



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Rensselaer County

ANNUAL REPORT



2026











A LETTER FROM BOARD PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2026 was a very special year as we all celebrated the Semiquincentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It is because of this document and ongoing efforts to protect the Declaration of Independence, that organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension are possible and our residents are able to engage and participate in our offerings to increase their quality of life. We hope you take a look through our 2026 Annual Report and see the impact CCE Rensselaer has made. This report tells our story, October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026. Collectively, the programs and events we offered reached 12,000 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 of 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. As you read our Annual Report, we hope you learn one or two new things about how CCE makes Rensselaer County stronger and maybe about a program you would like to learn more about.

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.

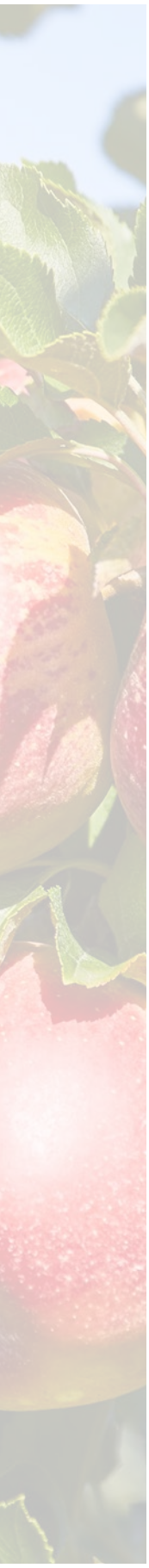


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ABOUT CCE RENSSELAER

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

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Michelle Martin, Family and Consumer Science PDC Representative
Liz Ruepp, 4-H Youth Development PDC Representative
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PUBLIC FUNDING PARTNERS

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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. Hamby, Director

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STAFF

CCE Rensselaer County Staff

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Lexi Hoag, Fair Program Assistant
Christopher Kuhbander, Program Temp
Catherine LaPorta, Natural Resources & 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
Brian Ducey, Ag Entrepreneurship and Market Development
Steve Hadcock, Team Leader, Beginning Farmer & Market Development
Rachel Moody, Commercial Livestock
Jingjing Yin, Commercial Horticulture

Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Team

Michael Basedow, Tree Fruit Specialist
Charles Bornt, Team Leader, Vegetable Specialist
Dan Donahue, Tree Fruit Specialist
Sarah Elone, Program Aide
Ethan Grundberg, Vegetable Specialist
Elizabeth Higgins, Business Management Specialist
Elisabeth Hodgdon, Vegetable Specialist
Heather Kase, Small Fruit Specialist
Lydia Pendergast, Field Technician
Teresa Rusinek, Vegetable, Fruit & Food Safety Specialist
Jeremy Schuster, Viticulture Specialist
Jennifer Stanton, Program Aide
Crystal Stewart-Courtens, Vegetable Specialist
Sarah Tobin, Extension Support Specialist

2026 FUNDING - $1,715,767



AGRICULTURE



Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County connects community members with local agriculture, supports farm viability, and helps residents understand where their food comes from.

Along with our local agriculture educators, the Ag Extension team includes two regional programs: the Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program (CAAHP) and the Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program (ENYCHP). These partnerships expand access to research-based expertise that helps producers improve farm profitability and long-term sustainability.

Extension educators answered producer and resident inquiries throughout the year, providing technical assistance on:

- Pasture Management
- Farm Rentals
- Livestock Management
- Soil & Erosion Control
- Pest Management

Workshops on mushroom production and horse management offered practical information for both new and established producers.

The Harvest Connection initiative continued linking consumers with local producers through newsletters, website resources, and social media outreach, with seasonal updates that raised awareness of local food opportunities.

Farm Day Out at Mill Pond Alpacas welcomed approximately 266 attendees, who toured the farm, learned about alpaca management and fiber production, and met the animals up close.

In partnership with the CCE Healthy Living Program, quarterly Farm to Fork webinars featured recipes made with locally sourced ingredients, encouraging residents to buy and enjoy fresh local products.

Through education, technical assistance, and strategic partnerships, the Agriculture Program strengthens connections between residents and local agriculture across Rensselaer County and beyond.

