

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Oneida County

Farm Flash



October 2026

The Ag Team

Carol Watkins - Ag/AED Team Lead

cap49@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 231

Amanda Vinci - Operations Coordinator

als354@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 253

Marylynn Collins - Dairy & Livestock Educator

mrm7@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 132

Holly Wise - Consumer Horticulture

hlw2@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 125

Alex Harrington - Communications Manager

ash273@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 255

Madi Engel - Ag Educator

mee67@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 109

Matt Volz - Ag Community Educator

mcv54@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 177

**JB Riffle - OCPM and Small Food
Manufacturing Manager**

jr2533@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 103

Bethany Solomon - OCPM Coordinator

bns62@cornell.edu (315) 736-3394 ext. 266

Upcoming Events

Pork Production and Marketing Workshop

Monday, November 2 -

6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Clonan Post 1000

American Legion - 3454

Oneida St., Chadwicks



Registration is \$10
payable at the door,
includes dinner.

Guest presenter is NY Pork Producers. Topics
for discussion focused on production, bio
security and marketing tools.

Please contact Marylynn Collins at (315)
736-3394 ext. 132 with questions.

Scan the QR Code to Register!

Feeder School

October 28 SUNY Morrisville - \$50/pp - Lunch
included - 9:30 am - 3:30 pm

Register online at <https://tinyurl.com/mwzpa7wu>

Topics Covered During Feeder School:

Economics and importance of feeding and feed
management - Dry matter and feeder math
basics: how to measure DM and refusals, and
adjust ration - Feed consistency and TMR audits
Troubleshooting mixer wagons - and more!

Upcoming Events

Agricultural Leasing 101: Understanding Lease Rates, Agreements & Legal Considerations

The program will be held October 21 and October 28 from 12:00–1:00 PM via Zoom.

The program is free, but registration is required. Register online at <https://tinyurl.com/57udm86p>

October 21 – Agricultural Leasing Fundamentals

Topics include:

- Types of ag leases
- Determining lease rates
- Costs and responsibilities for both landowners and tenants
- Tools and resources to help you make informed decisions

October 28 – Legal Considerations for Agricultural Leases

Topics include:

- Building a clear lease agreement
- Renewal, termination & dispute resolution
 - Liability & insurance considerations
- Common legal issues & when to seek legal counsel

Oneida County Public Market

Every Saturday starting May 23 from 9:00am to 1:00pm
at Utica's Union Station - 321 Main St, Utica

Preparing for Fall and Beyond

Matt Volz

Fall is already in the air as I write this. Depending on your operation you may be winding down for the season or gearing up for harvest. Regardless, it's that time of year again to start thinking about tax prep. I've mentioned the importance of keeping up with your books in my last two Farm Flash articles, so I'll try not to belabor the point. Suffice it to say that up-to-date books will make year-end tax prep much easier for you and/or your tax preparer, and can turn what seems like another chore into a tool that will help you make better decisions about your operation, capitalize on opportunities, and more comfortably handle the unexpected.

Speaking of opportunities, if you're in the dairy business, you're probably already aware of the Dairy Modernization Grant Program which is awarding grants to "install new technologies for transportation and storage of milk." Just a reminder applications are due October 28th. If you're looking to make other improvements, the Dairy Farm Improvement and Modernization Grant opens this month and includes a wider range of eligible projects. Awardees will receive grants from \$15,000 to \$100,000 with a 25% in-kind and/or cash match contribution required. \$1 million in total funds have been allocated to this program, which aims to help farmers "improve their operations for long-term success. Eligible projects may modernize outdated systems or introduce innovative solutions to improve farm viability, reduce climate impacts, improve milk quality or value, improve worker conditions, and strengthen the farm's ability to respond to challenges."

Please be aware that this grant will not simply allow farmers to update old equipment: "Competitive projects will take a strategic, systems-level approach, involve expert guidance such as farm planners or technical assistance providers, and may benefit individual farms or groups of farms. Projects that only replace old equipment without broader improvements to farm systems are not eligible."

