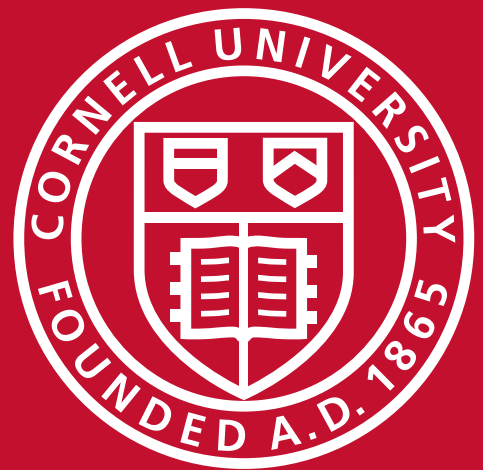


Cornell Cooperative Extension
Rensselaer County

ANNUAL REPORT



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A LETTER FROM BOARD PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CCE Rensselaer invites you to see the positive results of our work. Our Annual Report highlights all the outstanding impacts our organization has had on the residents of Rensselaer County. Collectively, the many programs and events we offered reached 11,279 individuals of all ages. From our Cloverbud 4-Hers to our seniors benefiting from Digital Literacy to the agriculture, horticulture and healthy living programs we reach residents from all ages.

We thank the Rensselaer County Executive and Legislature for continuing to support CCE. Additionally, we thank our many volunteers and staff for making our programs and operations of our association so successful! We couldn't do this good work without support. As you read our Annual Report, we hope you learn one or two new things about how CCE makes Rensselaer County stronger.

Penny Hill
Board of Directors President

Bernie Wiesen
Executive Director

OUR MISSION

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability, and social well-being. We bring local experience and research-based solutions together, helping Rensselaer County families and communities thrive in our rapidly changing world.

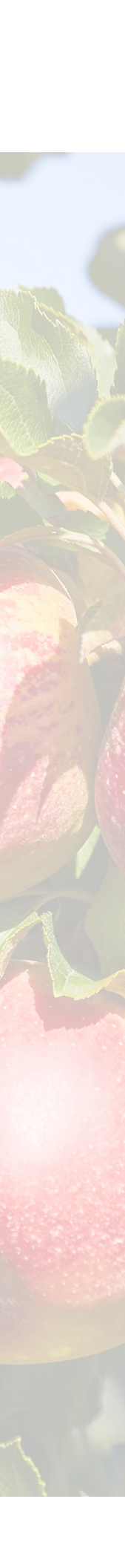


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ABOUT CCE RENSSELAER

Rooted in every county of the state, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) translates Cornell's world-class research into practical, real-world knowledge for New York residents, businesses and communities. Established in 1912, CCE has been a trusted resource for many generations of New Yorkers—offering proven, cutting-edge information to assist individuals and families with raising children, saving energy and money, growing and preparing food, starting and sustaining businesses and much more. Backed by research and leadership from Cornell, county offices operate independently with each office pursuing funding to focus on the issues that matter most to residents, tailoring knowledge and expertise to solve pressing local concerns and advance vital community interests.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Penny Hill, President, Member at Large
Donna Bradbury, Vice President, 4-H PDC Representative
Sarah Shufon Westcott, Secretary, Member at Large
CharlieAnne Huffam, Secretary Two, Member at Large
Jeanie Scott, Treasurer, Member at Large
Hali Bey Ramdene, Member at Large
David Tarbox, Member at Large
Erin Walsh, Member at Large

Representatives

Patrick Michel, AG PDC Representative
Nancy Clement, FCS PDC Representative
Betsy Kauffman, Hort PDC Representative
Danielle Hautaniemi, Cornell State Extension Specialist
Jeff Wysocki, County Legislator Representative
Michelle Burton, County Executive Representative

PUBLIC FUNDING PARTNERS

County of Rensselaer

Steven McLaughlin, County Executive
Kelly Hoffman, Legislative Chairwoman

Cornell University

Andy Turner, Director of Cornell University Cooperative Extension

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Dr. Jaye L. Hanby, Director

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES (PDC)