327 ATTENDED THE QUARTERLY FARM TO FORK WEBINARS

157 PRODUCERS REGISTERED ON THE HARVEST CONNECTION PLATFORM

266 ATTENDEES AT FARM DAY OUT



CAAHP

- To help with food security and increasing local meat sources, the CAAHP team held a Poultry Processing workshop, one of four around the state. Participants were able to process a bird from start to finish, including packaging, and received items to assist with future processing endeavors.
- Three Capital Region farms were added to a statewide multi-year research project to investigate crop yields with and without seed treatment pesticides to address upcoming regulations from the Birds and Bees Protection Act.
- Met with farmers to develop a marketing plan for their beginning farm enterprise and develop a strategy to implement production records to support their farm viability and success.
- Provided one-on-one consultations and farm visits to 18 growers of cut flowers, Christmas trees, and greenhouses. Shared research-based information and provided technical support to help growers address production challenges and improve their horticultural practices.

CCE ENYCHP

- Is on the front line for educating growers and industry partners as well as researching, monitoring and finding ways to control new and current invasive species that threaten vegetable and fruit crops in NYS (ie: Spotted Wing Drosophila, Spotted Lantern fly).
- Continues to help refine and educate fruit and vegetable growers on the overwhelming number of varieties that are available to them to help determine which are the best to grow for our local farms and markets.
- Helps to guide and educate fruit and vegetable growers on business decisions such as business plans, crop insurance, labor, food safety and workforce development to ensure our local producers remain profitable and sustainable today and into the future.
- Coordinated the winter fruit and vegetables school yielding over 500 growers/farmers and 49 business vendors.

HORTICULTURE



Commercial Horticulture

Training and recertification programs kept landscape and turf professionals current on safe, effective pest management.

The 30-Hour Pesticide Applicator Training was held over ten days in February via Zoom and prepared participants to take the NYSDEC Certified Pesticide Technician exams.

The Pest Management Update Series offered NYSDEC recertification credits through three Zoom sessions, which drew a combined 57 attendees.

Youth Outreach

In partnership with the Rensselaer County Legislature and the Environmental Management Council, Master Gardeners celebrated Arbor Day by planting redbud seedlings with students at Gardner-Dickinson School in Wynantskill.



426 SPENT THEIR LUNCH HOUR WITH LUNCH IN THE GARDEN SERIES

200+ ATTENDEES OVER 6 SESSIONS AT THE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

200+ PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED SPRING GARDEN DAY

Consumer Horticulture

SPRING GARDEN DAY

The 28th annual Spring Garden Day at Tamarac High School in Brunswick attracted more than 200 participants for workshops, speakers and vendors. Plant, book & tool sales and a pick-a-prize auction raised funds for Master Gardener programs.

SUMMER EVENINGS IN THE GARDEN

Free evening programs at the Demonstration Garden at the Robert C. Parker School in North Greenbush drew 200 people, with topics ranging from colonial herb gardens and dahlias to tool sharpening and live music.

PAPSCANEE ISLAND NATURE WALK

As part of the Hudson Valley Ramble, the Horticulture Educator led participants through the Papscanee Island Nature Preserve in Schodack, exploring native and invasive plants and 400 years of human history on the site.

Lunch In The Garden Series

This free Zoom series brought gardening education to lunchtime screens, with 10 webinars reaching 426 viewers. Topics included Plants for an Autumn Garden, Alternatives to Lawns, Indoor Mushroom Farming, The Dirt on Garden Soils, Gardens of the Hudson Valley, Pruning Woody Landscape Plants, Where Have All the Insects Gone, and Vegetable Gardening in Containers.

Capital Region Flower and Garden Expo

Master Gardeners and staff gave lectures to more than 250 people at Hudson Valley Community College, and many of the Expo's 17,000 visitors stopped by the Master Gardener booth and floral display celebrating the great outdoors.