If you are in the process of applying for either of these grants feel free to reach out for assistance at mcv54@cornell.edu or by phone at (315) 736-3394 ext. 177. Depending on your needs, we can either help you directly or connect you with a local partner that can better serve you.

Back to tax prep. We know that many of you do your own tax returns. That may be a cost saving measure. It may be because you can't find a local accountant that is willing to work with a farmer. If the latter is the case, we have been compiling a list of accountants, CPA's and tax preparers in the area who are open to taking on new farm clients! We are happy to connect you with that list if you are looking to find someone in your area.

Best of luck this fall. Here's to good weather and heavy harvests!

Market Musings: Choosing the Right Farmers' Market & Setting the Right Prices

JB Riffle

When deciding whether to sell at a farmers' market, vendors ultimately want to know one thing: **Will it help my bottom line?**

The market you choose and the prices you set can have a significant impact on profitability. Below are three key considerations when selecting a farmers' market and three important factors to keep in mind when pricing your products.

Choosing a Farmers' Market

Market Details - Your time and sales potential are valuable. It's important that the finer details of a farmers' market's operation (market organization, market day, market location) match your unique circumstances. How a farmers' market is managed and operated can significantly influence customer attendance, shopping behavior, and your overall success on market day.

- Market management: Markets with dedicated, well-organized, and mission aligned management often have the greatest potential for growth and customer engagement.
- Market day and time: Weekend morning markets are often the busiest, but the best fit depends on your products, target customers and availability.
- Market location: Markets in convenient, high-visibility locations with strong foot traffic tend to attract more shoppers. Traveling farther may be worthwhile if it provides access to a larger customer base.

Vendor Mix - Customers are rarely drawn to a market by a single vendor. It's important to understand the current vendor makeup in your product category and the breadth and quality of products outside of it. A strong mix of vendors and products helps create a destination that attracts shoppers and encourages repeat visits.

- Competition matters: Too many vendors selling similar products may limit your sales opportunities.
- Variety matters too: Too few vendors in a product category can reduce customer choice and may make the market less attractive to shoppers.
- Think like a customer: Consider whether the market offers the quality, variety, and overall shopping experience that customers expect.

Food Access Programs - It's important that your market reaches all segments of the community. Food access programs help markets serve a broader range of community members while increasing customer purchasing power. These programs can expand your customer base and contribute to higher overall sales at the market.

- SNAP authorization: SNAP-authorized markets can participate in food access and incentive programs that support customers using nutrition assistance benefits. Vendors at SNAP-authorized markets can accept benefits without completing their own SNAP retailer application.
- Fresh Connect: Doubles customers SNAP benefits up to \$50 in NY for SNAP-eligible products. Vendors do not need to be pre-authorized to accept these coupons.
- Double Up Food Bucks: Doubles SNAP benefits up to \$50 for fruit and vegetable products. Vendors generally need FMNP authorization to participate.
- NYC Farmers Market Health Bucks: Doubles SNAP benefits up to \$10 for fruits and vegetables in NYC. Vendors must be FMNP authorized.

Setting Farmers' Market Prices

Develop a Pricing Strategy - Pricing directly affects your profitability and sales. It's important to price your products correctly to balance your production costs, profit goals, customer expectations and market conditions. Prices that are too low can reduce your earning, while prices that are too high may discourage purchases and leave you with unsold inventory.

- Know your costs: Calculate your production, labor, packaging, transportation, and market fees to ensure your prices cover and generate a profit.

- Avoid competing on price alone: Constantly matching or undercutting competitors can reduce profitability and create a race to the bottom.
- Be strategic and flexible: Consider discounts, bundled products, or end-of-market specials when appropriate to increase sales and reduce leftover inventory.

Consider Your Production Value - Your production capacity should influence both your pricing and sales strategy. It's important to know what the production strengths of your operation are to determine whether your business is better suited to a high-volume or premium-price approach. Understanding how much you can produce consistently helps you set realistic prices and meet customer demand.