Agriculture

Robert Church
Carl Cipperly
Nichole Glasser
Matthew Grab
Patrick Michel
David Pruiksma
Keith Wagner

Family & Consumer Sciences

Nancy Clement
Mindy Fowler
Pearl Higgins
Shennan Jarboe
Alexander Little
Lisa Overocker
Emily Purtell

Horticulture

Janet Brizzell
Betsy Kauffman
Ben Larson
Jacob Morris
Christopher Roblin
Will Steller
Stephanie Stewart

4-H

Donna Bradbury
Laura Holmes
Susan Jacon
Megan Myers
Natalie Shudt
Dona Ries
Liz Ruepp

STAFF

CCE Rensselaer County Staff

Felisha Chandler, Nutrition
David Chinery, Horticulture
Eileen DePaula, 4-H Youth Development
Kandis Freer, 4-H Youth Development
Mamnenge Gbim-Gbade, Agriculture & 4-H Youth Development
Lexi Hoag, Fair Program Assistant
Meredith Howard, Fair Program Assistant
Catherine LaPorta, 4-H Youth Development
Kim Mullen, Nutrition

Margery Reilly, Finance Manager
Michele Reynolds, Fair Program Assistant
Nikola Segoloni, Healthy Living & Food Systems
Michelle St. Louis, Digital Literacy
Kate Tubbs, Fair Program Assistant
Marcie Vohnoutka, Communications Coordinator
Bernie Wiesen, Executive Director

Shared Business Network

Michael Heiserman, Information & Technology Support Specialist
Jim McNaughton, Human Resources

Erik Yager, Information & Technology Manager
Anthony Zumbolo, Finance

Capital Area Agriculture & Horticulture Program

Danielle Doering, Commercial Field Crops Educator
Steve Hadcock, Team Leader, Beginning Farmer & Market Development

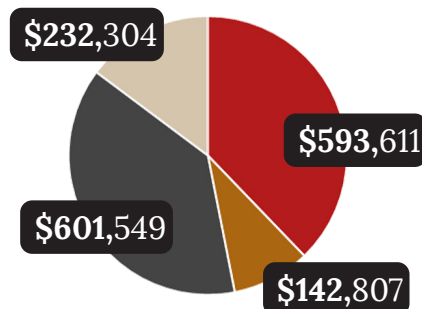
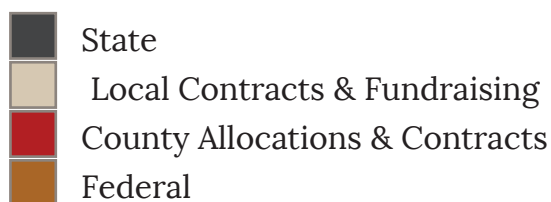
Rachel Moody, Commercial Livestock Educator
Jingjing Yin, Commercial Horticulture Educator

Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Team

Michael Basedow, Tree Fruit Specialist
Charles Bornt, Team Leader, Vegetable Specialist
Dan Donahue, Tree Fruit Specialist
Sarah Elone, Technician
Ethan Grundberg, Vegetable Specialist
Liz Higgins, Team Leader, Business Management Specialist

Elisabeth Hodgdon, Vegetable Specialist
Heather Kase, Berry Specialist
Teresa Rusinek, Vegetable Specialist
Jeremy Schuster, Viticulture Specialist
Jennifer Stanton, Technician
Crystal Stewart-Courtens, Vegetable Specialist
Maire Ullrich, Vegetable Specialist

2025 FUNDING - \$1,570,271



AGRICULTURE

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County delivers educational outreach that connects consumers with local food systems, supports farm viability, and informs public and government stakeholders on best agricultural practices.

Along with our local agriculture educators, the Ag Extension team also encompasses two regional initiatives—the Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program (CAAHP) and the Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program (ENYCHP).

Extension educators supported producers through technical assistance and professional development in emerging agricultural practices, which included:

- Greenhouse Management
- Small Ruminant Parasite Control
- Landowner/Tenant Relationships & Agricultural Value Assessment
- Pasture & Poultry Management
- Soil & Erosion Control
- Avian Influenza education

The Harvest Connection platform continued linking consumers directly with local farms, supported by educational communications that encouraged the purchase of local produce.

