Cornell Cooperative Extension | Oneida County

Farm Flash

April 2026

The Ag Team

Jennifer Reynolds - Ag Team Lead
jlr547@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 111

Carol Watkins - AED Team Lead
cap49@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 231

Amanda Vinci - Operations Coordinator
als354@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 237

Marylynn Collins - Dairy & Livestock Educator
als354@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 237

Holly Wise - Consumer Horticulture
hlw2@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 125

Beth Irons - OCPM Manager
egi3@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 103

Audra Benincasa - OCPM Online Coordinator
ajb489@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 266

Alex Harrington - Communications Manager
ash273@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 255

Madi Engel - Ag Educator
mee67@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 109

Carl Mierek - Food System Specialist
cm2273@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 120

Natika Walters- Ag Educator
nmw62@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 177

Upcoming Events

2026 Northeast Beef Producer Workshop
Friday, April 24 - Saturday April 25
Learn more online by scanning the QR Code

Who's Ready for Silvopasture: Introduction and Implementation
An introduction webinar to Silvopasture
Thursday, April 9 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm via Zoom

Register by emailing Marylynn at mrm7@cornell.edu

Maple Marketing Trends Webinar
Monday, April 13 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm via Zoom

Register by emailing Natika at nmw62@cornell.edu

Oneida County Dairy Promotion Banquet

Friday, May 1, 2026 at Delta Lake Inn
Cowtails at 6:30 pm with Dinner to Follow at 7:00 pm

Cost per Adult $32 - Children 6-12 $15 - Under 5 Free

RSVP to Joanie Smith at (315) 941-2906 by April 24, 2026

$1.7 Billion Available for NY Beginning Farmers

New York Farm Viability Institute is pleased to announce that the **2026 NYS Beginning Farmer Competitive Grant Program (BFCG)** launched on March 16, 2026. The BFCG is a competitive funding opportunity administered in partnership with the **New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets**. The program will provide 1.7 million to support beginning farmers in building financially sustainable, independent, commercial agricultural enterprises throughout New York.

What can be funded?

- Start-up, improvement or expansion of farm operations
- Purchase of land, machinery, equipment, or livestock
- Construction or improvement of structures
- Marketing initiatives
- Worker or apprenticeship training
- Other business needs tied to financial impact

Who is eligible?

NY Beginning Farmers with 10 years or less of farm operation experience and who will materially and substantially participate in operating a farm in New York State.

Funding Operation

Application Period: March 16 - June 14, 2026
Total Funding Available: $1,700,000
Track 1 Grant Award Range: $5,000 - $49,999
Track 2 Grant Award Range: $50,000 - $200,000

Learn more at www.nyfvi.org

Oneida County Dairy Promotion

Those interested in joining Oneida County Dairy Promotion as an Ambassador or have any questions regarding Nominations or joining Oneida County Dairy Promotion please contact Sarah Lanckton at (908) 963-6587

Finding Success in Diversification

Multiple streams of income can bring financial success for any business owner. Agriculture is no different. Evolution is important if you want to "stay in the game." However, a game plan is vital for those who wish to do so.

Diversification can be driven by several factors, says Penn State Extension Dairy Educator Ginger Fenton, Ph.D. She was joined in a recent presentation by Sarah Cornelisse, senior Extension program specialist, and Assistant Professor Becca Weir to discuss diversification for dairy producers.

Some operators might be looking to absorb or reduce financial risk factors. Some might be looking to strengthen their existing farm operation's portfolio. Perhaps there are underutilized resources at play or surplus product that needs an outlet. There is also the promise of a better quality of life. Hypothetically, increased income means less financial anxiety.

Diversification can mean any divergence from the current business plan: a pivot in production or milk market (switching from a grass-fed operation to organic). It can involve the creation of value-added products like cheese, butter and ice cream. It can involve the introduction of additional crops and livestock – beef, poultry, corn or soybeans. It can look like opening the farm to agritourism: U-pick operations, farm tours, farm stands and markets, farm stay accommodations and more.

There are also those who engage in custom work – any work taking place off-site from the farm. Fenton gave examples of manure hauling and trucking milk.

It all qualifies as diversified income.

Statistically, younger farmers are more likely to diversify. They benefit the most in real time from technological access and are often more equipped with the network to facilitate any new initiative.