- Higher-volume operations: Larger, more efficient operations may benefit from lower margins per item while generating profit through higher sales volume.
- Limited production capacity: Smaller-scale operations or production methods may require higher prices to maintain profitability.
- Evaluate your production methods: Consider whether changes in production practices, equipment, or processes could improve quality, increase efficiency, or support higher prices and greater sales volume.

Choose the Right Pricing Unit - The way you package and price your products can influence both sales volume and profitability. It is important to match your pricing units to support different business goals, depending on your available product volume and selling strategy. Choosing pricing units that align with your production capacity and customer preferences can help maximize revenue while minimizing unsold inventory.

- Per-piece pricing: Selling individual items often provides the highest margin per unit and can work well for vendors with limited production volume or specialty products.
- Per-pound pricing: Weight-based pricing allows customers to purchase the quantity they need and can help ensure pricing reflects the value of the product.
- Volume discounts and packaged units: Selling by the quart, basket, or bundle, or offering discounts for multiple purchases (for example - 1 for \$3 or 2 for \$5), can encourage larger purchases and move higher product volumes more efficiently.

Looking Ahead - Choosing the right farmers' market and setting the right prices are two of the most important decisions a vendor can make. Evaluating market operations, vendor mix and food access programs, while developing a thoughtful pricing strategy based on costs, production capacity, and packaging options, can help maximize profitability and long term success.

Next month, we'll explore general best practices to increase sales when you're not at the market and when you are at the market.

Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District Intern Program

Haylee Moore - Oneida County SWCD

Intern Experience

Our district hires interns during the field season to assist in a few of our stream programs and our agricultural programs when needed. The internship is meant for those who are interested in learning about the conservation and environmental fields.



Their primary role is to conduct field work, monitor progress, and report to District staff. This educational opportunity gives our interns the ability to learn about what a Soil & Water Conservation District does and how it functions. It allows them to apply what they've learned in the classroom out in the field.

Upper Susquehanna Coalition - Bridgewater Riparian Buffer Project

- Our District is a member of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) and we work closely with their Riparian Buffer Program. We maintain sites where the USC has planted forest buffers that protect by helping to intercept and process excess nutrients, sediments, and pathogens from entering streams.

Our interns have the opportunity to become Riparian Buffer Stewards and attend a variety of Steward Workdays hosted by USC during the field season. During these Workdays, the stewards will do maintenance on or plant trees in Buffer Zones across the state. Through these workdays, the stewards learn technical assistance skills, tree and plant identification, and the importance of maintaining the health of stream ecosystems.

Invasive Water Chestnut Project - This past year we received funding from the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lake Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to support our Water Chestnut Removal project. Alongside 5 other districts who have received funding, our District is working to eradicate this invasive plant from the Oneida Lake Watershed. The invasive water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) is a fast-growing aquatic plant from Eurasia and Africa that forms thick surface mats, blocks sunlight, and harms local ecosystems. Our interns spend time in the southeastern region of Oneida Lake during the field season conducting surveys to monitor the extent of chestnut populations and hand-pulling the plant from the water. We have removed around 2,300 pounds of water chestnut this year.

Mohawk River Watershed Coalition Capacity Grant - We have received funding from the Mohawk River Watershed Coalition which has the interns conducting invasive species monitoring and assisting with stream crossing assessments for the North Atlantic Aquatic Conductivity Collaboration.

Water Quality Program - The interns also assist our Water Quality Specialist with stream projects during the field season. They will assist by conducting preliminary surveys and assessments of potential project sites. In appropriate sites, they will plant live willow cuttings along a stream's edge to aid in bank stabilization and prevent excess nutrients and pollutants from entering the waterways.

October Farm Activities

Jeff Miller

Soil Sampling - This fall is a good time to obtain soil samples. The crop has taken whatever nutrients it needed during the growing season, soil temperatures decline reducing changes in soil nutrient levels until the following spring.

Take a representative soil sample, avoid areas that are not representative. Take the same quantity of soil at each location (using a soil probe or auger) going to 8 inch depth each time.

