Steuben Spotlight

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities for 100 years!

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Our Mission

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County builds strong communities through education and collaboration in the areas of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Financial Literacy, Nutrition Education and 4-H Youth Development.

Our Vision

Our work is based in over 100 years of service to the community using the land grant mission. Our vision is a strong community in which residents thrive, maintaining health, self-reliance, and prosperity.

Creating the relationships to help farmers succeed

“Steuben County is a very rural agricultural county,” says Larkin Podsiedlik, CCE-Steuben Executive Director, “and yet people are not as aware about where their food comes from. So one of the things CCE-Steuben is trying to do is get the word out about the issues that farmers are facing and how people can support their local farmer. A big part of our role is staying on top of the research and connecting to Cornell to make sure we are bringing the best to the county. Our people connect to the Cornell experts and build the relationships – that is what CCE brings to the table.”

The Burns Family Farm in Hornell began in 1966 with a humble start of 43 cows and 450 acres. When they showcased their farm at the 2010 Farm City Day, they had approximately 400 milking cows, 12 employees, and 2,000 acres. Jonathan Burns, now owner of the farm, says, “CCE has helped me get out of my own little box. They have helped me step out to be on the forefront of going into schools and teaching kids…They have helped me to see the need of the educational side and helped me be available for questions…tours…bringing people on the farm. They’ve helped me to be able to step out and not be so timid in promoting what I do.”

CCE empowers adults to choose healthier drinks

Nutrition Educator Jon Sterlace reviewed a variety of drink choices with a group of three Steuben County Department of Social Services nutrition program attendees. Jon has worked with these folks before and was concerned that they were still not choosing lower sugar drinks. Using the ReThink Your Drink lesson, they looked closely at a variety of beverage choices, with emphasis on the nutrition facts labels and ingredient lists.

Robert talked about his preference for large size energy drinks, so they took a closer look at the label on his drink. They counted out how many teaspoons of sugar were in a serving, then multiplied it by the number of servings that was in his can, times the number of cans he drank each day. This exercise was a real eye-opener for him, as he commented, “I had never realized there was so much sugar in there. I just drank it without thinking about it. I’ll choose low-fat milk instead.”

Fellow class attendees Terence and Ashley also agreed they would change their drink choices. Terence commented, “I like 100% juice, but now I know one cup a day is enough.” Ashley added, “I will choose water and eat healthier food, too.”
**Former Steuben 4-H’er says 4-H is the key to the doors of the world**

By Jeremy Elliott-Engel, CCE-Steuben 4-H Alumni

Growing up, I would spend hours playing with farm toys and I spent hours planning out farms. When I was 10 or 11 years old my Mom came home and mentioned about an organization for kids who also were interested in agriculture. I was pretty sure I had found “my people!”

I attended my first Southern Tier Livestock 4-H Club meeting, in January 1997. My first project was an order of 25 chicks from the Hemlock Agway. I poured through the copies of the hatchery catalogue that they had provided. I had to make the right decision and, of course, there are so many types of chickens. I credit this experience as my first livestock judging experience. Judging competitions provide opportunities for the development of critical analysis and oral communication skills. Over the next seven years of membership in Steuben County 4-H, I would become heavily involved in poultry and livestock judging, which allowed me to attend state, regional and national competitions.

My involvement in 4-H helped me have many interactions with higher education institutions across the state. Through these experiences I was exposed to agriculture as a college major and the possibilities of a career in agriculture. Numerous caring adults in my 4-H club and in the CCE office supported my leadership growth through many endeavors to plan and implement poultry and goat showmanship clinics. Long before the 4-H program had developed the Teens as Teachers model, I was compelled to create learning opportunities with my peers. These experiences were some of my first experiences teaching and organizing people - skills and experiences that have become central to my professional work.

4-H also provided me opportunities to travel to Washington, D.C. for Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF) trip and National 4-H Conference. During my six years as a Regional 4-H Youth Development specialist in rural Southwest Missouri, my first position after graduating from Cornell University with a Masters in Agricultural Science Education, I regularly reflected on my many positive experiences in Steuben County 4-H. I coordinated statewide trips to provide youth opportunities to get excited about government. And I traveled with youth to many different states across the Midwest for livestock judging contests.

I will graduate with a Doctorate in Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education from Virginia Tech in August 2018, and I will take over the statewide leadership responsibilities for the Arizona 4-H program in September.

I do attribute Steuben County 4-H as being my catalyst. As a delegate to National 4-H Council, I stated “4-H is the key to the doors of the world.” Steuben County 4-H unlocked many opportunities for me. I deeply believe that it can do the same for all youth. Whether they are super excited for their first order of chicks or if they cannot wait for their Lego-NXT lego kit to arrive in the mail, 4-H can be their catalyst.

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**You too can enrich a young person’s life through 4-H experiences.**
**You gift can provide ribbons at fair, new technology equipment, or scholarships to camp. Call us at 607-664-2300 to see what you can do. How can you help?**

**CCE Helped Me...**

“...make healthier low-cost meals and snacks. This program was a great learning experience. I have been trying to eat less sugar and smaller portions. I still struggle with this, but fruits are a great alternative to processed snacks. The nutrition papers with tips also help a lot, and I have started taking more walks.”

*Jessica, EFNEP participant*

**CCE-Steuben helps farm families promote their business to the public**

**John Wallace, Avoca farmer**

John Wallace of Avoca says he has wanted to be involved in farming since he was little. He is proud that his father started the farm and that he is keeping it in the family. He not only learned the trade from his dad, but also a good work ethic. When his father passed a couple years ago, John expanded crops to potatoes, rented a little more land, and increased use of new technology.

He says, “CCE has helped keep me informed throughout the farming practices that we endure here every day. Farmers are misunderstood. People think if you’re a farmer, you’re a big farmer. Farmers do their best to provide a quality product. Cornell does an excellent job of making sure the chemicals are safe.”