MASTER GARDENERS



Master Gardeners Respond to a Busy Pest Season

The growing season brought abundant pest problems, with calls, emails and samples arriving at the office, where Master Gardeners held office hours on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Notable issues included:

- Peach leaf curl
- Rudbeckia triozid
- Apple scab and apple-cedar rust
- Verticillium wilt
- Septoria and early blight on tomatoes
- Brown patch and chinch bugs in lawns
- Magnolia scale
- Japanese and Oriental beetles

New: Gardening on Social Media

Launched 11 “Gardening In A Moment” videos, each under two minutes, and posted 25 “Plant of the Week” profiles on Facebook to promote local gardening and awareness of the natural world.

65 MASTER GARDENERS SUBMITTED SERVICE DIARIES

45 COMPLETE SOIL NUTRIENT ANALYSES PERFORMED

2,882 VOLUNTEER HOURS



PUBLIC GARDENS

New Evolution Garden: Volunteers replaced an ornamental grass bed containing invasive species with a layered native planting that shows how land use changes over time.



YOUTH OUTREACH

Kids Gardening at the Rensselaer Boys and Girls Club - 40 or more students per session learned about gardening, earth care, and nutrition, and volunteers are turning an abandoned space into a teaching garden.



9/11 MEMORIAL

For the 25th anniversary of September 11, Master Gardeners redesigned the 9/11 Memorial Park in Lansingburgh around a new walkway and flagpole, adding plants for September color. Volunteers attended the memorial ceremony, where officials and speakers recognized their years of care for the park.

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 2025–2026 4-H year, Rensselaer County 4-H engaged 7,500 youth across our rural and urban communities through schools, libraries, afterschool programs, clubs and camps. 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 trained volunteers, 4-H continues to build confidence, leadership, and a strong sense of belonging in the next generation.



Agriculture & Food Systems Education

Agriculture Literacy Week brought guest readers into second and fourth grade classrooms. Youth followed wool from sheep to finished neck warmers. 3200 youth gained hands-on experience in animal, plant and veterinary science and embryology.



Schaghticoke Fair Essential for Experiential Learning

The fair saw over 200 Youth participate in some way, through respective animal shows, general interest projects, volunteer activities and snack bar assistance. These “real life” experiences provide an essential portion of project completion allowing a formal evaluation or judging of their projects, receiving feedback from knowledgeable and caring adults and mentorship. There were 1537 4-H entries this year. The fair serves a critical role in our youth to create and strengthen their own networks and explore their interests with their peers.

Leadership & Civic Engagement

Teens served on the Teen Planning Committee at the 91st NYS 4-H Capital Days, attended the National Ignite by 4-H Conference in Washington, D.C., and explored careers at Cornell Career Explorations. They prepared meals for Joseph’s House and Shelter, hosted a luau at Van Rensselaer Manor, and raised travel funds through chicken barbecues and wreath sales.

25% OF COUNTY YOUTH PARTICIPATED IN 4-H

100% BEYOND READY

89 4-H TRAINED VOLUNTEERS



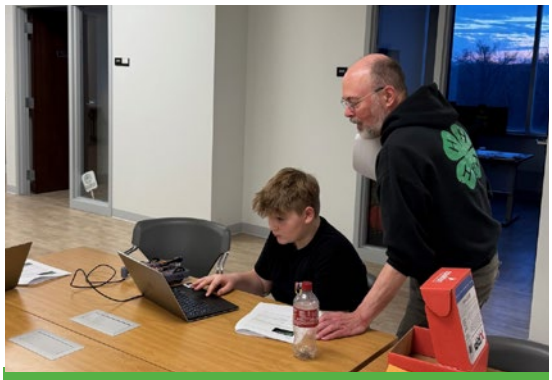
Healthy Living & Culinary Arts

Junior Chefs programs helped 30 youth build lifelong cooking and nutrition skills, preparing balanced meals at in-person and virtual workshops, and 36 youth participated in the Junior Chefs Contest at the Schaghticoke Fair.

At the Schaghticoke Fair, members ages 5 to 19 assisted with and ran the 4-H Snack Bar, a youth-led enterprise that builds real-world work skills while raising funds for 4-H.

Through a grant-funded partnership with Hannaford, youth sampled locally produced foods and prepared simple recipes.

Held the first clover fun run walk at the Schodack Island State park attracting 40 runner/walkers encouraging intentional attention to physical activity and our natural environment.