Take an average of 2 samples per acre dumping into a plastic bucket. Mix the sample well and put a pint of this mixed sample into the labs container. My suggestion is to send the sample to Dairy One, selecting the agroOne (morgan extraction) or the University of Main (morgan extraction).

For more information on the correct forms and proper procedure to submit a sample visit the Dairy One Website at <https://dairystone.com/services/soil-laboratory/about-soil-laboratory/> or the University of Main Soil Testing Lab at <https://umaine.edu/soiltestinglab/>.

Cornell has and continues to conduct fields trials in NY determining the economic rate of fertilizer to apply given soil test levels using a morgan extraction. Why not get fertilizer recommendations backed by research trials conducted in the state?

Soil sampling in the fall also gives you the opportunity to view the pH in your fields and apply lime if necessary in a timely manner. Fertilizer prices may be high again next year. Know what nutrients your crops need and make informed decisions on what fertilizer you apply.

CCE Oneida County does pH testing only. You can bring dry soil samples to the CCEOC in Oriskany between 8:00 am - 4:00 pm for \$3.00 a sample.

Weed Seed Movement and Equipment Clean-Out

Lynn Sosnoskie - Horticulture Section, School of Integrative Plant Science at Cornell University

Weeds can interfere with crop growth and development, directly, via competition for water, nutrients, and light. Indirectly, weeds can physically interfere with crop production operations, including harvest. Weeds that escape in-season control often produce significant quantities of seed, which are threats to future yields. While most seed will be deposited in the same field in which it was produced, some may be transported between sites on combines.

Throughout the US, university personnel have reported harvesters as being important mechanisms of seed dispersal for some economically important weed species, such as herbicide resistant bio types of Palmer amaranth and waterhemp.

While it may not always be feasible to thoroughly clean equipment between every field, removing as much plant debris as possible before transferring combines between sites is a valuable strategy for controlling weed seed spread.

Newly purchased, but previously owned harvesters should be inspected thoroughly to prevent new weed species or weedy biotypes from being introduced. Here in NY, seeds recovered from a combine recently acquired from an out-of-state grower were identified as waterhemp. Results from subsequent herbicide resistance screening efforts found that the developing seedlings could not be controlled by glyphosate (WSSA Group 9) and some of the ALS-inhibiting (WSSA Group 2) herbicides, with possible resistance to at least two additional chemical classes.

Ultimately, the careful examination of this harvester may have prevented the establishment of a difficult-to-control weed with a novel resistance profile. Before engaging in combine clean-out efforts, make sure all personnel are equipped with PPE such as safety glasses, gloves, dust masks, and ear protection and that everyone involved is familiar with the safe operation of any equipment. Although the combine head and feeder house are likely areas for weed residue to accumulate, tissue and seed can accrue in all parts of the harvester including the rotor, rock trap, grain tank, and unloading auger.

Be strategic with site selection when conducting end-of-season equipment clean-outs; choose a location where dislodged or removed seed cannot be easily blown, picked up by footwear, washed away or otherwise transported back to fields. Vacuuming up all residue and disposing of it securely will help prevent unintentional seed return. The removal of debris may have additional economic benefits (beyond its impacts on weed control efforts) if it prevents unnecessary wear-and-tear and helps to preserve equipment functionality over time. While harvester clean-out is important for limiting weed seed movement, other strategies can also minimize weed dispersal. This includes avoiding overly dense patches of weeds in a field (especially if you suspect herbicide resistance) and arranging harvest operations to ensure that the weediest fields are harvested last. Remember that unwanted seed can also be picked up and spread on tires and on tillage and planting equipment. Removed clumped soil from implements and tractors to avoid spreading weed seeds, as well as devastating soil-borne pathogens.

Local Ag Updates

Jeff Miller - Oneida County SWCD

Wheat planting will be beginning very soon. Growers can view the performance of wheat varieties tested in NY by Cornell.