- Facebook page: 5,000+ visits/views (Jan–Oct 2025)
- Website: 19,000+ active users (Jan–Oct 2025)

Farm Day Out event at Engel's Acres in Brunswick welcomed approximately 250 attendees. Participants toured the farm and experienced firsthand the process of food production; gaining a deeper appreciation for the role of local agriculture in their daily lives, which was seen with the increase of locally purchased food.

In partnership with the Hudson River Estuary Program and Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the “Building Resilient Communities” webinar series engaged 74 Capital District residents—representing local governments, nonprofits, and neighborhood groups—to strengthen climate action and conservation. The sessions fostered collaboration and helped communities access resources to boost environmental resilience.

By bridging the gap between farms and communities, CCE promotes sustainable agriculture, strengthens the local economy, and encourages environmentally responsible practices.

4 QUARTERLY FARM TO FORK
WEBINARS

74 PARTICIPANTS FOR THE BUILDING
RESILIENT COMMUNITIES WEBINAR

250 ATTENDEES AT
FARM DAY OUT



AGRICULTURE PRIMARY PROGRAM AREAS

INCLUDE

- Market Development, Business Management and Analysis
- Soil Health, Production & Variety Evaluation
- Pasture & Pest Management
- Pesticide Certification and Recertification
- Food Safety
- Cultural Practices



Specialists have built a strong network of fruit and vegetable growers who allow insect traps and field scouting on their farms to monitor pest activity. While no grower wants to rely on fungicides or insecticides, these practices help them make informed decisions and use treatments only when necessary to produce a healthy, marketable crop.

HORTICULTURE



COMMERCIAL HORTICULTURE

In 2025, a powerful lineup of educational programs that empowered professionals, volunteers, and community members with practical skills and knowledge in horticulture and pest management were delivered.

30-Hour Pesticide Applicator Training- Held over ten days in February, prepared 14 participants to take the NYSDEC certification exams.

Pest Management Update Series- Offered NYSDEC pesticide recertification credits to professionals.

- **Woody Plant Pest Update-** drew 20 attendees.
- **Pests Underground: Basics of Moles and Voles and Basics of Jumping Worms** each attracted 24 participants.

YOUTH OUTREACH

In partnership with the Rensselaer County Legislature and Environmental Management Council, an Arbor Day event was held at Gardner-Dickinson School in Wynantskill. 32 first-grade students planted redbud seedlings and learned about the importance of trees.

Rensselaer Boys & Girls Club youth were guided through hands-on gardening and nature-based projects in a series of classes.



144 SPENT THEIR LUNCH HOUR THROUGH
LUNCH IN THE GARDEN SERIES

180 ATTENDEES OVER 6 SESSIONS AT THE
DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

190 PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED
SPRING GARDEN DAY

CONSUMER HORTICULTURE

SPRING GARDEN DAY

A full-day celebration with educational workshops based on gardening, keynote speakers and vendors attracted 190 attendees.

- Fundraising efforts during the event raised nearly \$1,800, providing vital support for Master Gardener activities throughout the year.

EARTH DAY & ARBOR DAY REDBUD GIVEAWAY

33 Redbud seedlings were distributed to the community. Participants also learned about CCE and signed up for the e-newsletter.

SUMMER EVENINGS IN THE GARDEN SPARK LEARNING AND COMMUNITY

This summer, the Demonstration Garden at the Robert C. Parker School in North Greenbush came alive with an average of 30 attendees over 6 sessions with a slate of engaging, evening programs designed to educate and inspire the public.

LUNCH IN THE GARDEN SERIES

Lunch In the Garden Series- Zoom-based series brought gardening education to lunchtime screens, engaging a total of 190 viewers. Topics included: Jumping Worms, Earth Friendlier Lawns, Backyard Medicine: Eat Your Lawn, Contain Your Garden and The Benefits of Trees.