What are some of the challenges? A diversified operation can require year-round input, especially in its infancy. There might be limited financial resources available. There might be contractual limitations with an existing co-op or other market collaborators, reflected in territory boundaries and non-compete clauses.

Navigating the proper licensing and certifications with the state can be challenging. Sometimes, a farmer might lack the specialized knowledge needed to produce the product or service – and they might have to deal with a less than supportive team or family.

Evaluating the current operation is important. Couch any discussion about diversification with the caveats that not every farm should diversify – they're simply not equipped for it – and a solid foundation and sufficient preparation are more important than creativity here.

This is a time of introspection for the farmer. What are their goals? Is it to increase the farm business's income and stabilize revenue streams? Is this a strategic investment in the operation's long-term growth and opportunities for the next generation?

Reactive answers (as well as the absence of an answer) are cause for concern – "keeping up with the Joneses," concerns over milk prices and other market indicators, etc. However, operators can feel secure if there are clearly defined goals in mind, like "I want to improve the business's financial stability with another stream of income."

Ask "Do I have the capacity – physically, financially?" Adding this new enterprise will result in increasing complexity, with front-loaded investments of time, finances and more to get started.

Who is going to manage this enterprise – the farmer or a team member? Do they have the capacity and resources to do so and balance existing responsibilities? Does any delegation need to happen?

What resources are available? Think equipment, land and facilities, existing skillsets. Time is one of the biggest assets for a farm owner – avoid overestimating available time and stretching yourself and your farm team too thin when examining this new project.

What is the status of the farm's existing operations? "Diversification is not a Band-aid – it should support what is already in motion," one of the presenters noted. Use some of the same introspective questions to evaluate the farm: what is the status of any current facilities? Are they adequate or in need of repair? Do any major operational issues exist? Is the current business model profitable? Can current operations support those front-loaded investment costs of a new project?

Finally, has the entire farm team been included? Is everyone in agreement and aligned with long-term goals? Being on the same page as a team is paramount to the success of any diversified effort.

The next step? Brainstorming with those essential team members – family, farm partners and workers. Create an environment where everyone can think big and suggest without judgment, no matter how far "off the path." Document the process exhaustively via a note taker or simply record the conversation. For ideas, explore existing industry resources together. Examine gaps in the market together. Revisit notes from the initial evaluation stage.

Run each idea through the same sieve: "Does it align with the farm's values and goals? Does it leverage existing assets? Is there genuine market demand? Do I have or can I acquire the necessary skills to do this?"

Rank the top two or three ideas for further analysis. Cornelisse shared the idea of a "business idea scorecard" – sorting each idea into subcategories of evaluation criteria (market need, market size, profit potential, competitive advantage, ease of implementation, etc.), a weighted score and notes/evidence of those findings in action.

This criterion provides a deeper window into the idea's viability. Based on the ranked outcome of the scorecard exercise, move forward with the leading options that make sense for your operation. The next steps? Conduct a detailed feasibility study to continue to boil down your list to that golden idea. Assemble the project team. Develop a business plan.

A 2023 article from Penn State Cooperative Extension titled "Developing a Business Plan" has some great pointers for those wondering "what's next."

Fenton stressed "diversification should not be reactionary. It can be a strong business strategy, but it should be carefully considered and implemented. Readiness is more important than creativity. Asking the tough questions early will eliminate hiccups down the road."

American Farmland Trust Releases Farm Transfer Toolkit

The American Farmland Trust team presented the brand-new Farm Transfer Toolkit. Filled with fact sheets, example documents and proven tools. This online resource can walk families through the complexities of the succession planning process.

"The toolkit has information on everything from assessing finances to handling difficult conversations about succession," shares Ariel Looser, a Farmland Information Specialist at AFT. "We hope it will equip landowners to effectively plan for the future of their farm or ranch."

Are you thinking about the future of your farm or know someone who is? Share this information with them!

Growth in an Evolving Dairy Industry Takes Planning

ML Collins

We know that dairy processing here in the county is embarking on a growth spurt with the impending arrival of the Chobani plant in Rome. Growth and expansion in the dairy processing sector is booming across our state with several processors actively on line and others due to go live by 2027 and extending into 2030. New York is leading the pack of key dairy states with over 2 billion dollars being allocated to dairy processing investments. With more processing capacity comes the demand for more milk. Remarks and presentations shared at the recent Northeast Dairy Management Conference held in March further expand on the notion of increased demand by predicting that 10 billion more pounds of fat and protein corrected milk by the year 2030 is needed to serve the increased processing capacity.