Cornell small grain variety testing program can be found online at

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/varietytrials/small-grains-wheat-oats-barley-triticale/>

Corn silage harvest will be starting some time soon (or may possibly be done when this issue reaches your mailbox).

Remember that once the corn canopy is removed your fields are very vulnerable to erosion. Planting a cover crop can help prevent this loss while providing weed control and increasing the organic matter and biology in your soil.

You can find a great deal of information about species selection, timing, and rates of cover crops at **Cornell's cover crop decision tool website online at**

<https://cals.cornell.edu/field-crops/about/resources/web-based-tools>

Technologies for Field Activities

Jeff Miller - Oneida County SWCD

A few local growers use GPS guidance for tillage, planting, spraying and harvest. I wondered if there were any programs that could help farmers to plan the most efficient paths to farm our many odd shaped fields, and in a cursory investigation I found the software listed below.

Verged Ag Path - This is a specialized field route planning tool designed for precision agriculture. It can:

- Import field boundaries from GPS data, satellite imagery, or shapefiles.
 - Use AI-driven algorithms to split complex fields into optimal sub-fields.
 - Generate start-to-finish routes with turns, minimizing travel time and soil loss.
 - Export routes for autonomous tractors or other equipment via API.
- It's useful if you want a **production-ready routing engine** trained on real farming decisions verqag.com.

Farmonaut - A general-purpose farm mapping and monitoring app that supports:

- GPS-based field boundary mapping (import coordinates or draw manually).
- Crop and harvest planning integration.
- Real time analytics. It's good for **planning and monitoring** harvest operations alongside other farm activities.

File Pilot - A GPS navigation app for precision agriculture that lets you:

- Map your field and plot paths.
- Generate guidance lines for straight-line or headland routing.
- Track your actual path in real time. It's ideal if you want **on-the-go navigation** during harvest.

GLandNav/GLandGo:

- **GLandNav:** Tractor GPS guidance system for planting, spraying, tilling, and harvesting.
- **GLandGo:** GPS area and distance measurement app with coordinate support. Both can help you **navigate and measure** fields accurately, reducing overlap and improving efficiency.

4Harvest - While not a pure path-planning tool, 4Harvest integrates GPS to track active fields and harvest routes, helping you **manage and monitor** your harvest flow from field to storage.

Recommendation:

If your priority is optimizing route efficiency and minimizing soil loss, start with Verge Ag Path Planner for AI-driven routing. For real-time navigation during harvest, combine it with Field Pilot or GLandNav. For field mapping and planning, use Farmonaut or GLandGo to set up your GPS coordinates before you begin.

These tools can be used together — for example, plan your routes in Path Planner, then navigate them in Field Pilot or GLandNav during the harvest. This ensures you have both pre-harvest planning and real-time execution capabilities.

Save the Date - Crop Congress

A great opportunity to get credits for 2027!

White's Farm Supply - Sangerfield

Thursday, January 14, 2027

Perspective on New York Dairy Industry Growth

Karl Czymmek, Mike Van Amburgh, and
Thomas Overton - Progressive Dairy

New York has a long history as a leader in dairy farming and dairy processing and is blessed with excellent dairy farmers and a great climate for dairy production. Recently, New York has also been fortunate to be part of historic and significant revitalization of dairy processing: multiple dairy companies are investing renovations or new construction to the tune of approximately \$3 billion.

With this exciting news, one of the questions that arises is: How will dairy farmers meet the expected demand? The total amount of milk that will be needed, and when, are major questions.

How Much Milk? Several estimates fall in the range of seven to eight billion or more pounds of additional milk per year will be needed once processors are up and running. Assuming most of the milk will be produced within a reasonable distance from the plants, a lot more milk need to come from New York cows. Do we just add cows? How many will be needed? How much land is available to grow the feed and recycle the manure nutrients? Are there ways we can be smart about dairy growth that puts less strain on our people, our cows, our land, our neighbors, and our environment?

We started asking ourselves these questions in mid-2025 and began to think about different scenarios where New York dairy farmers could deliver billions of pounds of milk in the next five years.