**CCE Helped Me...**

“...stay informed about farming practices.”

*John Wallace*

**CCE Helped Me...**

“...unlock many opportunities for my future.”

*Jeremy Elliott-Engel*
CCE-Steuben financial education helps elderly widow save her house

By Nancy Reigelsperger, CCE-Steuben Financial Educator

The Financial Management program through Cornell Cooperative Extension provides financial coaching to people of all income levels, ages and needs. We receive client referrals from a multitude of programs across the county. One referral from the Office of the Aging was a woman in desperate need of financial help. She was in her early 80’s, extremely upset, and on the verge of tears. As we talked, I discovered she had recently lost her husband, who had no life insurance nor a pension, leaving her in dire financial straits. The biggest issue was that she was behind in her property taxes and about to lose her home of 50 years. On top of this challenge, she had run up $20,000 in credit card debt and used all of her savings to pay for her husband’s funeral.

We worked together on a strategy to contact her creditors and create a budget so that going forward she could pay her taxes and keep her home. I encouraged her to apply for food stamps and utilize the food pantry, because previously she had been skipping groceries so she could attempt to pay her bills. She admitted to me that she was at the end of her line when she came to our office, feeling devastated about the possibility of losing her home. She didn’t know where to turn because she was an independent woman and didn’t want to rely on her family and was embarrassed to ask for help. She didn’t want to discuss her situation with family or friends, so having someone unbiased and professional like CCE to discuss her situation was truly comforting.

In a recent follow up call, I spoke to this woman and she admitted she was living a different life now and no longer felt depressed. She is able and ready to pay this year’s school taxes, and once they are paid, can make arrangements for payments on back taxes. She has arranged payments on an old gas bill and is now receiving HEAP assistance. She thanked me profusely for being so helpful to her and her words to me were “I now can bask in the sunshine.” There are so many unique financial situations that weigh heavily on people’s lives and our goal is to help them strategize wise choices, to be able to look at their financial situations with a different set of eyes, and to find their path to a financially successful life.

Financial conference inspires Corning resident to pay down debt

By Lisa Sterlace, Corning participant

Because of the information that I received at CCE-Steuben’s Women’s Financial Conference, I took a good look at my own household. I was not always good about paying bills on time, and the late fees on those late payments really can add up! I also made the decision to take on a second job. My “side hustle” income is now being used to pay down credit card debt. So far this has helped us pay off two credit cards. What an eye opener it was to see where our debt was!

Another key decision I made was to have my will updated. There are important reasons to update your will. My will has been updated to change with our circumstances, which now have my older daughters caring for their younger sister. I learned to ask questions of my parents: Where is their will kept? What are their wishes when they pass away? These questions are important to ask, even if they are uncomfortable. Make a commitment to set aside money regularly towards your retirement early in your working life. Even an amount as small as $25 each paycheck will help. You won’t miss it and the money will grow to provide a future for you. I have started to get my house organized. I checked out the many websites I learned about at the Women’s Conference for ideas. I began with a 52-week decluttering plan online that addresses every area of my home. The daily mini tasks help you reach your goals. While I have not implemented everything that I learned yet, I have taken a huge leap towards financial stability and organization in my household. Just take that first step.

Extension gives farmers latest research to increase their crop yields

Linwood Ford, Campbell farmer

Linwood Ford of Campbell had just a small produce stand in Savona in 1991 and could not find additional land to rent. An older landowner finally offered him some ground in the flood plain. During his first year, 10 acres of tobacco got flooded out. “But we made it through. CCE helped me maintain my sanity,” he said. “They gave me faith in people, because I almost gave up.” He was also discouraged when 20,000 tomato plants were suffering. He was amazed that the CCE Agriculture Agent brought a Cornell expert on site to inspect the problem and offer a product that saved those plants. Then seven years ago Linwood agreed to put $7,000 into a high tunnel because the agent said there was a program that would refund the investment. It ended up helping him extend his growing season by two months. “Cornell is the best, if farmers will use them,” he says. “If you’re a young farmer and you need help, you’ve got to ask. CCE is a good place to start. Cornell has a tremendous amount of knowledge.”

Linwood has now joined the CCE-Steuben Agriculture Advisory Committee and the Farm To School Initiative. “It’s important to me. Our future is the children. If they understand where they food comes from, they’ll be interested in becoming farmers.”
Dear CCE Friends:

This summer I had the pleasure of tagging along as we interviewed farmers for a video project about farming past and present as part of CCE-Steuben’s Centennial. Some of their stories are in the pages of this Spotlight.

While riding in a tractor over 30 acres of potatoes had me feeling like a kid in a candy shop, it was the responses from the farmers that really highlighted the day for me. Whether it was in large or small ways, these farmers shared how Cooperative Extension has had a positive impact on their farm and their family. Afterwards, the videographer asked me how it felt to hear about what CCE has done for these farms. My response was something like this:

As you move through an organization, farther away from the front lines of public service work, you often don’t get to see the impact of your organization in such a tangible way. So to hear stories of exactly how CCE’s staff, programs, and very presence in the community has made a real difference to the people of our community brings tears to my eyes.

A favorite quote of mine, from Ralph Waldo Emerson, is as follows: “...to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you lived here. This is to have succeeded.”

I know that Cornell Cooperative Extension, our staff, and our many volunteers and donors, both today and over the past 100 years, have succeeded because we have left Steuben County a better place. I hope you will join us in making a Centennial gift today to help CCE continue to leave our community a bit better for the next 100 years.

Larkin L. Podsiedlik, MS, MPH
Executive Director

Larkin met 2018 County Fair headliner Easton Corbin who is a former 4-H’er himself.