Growth Looks Different for Everyone: For producers with a growth mindset and pans to stay actively engaged in the dairy industry, how you plan for growth is incredibly important as there are many moving parts. Let me be clear, when I speak on growth, I am not implying that ever farm will or should expand in cow numbers and throw up state-of-the-art free-stall facilities. I feel that growth in our local diary sector will look different for everyone, based on their business goals, where they are in the business cycle and the resources they have available to them. Rising to the challenge of supplying more milk can be achieved bu either increasing milk cows per farm or through seeking marginal milk from existing cows, OR by some combination of both approaches. Proper planning for either approach will ensure you success moving forward.

Planning for Growth Responsibly: Nutrient management on farms of all sizes is a topic of discussion that is not going away, particularly as we navigate changing climates and the task of reducing green-house gases in the industry (animal agriculture remains the low hanging fruit). Assessing your current land availability, current crop rotations, and nutrient management plans are essential for growing responsibly and successful farming. Leave no stone unturned when looking for ways to increase productivity on land currently in your rotation. Relying on pH monitoring and routine soil analysis are practices that remain important and should not be dismissed. Don't forget the basics. When contemplating expansion and growth in dairy we must look at both sides of the equation. With the addition of more cows comes the necessity to move and apply more recycled nutrients on the land you have available. We can use the metric of animal density to evaluate the balance between crop land to grow animal feed and recycle manure, and the animals on the farm.

Making time to calculate your farm's Animal Density (AU/Acre) was a focal point in the expansion discussion. Reach out to me at (315) 736-3394 ext. 132 or mrm7@cornell.edu if you are interested in working through the calculations to determine your Animal Density as it relates to your growth plan. Read more on animal density and the impacts for your farm in the Agronomy Fact Sheet #132 included after this article.

Moving inside the barn, another management consideration to be mindful of when planning new facilities or even when maintaining existing free-stalls, is the concept of overstocking barns, or managing stocking density. I have heard conversations implying that some processors in New York State may implements standards of their own, perhaps above those required by the F.A.R.M. program, related to over crowding percentages. While I have not heard of any activity locally, you can believe that the animal activist groups are paying attention to the growth potential in our industry. As producers, you know and understand the bet management practices implemented on your farms, the activist groups do not, unfortunately. Planning accordingly and responsibly has far reaching effects.

Chasing Marginal Milk: Can you address management areas on the cow side or nutrition side that can impact incremental increases in milk production? By the time this issue hits your mailbox, you will likely be in the throws of field work, finishing up shop and equipment repairs, and prepping to hit the fields. Keep these areas in mind and address them timely:

- **Cow Comfort Gains**: This can be achieved by routinely performing stall maintenance. Is that broken stall divider preventing her from using the stall? Tie-stall operations, you are not exempt. Have you assessed where your neck rail is and how it maybe impeding her lying time and comfort? We have resources to help you address necessary changes.
- **Ventilation Concerns:** Fan maintenance and placement. Our summers are getting hotter, are you prepared? Have you considered addressing heat concerns for all groups of animals, not just the lactating string? Dry cows matter too.
- **Don't loose fresh cows:** Consider a dry cow and transition cow ration when feasible. Ensure adequate bunk space for fresh cows to minimize competition for feed and monitor stocking density in fresh groups.
- **Monitor Protocol Drift:** Across multiple dairy herd management areas protocol occurs on the regular. Get a handle on it. Areas to consider include, but are not limited to:
  - newborn calf care and colostrum management
  - milking prep routine
  - feed push up and frequency
  - feed management and delivery

Animal Density

Introduction

Animal density refers to the ratio of animal mass to cropland. This term is often used interchangeably with whole farm "stocking density". In animal agriculture, animal density is used to evaluate the balance between crop land to grow animal feed and recycle manure, and the animals on the farm (Figure 1).

Understanding animal density is crucial because it provides insight into how effectively a farm is utilizing its land base and managing nutrient resources. Animal density allows a farm to determine if there is enough land to recycle manure nutrients or whether manure export should be considered. Integration of animals and land to meet but not exceed feasible nutrient balances will support both economic and environmental goals by ensuring that a farm can produce feed sustainably, apply manure responsibly, and maintain productivity.