One note about our assumptions: though certainly imperfect, and likely incorrect, they provide important insight: broadly increasing cow productivity and feed efficiency over a period of a few years will allow New York dairies to make several billions of pounds more milk and related components while keeping the total cow number much lower than would otherwise be needed.

New York farmers are already adding cows, but far fewer cows will be needed if we can deliver and implement new practices across a large part of New York herd. The good news is that we already know how to do some of this and the Cornell dairy team will focus on sharing this information with the industry in the coming months.

Further, ongoing research explores exciting possibilities for significant additional progress on dairy feed efficiency and productivity that will help grow productivity and feed efficiency beyond current known boundaries.

TABLE 1
2029 cows and acres x 10B FPCM x three scenarios

	BAU	Moderate productivity growth	Aggressive productivity growth
Milk/cow	26,500	30,500	36,500
FPCM/cow	30,786	35,423	42,379
New cows	250,000	135,000	+/- 0
Total cows*	880,000	765,000	630,000
New feed acres	500,000	270,000	+/- 0

Based N.Y. 2024 USDA-NASS milking cow population of 630,000

Increasing Productivity - For decades, average milk production per cow has been increasing. Looking back at recent New York production figures, 2019 to 2024 average milk per cow increase by about 200 lbs. per year. Fat and protein per cow also increase for an apple-to-apple comparison, analysis standardizes on a fat and protein corrected milk (FPCM) basis.

First, we establish a baseline: projecting forward for 2025 to 2029 assuming the past five years average annual increase in fat, protein, and milk per cow, the baseline or "business as usual" (BAU) production scenario for the average New York cow is about 30,780 lbs. of FPCM.

We constructed two more scenarios: a moderate productivity growth (MPG) scenario and an aggressive productivity growth (APG) scenario. Under MPG, we assumed milk production will be 4,000 lbs. per cow per year higher than BAU, fat and protein percentage held to be the same as the BAU scenario, for a total FPCM per cow of about 35,420 lbs. of FPCM.

Under APG, we assumed milk production will be 10,000 lbs. per cow per year higher than BAU, fat and protein again help to be the same as the BAU scenario, for a total FPCM per cow of about 42,380 lbs. of FPCM.

If New York produces 10 billion pounds more milk by the end of 2029 at the above numbers, the BAU scenario will require approximately 880,000 cows or 250,000 cows over the 2024 herd of 630,000 cows.

Under the MPG scenario, New York will need to add 135,000 cows and for the APG scenario, essentially no more cows are needed. For reference, New York had more than 900,000 dairy cows from 1970 to 1985 (NASS), but numbers have been generally declining for the last 40 years until a recent uptick in 2025. Nevertheless, the power of increased productivity and efficiency has become quite clear.

Land Requirement - Next, we looked at the land required to support feed production for the total herd and to recycle manure nutrients from the cows. We assumed two acres per cow are needed to produce the required dietary forage. In the BAU scenario, 250,000 additional cows will require 500,000 additional forage acres; the MPG scenario will require 270,000 additional acres, and the APG will require no new acres.

How is this Possible? Given the dairy nutrition concepts that are being tested at Cornell, we expect that even as cows become more productive, they will convert more of what they eat into milk. Another way to think about this: with new dietary principles, cows will make more milk for every pound of feed they consume. Done this way, each high-producing cow will not need (a lot) more land to grow feed to meet her needs. Similarly, greater feed efficiency means nutrient excretion in urine and feces will not increase and will likely go down.

The land issue can be a challenge. In some areas, competition for land between farmers is already high, not to mention other competing land uses such as solar and development. Simply increasing cow numbers and expecting to pick up added acres will be a real challenge for many dairy operations. Higher productivity and efficiency make a lot of sense regardless of local conditions, but even more so when competition for land is fierce.

We think a middle way for New York is very viable: some number of added cows, taking up some additional land for dairy forage and grain production, and manure application, along with a broad portion of the herd increasing productivity by taking advantage of the unrealized genetic potential that already lives on our dairy farms.