CAPITAL REGION FLOWER AND GARDEN EXPO

Master Gardeners staffed an ecological gardening booth and created a stunning garden display featured on the front page of the Troy Record. Presentations included: "Earth Friendlier Lawns" yielding 30 attendees with additional talks by Master Gardeners.

MASTER GARDENERS



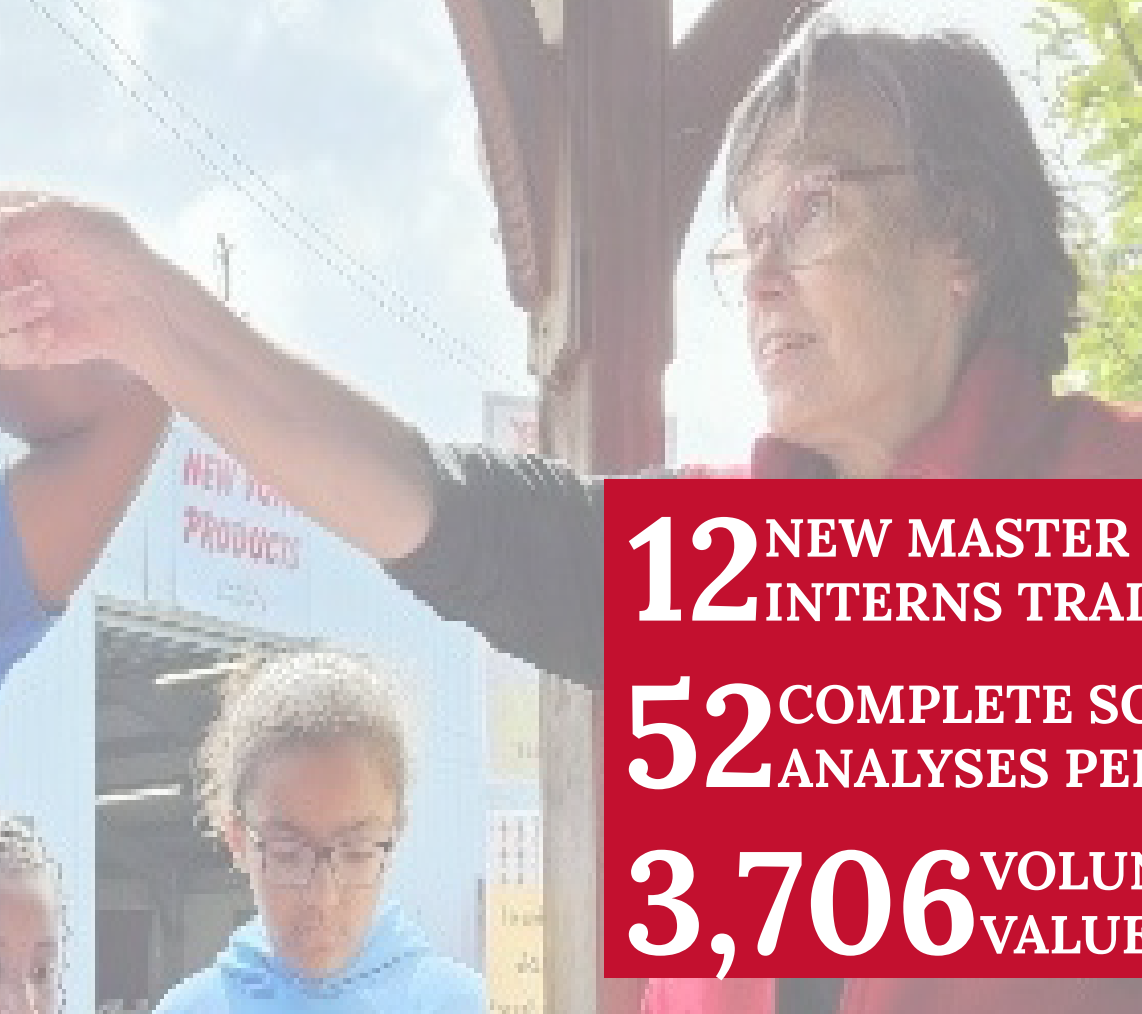
MASTER GARDENERS RESPOND TO SEASONAL PESTS AND NEW INVASIVES WITH EXPERTISE AND CARE

