business Cents program; Matt LeRoux, Cooperative Extension Agriculture Marketing Specialist; Monika Roth, Cooperative Extension Agriculture Program Leader; Kate Cardona, Groundswell Center Outreach and Program Coordinator; regional farm and food business entrepreneurs, other visiting experts. The course will be facilitated by Mary Kate Wheeler, Groundswell Center Board Member.

Location: All classes will be held at the Just BeCause Center located at 1013 West State St. in Ithaca starting at 6 PM until 9 PM.

Fee: $150. Tuition assistance available; see contact info. below.

Registration:

STEP 1: Register online or come by the Groundswell Center office, 225 S Fulton Street, Ithaca.

STEP 2: Pay Tuition here or mail a check to our office, made out to CTA – Groundswell. Note: If tuition assistance is needed, contact the email below and do not make a payment at this time.

Questions about the course, please contact info@GroundswellCenter.org or call 607-319-5095.

Southern Tier Maple School

Saturday, December 3rd from 9:30 – noon at the Tyrone Fire Hall, State Route 226 Tyrone. Join Cornell Cooperative Extension’s state maple specialist, Steve Childs, for important updates that will make your maple operation more successful – no matter the size! Further information available soon at: www.cceschuyler.org
Dairy Sheep Symposium

The 22nd Annual Dairy Sheep Association of North America Symposium will be held at Cornell University on 2 - 4 December 2016. Details are in an 8-page brochure at https://blogs.cornell.edu/newsheep/files/2015/09/2016-DSANA-program-registration.v12-13w4e86.pdf. The program includes a tour of a large sheep dairy and presenters who are among the top sheep researchers in the nation.

NYS New Farmers Grant Fund: Applications Now Open!

Program Summary

New York State has allocated $1 million in the 2016-2017 State budget for the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund. Administered by the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development ("ESD") in consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Markets ("Ag & Markets"), its purpose is to provide grants to support beginning farmers who have chosen farming as a career and who materially and substantially participate in the production of an agricultural product within a region of the state. Supporting beginning farmers will result in the growth of agriculture and the concomitant tax revenues within the state. Grants may provide a minimum of $15,000 and a maximum of $50,000 for up to 50% of total project costs. The remaining 50% must be matched by the recipient. Eligible sources of recipient match are limited to cash, lines of credit and loans. Other grant funds may not be used as matching funds. The minimum grant award is $15,000 and the maximum is $50,000. For any award the total project cost must be at least twice the grant award request.

Contact Information

Questions should be sent to Bonnie Devine at nyfarmfund@esd.ny.gov

Application

The application form, guidelines, amendments to these guidelines and additional information about the program can be accessed on the New Farmers Grant Fund website: http://esd.ny.gov/BusinessPrograms/NewFarmersGrantFund.html

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Are you a NY Farmer selling wholesale? Get $50 for a 30 minute interview

Are you a small or mid-scale farmer in New York State with experience selling to food hubs, distributors, groceries, restaurants or cooperatives? The Cornell Small Farms Program is seeking 30 minute phone interviews with farmers of all enterprises who market at least a portion of products to wholesale channels. The interview questions will ask about your experiences building relationships, marketing, harvesting, packing and transporting your product to the wholesale buyer.

Quotes from the interviews will be incorporated into the 2nd Edition of the Baskets to Pallets curriculum, a training manual to prepare farmers to successfully enter wholesale markets. Farmers will have the opportunity to review and approve any selected quotes and will also receive a $50.00 check for their time. Interviews will be scheduled at the farmer’s convenience. For more information, contact Violet Stone, project coordinator, at 607-255-9227 or email vws7@cornell.edu. Thank you!

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Livestock and Poultry Farmers: Apply for a Fund-a-Farmer grant today!

Are you a livestock or poultry farmer who wants to improve animal welfare on your operation? You may be eligible to receive a Fund-a-Farmer grant from FACT! FACT will award grants of up to $2,500 for two types of projects: Animal Welfare Certification Projects and Pasture Improvement Projects. Check out the grant guidelines for the full details and apply online! Applications are due by November 21, so don’t delay. FACT is also offering a free online information session to help farmers with their applications. Register for the webinar and learn more about this unique funding opportunity.

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Conservation Reserve Program

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Deputy Secretary Alexis Taylor today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands practice specifically tailored for small-scale livestock grazing operations. Small livestock operations with 100 or fewer head of grazing dairy cows (or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per farm. USDA’s goal is to enroll up to 200,000 acres.

“For 30 years, lands in the Conservation Reserve Program have contributed to soil and water protection and wildlife and pollinator habitat, while playing a significant role in mitigating climate change,” said Taylor. “CRP Grasslands recognizes the conservation value of well-managed, working grazing lands and pasturelands. This new opportunity for small livestock operations, like the dairy farms or small beef farms common in Pennsylvania, will help ensure that livestock operations of varying scales and across the country have an opportunity to achieve environmental and economic benefits. Small livestock operations are encouraged to contact their local Farm Service Agency office to learn more about this program.”

Taylor also announced that the current CRP Grassland ranking period will end on Nov. 10, 2016. To date, the USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) has received nearly
5,000 offers covering over 1 million acres for this CRP working-lands conservation program. These offers are predominantly larger acreage ranchland in Western states.

The new practice for small-scale livestock grazers aims, in part, to encourage greater diversity geographically and in types of livestock operation. This opportunity will close on Dec. 16, 2016. Offers selected this fiscal year will be enrolled into CRP Grasslands beginning Oct. 1, 2017.

Participants in CRP Grasslands establish or maintain long-term, resource-conserving grasses and other plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay), while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants can receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the grazing value of the land and up to 50 percent to fund cover or practices like cross-fencing to support rotational grazing or improving pasture cover to benefit pollinators or other wildlife.

USDA will select offers for enrollment based on six ranking factors: (1) current and future use, (2) new farmer/rancher or underserved producer involvement, (3) maximum grassland preservation, (4) vegetative cover, (5) environmental factors and (6) pollinator habitat. Offers for the second ranking period also will be considered from producers who submitted offers for the first ranking period but were not accepted, as well as from new offers submitted through Dec. 16.

“Adding a working-lands conservation program to the toolbox is an exciting opportunity for the future of CRP,” said Taylor. “There also are ways that CRP Grasslands could be combined with other traditional CRP conservation practices, such as riparian buffers on the same farm, to create a package that can help keep small livestock operations in production. An example of such a package would be to dedicate the most sensitive land to conservation, while still maintaining the bulk of the area as working grasslands for livestock. USDA would provide cost-share assistance to help farmers install fencing and provide alternative water sources to livestock, as well as annual CRP payments to help the farm's bottom-line.”

In May, FSA accepted 101,000 acres in the grasslands program, with more than 70 percent of the acres having diverse native grasslands under threat of conversion, and more than 97 percent of the acres having a new, veteran or underserved farmer or rancher as a primary producer.

Small livestock operations or other farming and ranching operations interested in participating in CRP Grasslands should contact their local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit http://offices.usda.gov. To learn more about FSA’s conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. The program, called EZ Guarantee Loans, uses a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to $100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations. EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent. USDA is providing a 90-day period for the public to review and comment on program improvements. To review program details, visit www.regulations.gov and follow the instructions to submit comments.
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