Meeting the productivity opportunity will likely require some rethinking of current practices to tap more of the existing and future potential of modern dairy cows. Which cows are typically the highest component producers, and how do we increase the proportion of these cows in our herds?

Are there opportunities to get calves off to the best start possible, keep them on course as heifers, and get them into the herd in the best condition, and then thrive through four or five lactations? What do our barns need to look like and how should they be managed to create the best environment for these high-performing animals? What does the forage quality need to be?

Future Promise - The next few years in New York will be very exciting for dairy farming. Start looking at your operation now to make sure your dairy of the future can support the cow of the future.

Animal Welfare and Stocking Density: Real-World Strategies for High-Performing Herds

Lindsey Ferlito - Progressive Dairy

"What is the recommended stocking density for my cows?" is a frequent question producers ask. My answer is usually long. Currently it's recommended to have no more than 100 percent stall stocking density, at least.

24-inches/cow of linear feed bunk space, and 3.5 to four inches/cow of water space for lactating cows. For pre-fresh and fresh cows, this changes to no more than 80 percent at the stalls, with over 30-inches/cow of bunk space.

Stocking Density Recommendations - When deciding what is right for a farm, there is a lot to consider. Jon Gilbert, Scipio Springs Dairy, and panelist at the recent Northeast Dairy Management Conference, asked "Are they 1,400-pound cows or are they 1,800-pound cows? Are you in a four-row barn or a six-row barn? Are your alleys 12 feet wide or 18 feet wide or 10 feet wide? It all depends!"

While the industry has accepted recommendations for stocking rates, the facilities, management factors, and goals on an individual farm will determine ideal stocking density.

Standards and Industry Benchmarks - Currently the U.S. does not have broad requirements or standards for stocking density and space allowance for dairy animals.

The National FARM Animal Care Program (which applies to 99 percent or more of the nation’s milk supply) focuses on animal-based outcomes, such as lameness and hock and knee injuries, and does not have a standard or corrective action for stocking density or space requirements.

The U.S. is unique in this way, as many countries in Europe have had legislation for years requiring no more than 100 percent stocking density. Canada requires no more than 120 percent stall stocking density, and the newest Canadian Code of Practice will require stall stocking rates of 110 percent or less by early 2027 and 100 percent or less by early 2031.

In New York, a long-held mentality is that 120 percent is “normal” or the “ideal” stall stocking density. Compared to the rest of the country, New York and the Northeast tend to overstock stalls more, and with more six-row barns that translates to even less feed bunk space per cow (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Stocking density data from on-farm assessments (usually of the mature high-producing pen) representing hundreds of farms across the U.S. (unpublished, NOVUS COWS Program, 2026).

	Northeast	United States
Stall Stocking Density	120-125%	114%
Feed Bunk Space	17.5 in/cow	21.4 in/cow
Water Space	2.6 in/cow	2.6 in/cow
Time Away from Pen	4.4 h/d	3.7 h/d

Negative Impacts - We’ve all heard the stories of an overcrowded farm that sold 10 cows out of a pen and total milk shipped stayed the same. Besides reduced milk production per cow, the full impact of overcrowding at the stalls and feed bunk can be hard to quantify, and especially hard to capture in an on-farm setting as so many factors are interconnected.

Documented short-term impacts include reduced lying time, increased competition for resources, reduced ability of cows to express natural behaviors, reduced milk production and components, and increased somatic cell count. Longer-term impacts include increased lameness, reduced reproductive performance, and the loss of flexibility in culling decisions.

Management Strategies - During a panel at the Northeast Dairy Management Conference, two New York dairy farmers, Jon Gilbert, Scipio Springs Dairy, and Bob Eichorst, Riverside Dairy, shared their experiences of how they manage differing levels of stocking density.