From peach leaf curl to apple scab, magnolia scale, and brown patch disease in lawns; the team addressed a wide range of concerns. Other notable issues included:

- Rudbeckia trioqid
- Apple-cedar rust
- Verticillium wilt
- Septoria and early blight on tomatoes
- Powdery mildew
- Japanese and Oriental beetles
- Bee and wasp identification
- Invasive Oriental bittersweet and Japanese knotweed

MASTER GARDENERS PROVIDE LEADERSHIP TO COMMUNITY- ACCESSIBLE GARDENS

- Demonstration Garden at the Robert C. Parker School in North Greenbush
- Leslie's Garden in downtown Troy
- Hospice Garden in Rensselaer
- Albert Family Community Forest in East Nassau
- Oakwood Cemetery Tree Survey and Yourt Monument in Troy
- 9/11 Memorial Garden in Lansingburgh



12 NEW MASTER GARDNER
INTERNS TRAINED IN 2025

52 COMPLETE SOIL NUTRIENT
ANALYSES PERFORMED

3,706 VOLUNTEER HOURS
VALUED AT \$128,930



Master Gardeners enjoyed an informative and entertaining tour of Hyde Park gardens; with stops at Bellefield, the Roosevelt Home, Vanderbilt Mansion, and the Northern Dutchess Botanical Garden.



4th Annual Used Garden Tool Fundraiser at the Sand Lake Garden Club's Garden Faire—answering gardening questions and offering tools, décor, and smiles to all who braved the harsh weather.



Friends from Wildwood paid a special visit to the Demonstration Garden. They sampled herbs and veggies from the gardens, scouted for insects and made bouquets from a myriad of flowers.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS AND CELEBRATING POLLINATORS!

Master Gardeners staffed the “Garden Q&A” booth all six days of the Schaghticoke Fair. Surrounded by a vibrant container plant display, they welcomed visitors and offered a native bee quiz that drew 228 entries from curious fairgoers.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

EMPOWERING YOUTH ACROSS RENSSELAER COUNTY

During the 2024–2025 4-H year, Rensselaer County 4-H engaged 6,248 youth across both our rural and urban communities. Rooted in the principles of Positive Youth Development, the program empowers young people to shape their own experiences through leadership roles and community-based projects. With the support of 95 trained volunteers, 4-H continues to foster confidence, leadership, and a strong sense of belonging among the next generation of changemakers.



AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS EDUCATION

From 4-H Ag Days, which brought 120 youth to a working farm, to Agricultural Literacy Week, reaching 676 youth across eight schools, participants learned where their food and fiber came from while connecting classroom lessons to real-world agriculture.

- More than 3,000 youth participated in agriculture-related projects, ranging from animal science and embryology to plant science and food systems.



HEALTHY LIVING & CULINARY ARTS

The Junior Chefs Contest at the 2025 Schaghticoke Fair engaged 31 youth in a creative, hands-on cook-off featuring local New York ingredients.

- Participants developed skills in nutrition, kitchen safety, and food science while exploring career paths in culinary arts.
- A total of 210 youth (outside of SNAP ED and EFNEP) participated in food and nutrition programs this past year.



STEM & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Youth explored science, technology, engineering, and math through hands-on programs.

- 550 youth engaged in engineering and technology programs through afterschool and school enrichment efforts, reaching youth that would not otherwise be involved in 4-H.

25% OF COUNTY YOUTH
PARTICIPATED IN 4-H

100% BEYOND
READY

89% OF GRADUATES
PURSUED COLLEGE

5% ENROLLED
IN THE TRADES

6% WENT DIRECTLY
INTO THE WORKFORCE



Tractor Safety Program, equipped youth ages 14 and older with essential skills for safe agricultural work. All youth received a national recognized certificate that enables youth ages 14–15 to legally operate tractors and machinery off the family farm—an important step toward employment in agriculture.