This fact sheet explains the importance of animal density, how to calculate it, and what its implications are for farm performance, sustainability, and planning.

Importance of Animal Density

Maintaining a feasible animal density is essential for optimizing both productivity and environmental stewardship on dairy farms. When a farm's animal density is well-aligned with the available cropland, manure nutrients can be recycled through crop production, thereby reducing the need for purchased fertilizers. This not only lowers costs but also limits the risk of leaching or nutrient runoff into nearby waterways. Farms operating within a balanced animal density range are better positioned to grow high-quality, homegrown forages that support herd health and performance while minimizing off-farm inputs.

Animal density also directly influences the farm's Whole-Farm Nutrient Mass Balance (NMB), a key performance indicator (KPI) that tracks nutrient imports against exports. By keeping animal density within a manageable range, producers can better align nutrient inputs and outputs, contributing to long-term soil health, environmental protection and financial longevity of the farm.

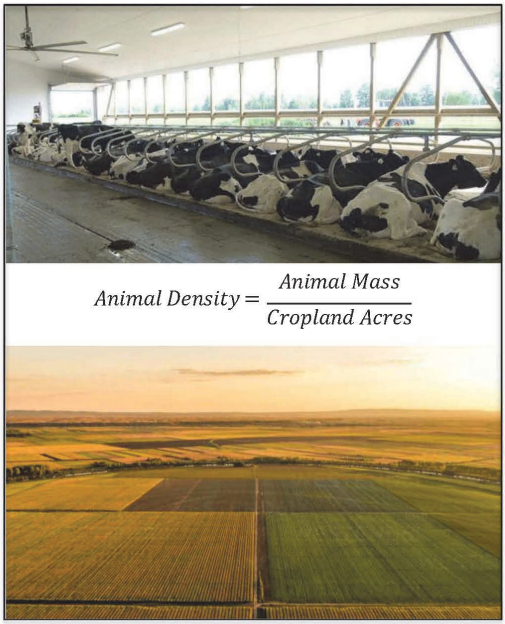


Figure 1: Animal density is the total animal mass on a farm divided by the total cropland of the farm.

How to Calculate Animal Density

Animal density is calculated using a standardized unit called the Animal Unit (AU). One animal unit is equivalent to 1,000 pounds of live animal weight. Use of this standardized unit allows for consistent comparisons across different ages and types of livestock.

In addition to calculating total animal units, the calculation requires knowing the number of cropland acres on the farm. Cropland includes any land that crops are grown on and harvested from, such as managed pasture, hayfields, and land planted with annual crops such as corn silage, corn grain, and soybeans. Forested areas, barnyards, and exercise lots are excluded from the calculation because they do not support crop production.

Table 1 shows an example calculation for a dairy that houses lactating cows, dry cows, a l heifers from weaning to their f irst calving, and calves, while operating on a total of 1700 tillable acres. Dividing the total animal units of the farm by the tillable acreage for this example farm gives an animal density of 1.01 AU/acre.

Table 1: Example calculation for animal density on a dairy.

Animal Group	Number	Weight per animal	Animal units per group
Lactating cows	725	1400	1015
Dry cows	122	1400	171
Heifers: breeding to first calving	297	1200	356
Heifers: weaning to breeding	217	600	130
Calves: pre-weaning	205	250	51
Total animal units (AU for the farm)			1724
Total cropland (total acres in crops)			1700
Animal density (AU per acre)			1.01

Implications of Animal Density

The optimal animal density for dairy farms typically falls between 0.8 and 1.2 AU per acre. Operating within this range allows farmers to use the farm's land efficiently while still maintaining a healthy balance of nutrients. Farms with an animal density between 0.8 and 1.2 AU/acre have a better chance to meet the feasible balances per acre which offer additional f lexibility in terms of manure and fertilizer management (Fact Sheet #110, The New York Phosphorus Index 2.0, and Adaptive Nitrogen Management for Field Crops in New York).

When animal density falls below 0.8 AU per acre, there is the potential for *negative* nutrient balances, indicating that more nutrients are being removed than replaced. Negative balances can lead to mining of soil reserves and have a possible negative impact on yield and crop quality. In addition, while low animal density farms may more easily meet feasible balances per acre (environmental stewardship), it can be difficult to meet feasible balances per hundredweight of milk (production efficiency). For more detail on whole-farm nutrient mass balances, see Fact Sheet #128 Reading a Whole-Farm Nutrient Mass Balance Report.