STEM & Environmental Education

Youth programmed XRP Experiential Robots and showcased them at the State Capitol, explored Lego coding and video game design at the Lansingburgh Boys & Girls Club, and learned engine repair in a hands-on small engine workshop.

110 youth learned from industry professionals through 4-H STEM programming.

Outdoor & Shooting Sports Education

431 youth and adults took part in environmental education. Youth learned about wildlife and pond ecology at county libraries. The Outdoor Adventure Camp at Dyken Pond welcomed 85 campers, and youth restored a half-mile trail there through a Scotts Miracle-Gro grant. Youth competed in the Archery League and summer program.



FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE

900+ VISITS TO HEALTHY FOOD DEMONSTRATIONS

90% OF CLASS PARTICIPANTS ADOPTED HEALTHIER EATING HABITS

900 MONTHLY HEALTHY LIVING SENIOR NEWSLETTERS

Empowering Communities Through Nutrition and Healthy Living

BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS

Cornell Cooperative Extension's Building Healthy Habits (BHH)—formerly EFNEP—has served New York State communities for over 56 years. The program focuses on empowering limited-resource families through hands-on, interactive workshops.

- 97 adults enrolled in Building Healthy Habits lesson series, impacting 256 family members, and 99 youth enrolled at the Lansingburgh Boys & Girls Club and Knickerbacker Middle School.
- In the most recent program evaluation, 90% of participating youth and adults adopted healthier eating habits.

SNAP-Ed

Capital Region SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program emphasized balanced diets, reduced sugary beverages, and increased physical activity. This spring, students at Berlin, Rensselaer Park, School 16, and Van Rensselaer elementary schools received 32 classroom lessons, and classrooms received Healthy Classroom materials promoting proper water hydration, movement, and healthy eating.

HEALTHY LIVING

The Healthy Living Program promoted nutritious eating among older adults and strengthened community connections.

In partnership with the Department of Aging, the program distributed newsletters monthly and held 60 food demonstrations across five senior centers, averaging 15 or more participants per class.

Hands-on cooking classes also reached 41 youth at the Boys & Girls Club through four food demonstrations funded by the Hannaford grant. Students with special needs at Wildwood also received hands-on cooking classes.

Quarterly Farm to Fork webinars showed how to make sauerkraut, yogurt, strawberry preserves, and tomato sauce with ingredients from local farms, and a free community webinar with Cornell University faculty addressed GLP-1 medications and weight-loss treatments.

DIGITAL LITERACY

152 FIRST-TIME PARTICIPANTS

14 COMMUNITY LOCATIONS

98% PARTICIPANTS LEARNED SOMETHING NEW

Digital Literacy and Community Tech Engagement

CCE Rensselaer County's digital literacy program helps residents build everyday tech skills they need to stay connected, safe, and independent. Programs meet people where they are; public libraries, senior centers, as well as the CCE office.

BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE TECH HELP

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Tech Help offers free, drop-in, one-on-one support with the phones, tablets, and laptops residents use every day. Now offered at 14 locations, the program ran 122 sessions. Troubleshooting device problems and email were the most common needs. In post-session surveys, 98% of participants learned something new and 91% left feeling more confident using technology.

SENIOR PLANET PARTNERSHIP WITH AARP

Through Senior Planet from AARP, CCE delivered structured technology classes for older adults. Multi-week series included Getting to Know Your iPhone in Schodack and Hoosick Falls and Using Your Android Smartphone in Hoosick Falls and Troy. One-time workshops and lectures covered online shopping, sharing photos, Facebook, chatting with AI, and AI and disinformation.

WORKSHOPS AND OUTREACH

Computer Basics and Internet Basics workshops gave residents hands-on practice on laptops provided for in-class use, removing the barrier of needing to own a device to learn. The quarterly TechTips newsletter covered practical topics like online safety and digital wallets, and a smartphone demo at the Schaghticoke Fair brought digital skills directly to the community.







Cornell Cooperative Extension
Rensselaer County

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

SNAP-Ed New York
SAVE TIME. SAVE MONEY. EAT HEALTHY.

18 USC 707

Building Healthy Habits

Master Gardener
Cornell Cooperative Extension

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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