LEADERSHIP & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Through teen ambassadors, teen exchange, public presentations, community service projects, and educational trips; youth gained experience in decision-making, teamwork, and civic responsibility. 4-H youth are “Beyond Ready”—prepared to thrive after graduation and contribute meaningfully to their communities and careers.



OUTDOOR & SHOOTING SPORTS EDUCATION

Over 1,600 youth participated in environmental education programs through our partnership with Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center.

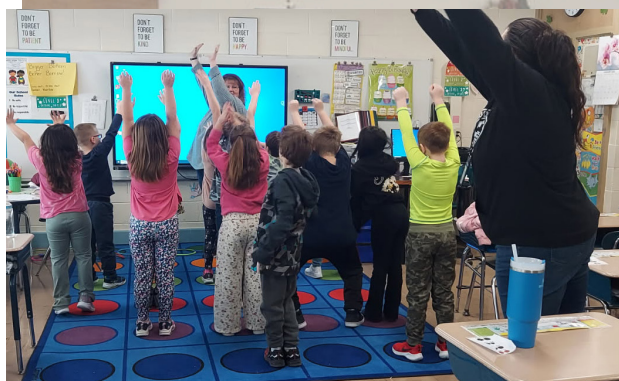
The 4-H Shooting Sports Program continued to grow, offering safe, structured, instruction in archery and outdoor education. This year, 19 youth participated in shooting sports designed to build focus, leadership, and communication skills under the guidance of certified instructors.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE

1,200 COUNTY RESIDENTS DOCUMENTED POSITIVE CHANGE (BHH)

15 HEALTHY CLASSROOM CHAMPIONS (SNAP-ED)

800 MONTHLY HEALTHY LIVING SENIOR NEWSLETTERS



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH NUTRITION AND HEALTHY LIVING

Cornell Cooperative Extension's Building Healthy Habits (BHH)—formerly EFNEP—has served New York State communities for over 55 years. The program focuses on empowering limited-resource families through hands-on, interactive workshops.

- Participants learned to make healthier food choices, stretch grocery dollars, practice food safety, increase physical activity, and reduce screen time
- Partnering with Head Start and local organizations, the program documented positive outcomes for 1,200 Rensselaer County residents

Capital Region SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program emphasizes balanced diets, reduced sugary beverages, and increased physical activity.

- 186 lessons were carried out to 862 elementary students in schools where over 90% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch

The Healthy Living Program promoted nutritious eating among our residents and strengthened community connections.

- Distributed over 800 newsletters monthly to senior centers and hosted more than 20 group food demonstrations averaging 15 participants per class through a partnership with the Department of Aging
- Quarterly Farm to Fork webinars continued to highlight local, sustainable foods
- Held food preservation workshops to expand opportunities for participants to develop advanced food preservation skills

DIGITAL LITERACY

18 SENIOR PLANET
GRADUATES

168 PARTICIPANTS
SERVED

115 LEARNING SESSIONS HELD
ACROSS 15 LOCATIONS

DIGITAL LITERACY AND COMMUNITY TECH ENGAGEMENT

BYOD Tech Help Sessions offered support at libraries and community centers. Participants received help using their smartphones, laptops, and tablets, addressing common challenges such as smartphone navigation, email management, and password assistance.

DEVICES SUPPORTED

- 50% Android smartphones
- 29% iPhones
- 17% laptops
- 8% tablets | 4% iPads | 8% other devices

PARTICIPANT SKILL GROWTH

- Before program: 9% no experience, 26% basic skills
- After program: 92% learned something new, 54% felt more confident
- 50% found better ways to complete tasks
- 21% now know where to continue learning on their own

SENIOR PLANET

- Offered free lectures, workshops, and multi-week classes
- Helped participants build tech skills and strengthen community connections
- 18 graduates completed courses such as Computer Essentials and Tech Resources for Everyday Life

Together, these programs help residents build digital skills, confidence, and independence in everyday life and close the digital gap in the community.



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Rensselaer County

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program



Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for providing equal program and employment opportunities in accordance with applicable laws.

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