Farms exceeding 1.2 AU per acre face the risk of nutrient accumulation if manure cannot be applied within agronomic limits. Without export, a surplus in nutrients increases the potential for nutrient loss through runoff or leaching. High-density farms often incur greater costs for imported feed and manure handling and must place additional emphasis on manure storage and application timing to reduce the risk of environmental impact.

In Summary

Animal density is a vital management metric that influences a farm's ability to sustain productivity, protect the environment, and remain economically viable. Properly balancing herd size with available tillable acreage enables more effective use of nutrients, supports forage production, and reduces reliance on off-farm resources. It is critical to assess animal density regularly, especially when considering herd expansion or changes in land use. Partnering with a Certified Nutrient Management Planner is the best way to ensure that animal density aligns with environmental regulations and long-term farm goals. Ultimately, securing the land base for the size of the herd is essential for responsible nutrient management and environmental stewardship.

Additional Resources

- Glossary: Livestock density index - Statistics Explained - Eurostat. 2025.
- Using animal density standards for nutrient management policy on Wisconsin dairy farms. H. Saam, J.M. Powell, D. Jackson Smith, W. Bland, and J. Posner. 2016.

Disclaimer

This fact sheet reflects the current (and past) authors' best effort to interpret a complex body of scientific research, and to translate this into practical management options. Following the guidance provided in this fact sheet does not assure compliance with any applicable law, rule, regulation or standard, or the achievement of discharge levels from agricultural land.

For more information

Cornell University Cooperative Extension

Nutrient Management Spear Program
http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu

Evelyn Kersmanc, Olivia Godber, Janice Degni, Eric Bever and Quirine Ketterings

2025

State of Fertilizer

(as of 3/10/2026)

Natika Walters

As we enter this season, we are facing new issues with raising costs in many areas, including energy and fertilizer. The global fertilizer market was already tight, with China restricting exports this year to ensure domestic availability, while producers in Europe have cut output due to the loss of cheap Russian gas supply. Ongoing conflicts in Iran have closed the Strait of Hormuz, shut down fertilizer plants in the region, and disrupted shipping routes. Potentially curing supplies to key importers around the world just as farmers in some countries are preparing to plant seeds. Despite a large domestic industry, the United States imports much of its fertilizer needs. Seth Goldstein, Morningstar analyst, reported the morning of March 5th that it is estimated that nitrogen prices could roughly double and phosphate price rise 50% from current levels. This chain reaction has shown a potential shift away from corn towards soybeans to save on fertilizer costs.

With these rising costs it is important for farmers to stay vigilant with costs and inputs inside of their control.

- Soil Sampling
  - Knowing where your soil nutrient levels are allows you to make informed decisions about the needs for the health of your soil.
- Cover Crops
  - One of the benefits of cover crops is the efficacy of building soil nitrogen while also protecting the field during fallow seasons. If the cover crops are legumes such as field peas, vetch and clover, they can add 50-150 lbs of nitrogen per acre through their root nodule. In non-legume cover crops residual nitrogen that would otherwise leach away is captured and held as organic matter until the cover crop is terminated and decomposes.
  - No-Til Farming
    - Adopting the strategy of no till and low till farming allows for the preservation of organic matter in the root zone and protects the microbial communities responsible for organic matter breakdown and nutrient cycling. A 2025 study showed that after transitioning to no-till farmers reduced nitrogen applications by 10-25% over 3-5 years as soil health improved.
- Fertilizer Application Timing
    - Crop Scouting can help you better identify crop growth stages and apply your fertilizer in a split application based on when crops can use it. As opposed to a calender based schedule which could result in losses from volatilization, denitrification and leeching. Efforts can also be made to effectively place nitrogen in areas through precision placement techniques like banding fertilizer near seed rows or side dressing into the root zone to deliver nutrients where plants can access them most efficiently.

Reforestation & Afforestation Guidance for New York

Climate change is impacting the globe, with thousands of documented cases of altered air and water temperature, rising sea levels, shrinking glaciers, and sea ice, and other changes. Climate change is already affecting New York through increased average temperatures, annual precipitation, and frequency and intensity of extreme weather events - and impacts are projected to continue into the future. To reduce future impacts, it is vital to take steps to minimize net greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon sequestration and storage.