Riverside Dairy has always overstocked to some degree, but with construction underway for a new freestall barn, they are more overcrowded than usual as they wait to fill the new barn. Lameness is one of the biggest challenges with overstocking, Eichorst said, and he estimates they make five to 10 pounds less per cow at their current stocking rate, with good components. Their older barns cannot handle overcrowding as well as the newer barns that have wider feed and stall alleys and longer stalls. Their three-row pen was short on feed bunk space, so they added an additional 80-feet of feed bunk space along an outdoor lot connected to the pen. They are also digging new lines to run water to the outdoor feed space to increase the water space available per cow.

Having large, comfortable, well-maintained stalls is crucial in a situation where cows must compete for a place to rest 11 to 12 hours per day. Both farms utilize deep-bed sand stalls, and Riverside Dairy has adjusted to adding bedding more frequently and using more sand than if they weren't overcrowded, approximately 30 to 40 percent more sand each week, Eichorst said, compared to other farms in their co-op benchmark.

Eichorst also stressed the importance of stall maintenance and ensuring every stall in the barn is usable. "If a stall is broke, it gets fixed, usually that day," he said. Also, to maximize the time cows have in the pen to access stalls and feed, Eichorst said when the pens get big enough, they split them in half to bring them to the holding area.

Regardless of stocking density, both Eichorst and Gilbert stressed the importance of farm worker safety. Gilbert cited an example of a farm that was so crowded it was hard for people to walk the pens. "That's an animal welfare concern, that's also a human concern, and that's a labor safety issue," Gilbert said. Both farmers said they make cattle handling and worker safety training a priority.

The farms also ensure their barns have adequate ventilation and heat abatement. Riverside has three rows of fans in every pen, plus soakers in the holding area and misters in the heifer pens. Scipio Springs has sprinklers over the feed bunk in the far-off, pre-fresh, and fresh pens, and holding area. As Gilbert said, your system doesn't have to be fancy to work.

Take-Home Message - Stocking density should be continually monitored and adjusted to reduce the negative impacts on performance, profitability, and animal welfare. Stocking rates are anything but static on a farm.

Freshening rates and culling rates change, feed inventories change, and sometimes cows just end up in the wrong pen.

While negative impacts are subtle at first, they can slowly creep up to become a huge problem. "A lot of the overcrowding effects, it's a slow, and it's a slow, you can overcrowd, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine," Gilbert said, "and then holy , what the heck happened? And then recovering from those effects takes six to 12 months and some cows never recover."

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Oneida County



TASTE OF CNY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

NORTH STAR ORCHARDS

**Children's Activities - Shopping -
Live Music - Food Sampling - Food Trucks
Fun for the Whole Family!**

NYS Grown & Certified Research and Development Grant

Provides \$10,000–\$50,000 to eligible New York farmers, food processors, distributors, and other businesses enrolled in the NYS Grown & Certified Program to support research and development activities for new or expanded NYS Grown & Certified products. Eligible expenses may include product development, market research, food lab testing, pilot runs, and technical services. A 10% match is required, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis through October 25, 2027, or until funds are exhausted. Learn more at <https://tinyurl.com/ycx68kyy>

REVITALIZE YOUR SOIL WITH COMPOST AND BIOCHAR!

A Free Workshop for Farmers

Join the Institute for Sustainability Engagement (ISE) and the New York Center for Organics Recycling and Education (NYCORE) at Salt City Harvest Farm for an in-person workshop on how high-quality compost and biochar can improve soil health, nutrient management, and crop productivity, including a live demonstration of compost/biochar application on the farm.

Click the link or scan the QR code to learn more and to register.
Registration is required but there is no cost to attend.

Learn more and register:
tinyurl.com/CompostDemo26

**September 16th, 2026
1-4pm**

**Salt City Harvest Farm
449 Fyler Rd
Kirkville, NY 13082**



This event is organized by the Institute for Sustainability Engagement (ISE) at Syracuse University, in partnership with the New York Center for Organics Recycling and Education (NYCORE) at Cornell University, with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Syracuse University is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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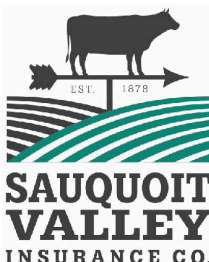
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