Through photosynthesis, trees and forests sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and can store this carbon for long periods of time - which helps mitigate climate change. In addition, forests promote community resilience to climate impacts like flooding and extreme heat, among other benefits, in communities disproportionately impacted by climate change and other environmental challenges. Reforestation and afforestation encourage the establishment of forests through practices like tree planting, invasive species control and protection from deer.

Protecting and increasing New York's forested area is one of the most cost-effective natural climate solutions available - and it includes planting trees via afforestation, reforestation projects and implementing practices that enhance natural regeneration. New York's Climate Act Scoping Plan has directed state agencies, authorities, partners and organizations to broadly encourage and support statewide tree planting, tree regeneration and tree maintenance programs to establish and maintain 1.7 million acres (approximately 680 million trees) by 2040, which would result in more than 4.9 MMT CO2e of additional annual sequestration by 2050 (Cook-Patton et al 2020). To jump-start this effort, Governor Kathy Hochul announced a statewide initiative to plant 25 million trees by 2033 as part of her state-of-the-state address in January 2024.

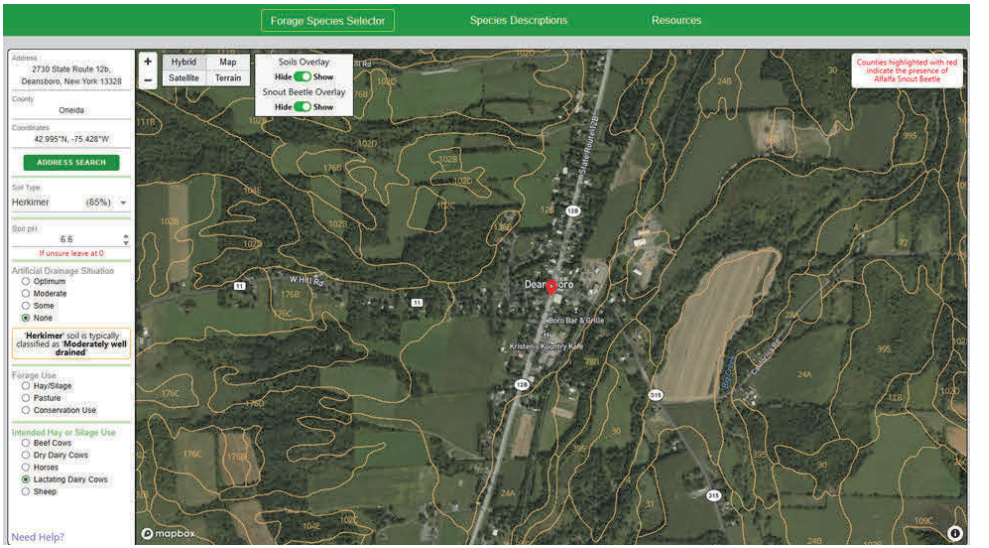
For more information scan the QR Codes below.

Reforestation & Afforestation Guidance for New York

Species Selection Tool Supporting Ecological Research

Cornell Species Selection Tool

Forages.org - Utilizes site location factors such as soil type, drainage, pH, selected use and livestock needs to provide a list of forages species and yield estimates.



Recommended species for this application:

Species Name	Tons per acre
Reed Canarygrass	4.8
Red Clover-Timothy	3.2
Orchardgrass	3.8
Meadow Fescue	4.3
Alfalfa-Meadow Fescue	3.4
Alfalfa-Tall Fescue	5.1
Alfalfa-Reed Canarygrass	5.0
Alfalfa-Orchardgrass	4.3
Tall Fescue	5.5
Timothy	3.7

Acceptable but not recommended species for this application:

Species Name	Tons per acre
Ladino White Clover-Timothy	2.5
Ladino White Clover-Orchardgrass	2.7
Alfalfa-Timothy	4.7
Alfalfa	5.5
Smooth Bromegrass	4.8

The NYS Envirothon

The NYS Envirothon is a hands-on environmental education competition – testing knowledge and understanding of NYS natural resources – www.nysenvirothon.org. The event is held at many locations across the state.

Students from local high schools sign up in advance to compete. Students attend 5 different sites, listening to a presentation and answering questions. There are 4 different subject matter areas each year: aquatic ecology, forestry, soil and land use and wildlife. A fifth current topic is selected each year. This years' current-topic is non-point source pollution mitigation. In addition, a sub-group is selected by each school to participate in an oral presentation. They receive a specific issue and scenario before the event (this year related to non-point source pollution mitigation). They prepare and present their oral argument.

This years local event will be held at the Utica Zoo in April.

Dairy Cattle Housing and Bedding Practices Survey

Farmers are invited to respond to a survey about dairy cattle housing and bedding practices on farms in New York and neighboring states.

The survey's goal is to understand the management of dairy cattle bedding materials on farms, how widely the use of manure solids and bedded packs are, what bedding conditioners and additives are used, and the benefits and challenges of these various strategies to keep cows clean, comfortable and productive.

Take the survey online by scanning the QR Code!
For questions contact Jason Oliver at jpo53@cornell.edu

Farmer's Tax Guide 2025

Getting ready for tax season? The CCE Oneida Ag Team has plenty of copies of the 2025 Farmer's Tax Guide at our office located at 121 Second St, Oriskany. Stop by to get one or contact Alex Harrington at ash273@cornell.edu to have one sent to you.

Funding for Private Landowners to Grow The Forests of the Future

This grant program was created to support landowners in restoring their forests or establishing new ones. Healthy forests provide vital services to our communities. They filter out air and water pollutants, provide food and shelter for wildlife, support local economies, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. To ensure these services are maintained, it is essential that our forests continually regenerate or regrow so there are younger trees to take the place of older ones as they die. But there are significant challenges to forest regeneration in New York State (NYS), including:

- An overpopulation of deer that can devastate forest understories by eating tree seedlings;
- competing vegetation, especially invasive plants, that outcompete native tree seedlings for light, water, and nutrients, limiting new growth; and
- Increasingly extreme weather - hotter and drier growing seasons, more severe rain and wind storms, heavier snow storms - that damages or weakens trees, making them more susceptible to insect and disease attacks.

Active management of our forests is essential to mitigate these challenges and increase forest health and resiliency, ensuring they continue to thrive long into the future.

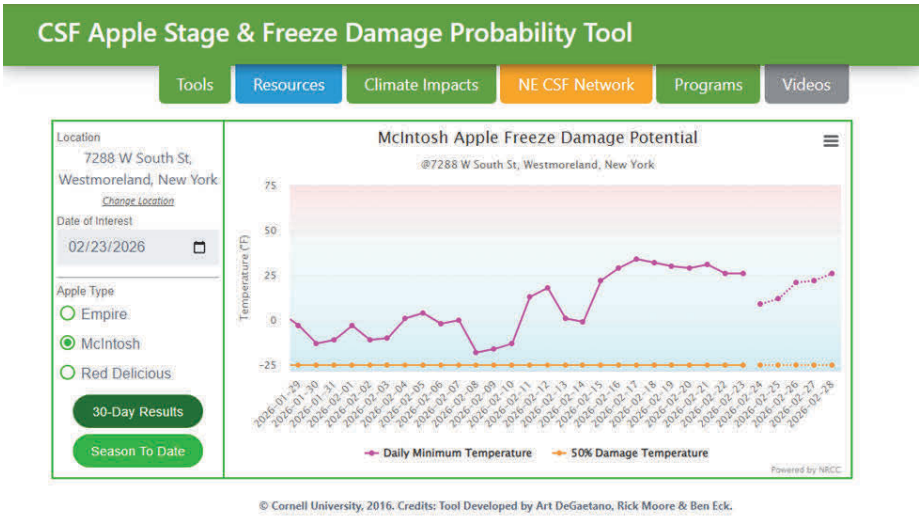
Through Regenerate NY, landowners can apply for financial assistance for projects on their land that support the establishment and renewal of healthy forests. Starting with this most recent grant round (Round 5), funding will now be released through a new performance-based payment system. This new payment structure will allow landowners to receive partial advance payments to carry out planned work by submitting workplans and budgets at the beginning of the planning process.

More information for applicants, including further details on each of the sections below, can be found in the Request for Applications (RFA)

For more information visit:
https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/regennyrfa.pdf

Apple Storage & Freeze Damage Probability Tool

Climate Smart Farming - Cornell University -
https://climatesmartfarming.org/tools/csf-apple-freeze-probability/



Cornell Cooperative Extension | Oneida County
121 Second St
Oriskany, NY 13424

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