

# SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Living and Good Farming – Connecting People, Land, and Communities



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SPRING 2017

Supplement to Country Folks

## LOCAL FOODS AND MARKETS

# Successful CSAs in Low-Income Communities

*Binghamton Farm Share helps CSA farmers develop sustainable business in untapped low-income markets*

by Kate Miller-Corcoran

Connecting farmers and residents in low-income areas is a strength of the Binghamton Farm Share. Each season since its inception in 2013, half of the share members have fallen within very low to moderate income ranges, as set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Share distribution grows each year, and in 2016 an average of 65 weekly shares, bringing in around \$1,300 weekly, were distributed to members falling within these income levels. While there is initial work that needs to be put into growing relationships in these areas, the benefits reaped by both the share members and the farmers is incredibly worthwhile. Programs like Binghamton Farm Share help to lighten the load on the farmers by having a central contact for the members, allowing the farmers more time to grow their produce. However, farmers around the country are also successfully marketing shares and delivering to low-income areas on their own.

Binghamton Farm Share (BFS) is a modified Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, born from a study done in 2012 by the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE) in Oneonta, NY, to determine the best way to increase access to good food in local food deserts. This study found that convenience and price were the top priorities for residents when it came to buying food, which BFS is able to achieve. Every week of the growing season, Binghamton Farm Share goes directly into neighborhoods that lack fresh, healthy produce to distribute CSA shares from local farms. By accepting SNAP benefits and providing a 50% discount to income eligible members, residents can better afford this good food. This opens an untapped market for farmers, one that should be further explored as we move into the future.

The success of Binghamton Farm Share relies heavily on the education that we provide for our members. With the help of a grant from the Northeastern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NESARE) program, we have been able to create extensive member education materials. These materials are universal, and can be found on our website for use by any farm that may wish to use them.

Keeping in mind that many of our share members are new to cooking with fresh vegetables, we create easy-to-follow recipes using ingredients that most members have on hand. This makes recipes accessible both to members who might be facing economic hardships, but also to members who are new to using a CSA as their source of produce for the week. Showing members how the produce they receive can enhance food they are already eating as well as sharing varia-



Member picking up share on the north side of Binghamton. Photo by Maria Majka

tions of dishes that members are familiar with to help people think about produce in new ways. For example, we have recipes for carrot tacos, zucchini "crab" cakes, and broccoli quinoa tots. We have these recipes available to sample at distribution. When members have tried something and know they like it, they are more likely to take the time to replicate it at home.

People joining a CSA generally have the desire to learn to cook with fresh produce, but some lack expertise. Guiding members in the basic ways of using fresh produce helps to retain members. To start, we created a comprehensive vegetable list, which includes all produce that has been distributed through BFS. Using this, members can identify produce, get simple preparation techniques, and learn how to store the produce for both the short and long term. The comprehensive vegetable list was also split into individual Quick Guides for less common produce to distribute on weeks they are found in shares. Both the comprehensive vegetable list and the quick guides can be found on the Binghamton Farm Share website.

When members understand the importance of proper storage, for both the short and long term, retention increases throughout the season. We found BFS members were commenting on their end of season surveys that their produce wasn't staying fresh long enough. Lack of knowledge in storage was attributed to much of this. For the past two growing seasons we have provided a colorful single sided "Care for Your Share" informational sheet that our members receive at the start of the season to hang on their refrigerator. It's a quick reference on how to store produce and how quickly each vegetable should be consumed. We also place an emphasis on storage at weekly distribution. We provide our distribution volunteers with extra knowledge and prompts for helping members understand what is in their share and how to store it.

Through our NESARE grant, we have been able to work with our partner farms to help them understand the needs of members who may have limited resources or lack experience preparing food. Many of these members simply want access to affordable produce, and are not looking for more

sophisticated shares. While we acknowledge that the traditional CSA model is not one in which a member chooses the food received, we also must understand the needs of our members if we are to have success in spreading fresh produce into areas that need it most. People just learning to eat healthy are most likely to stick with a CSA share if it contains a majority of produce that they can recognize.

It's important to consider what members in lower income brackets may be facing. What cooking utensils are available? Do they have cutting boards, ingredients to prepare food, or time to prepare extensive recipes? BFS raises money throughout the year to purchase cooking utensils and spices to give our members to start the season with. We also utilize surveys; most helpful is the mid-season survey which encourages members to give us feedback on what produce they need more help with, what recipes they would like to see more of, etc.

Our farmers adapt to create shares that with the 50% discount will cost members less than \$10. It is important to remember that even when people are paying that little per week, it is an

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Both Farmers and Volunteers had a tour of Main Street Farms. Photo by Kate Miller-Corcoran



Members receive education materials both electronically and at the distribution site. Photo by Maria Majka

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# Cornell Small Farms Program Update

## Agroforestry Trainings for Veterans

The Cornell Small Farms Program, with support from New York State and the USDA, announces three trainings in agroforestry this coming spring to support Veterans looking to get into agricultural production. Agroforestry includes farming practices that combine trees and forests with crop production.

Each training includes classroom instruction and site visits to farms in active production. Content will cover the technical aspects of production as well as the financial and business considerations for each venture.

These trainings are exclusively for veterans and active military personnel who are residents of New York State with an interest in selling commercial farm products (filing a Schedule F) in 2017 or 2018. Participants will be asked to complete a targeted survey at the end of the course as well as 6 months from completion, to determine the effect on their operation.

**Cost: \$30 per training includes lunch and all materials.**

Participants are able to submit up to \$100 in travel expenses for reimbursement.

## May 12 & 13, 2017

Managing Trees and Animals in Silvopasture Systems  
Cornell Cooperative Extension Schuyler County  
323 Owego St # 5, Montour Falls, NY 14865

This course will explore the successful integration of livestock and trees in mixed systems to help participants understand how to establish and maintain forest and tree grazing systems on their farms.

Questions? Contact Dean Koyanagi at 607-255-9911 or drk5@cornell.edu

Learn more and register at: <http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/projects/farmer-veterans/veteran-trainings-in-agroforestry-2/>

## One-Day Professional Development Training

Framing an Economic Evaluation of Community Food Systems Initiatives  
Save the Date: May 19, 2017

Led by Becca Jablonski (Colorado State University) and Todd Schmit (Cornell University, Dyson School of Applied Economics & Management), Cornell's LRFS\* Team will host an in-depth training on the USDA-AMS

The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments and Choices.

The Toolkit aims to help communities reliably evaluate the economic impacts of investing in local and regional food systems. This workshop will be tailored to small teams of Extension professionals, researchers, students, and other stakeholders (e.g., farmers, food security reps, distributors, processors, community planners, local legislators, etc.).

For more information or to request a Toolkit Training application, contact Kathi Colen Peck at ksc32@cornell.edu. Preference will be given to those who apply as a small team (2-4 individuals representing inter-organization or interdisciplinary perspectives working together on a local and regional food systems initiative).

\*Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension's Local & Regional Food Systems (LRFS) effort explores ways to maximize and improve interdisciplinary and inter-organization coordination, alignment, and connection for a robust and resilient regional food system in New York State. To date, a small team of researchers, staff, and Extension professionals has been identifying and further developing a collaborative network that will work to better integrate sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management in order to boost the economic, social and environmental well being in NYS. The Toolkit Training is one such effort to help strengthen collaboration among campus, county, and community.

## Baskets to Pallets Training

The Baskets to Pallets project hosted an intensive two-day training workshop at Templeton Hall, Cooperstown, NY. A total of 50 producers of all levels were instructed on preparing their products for marketing to wholesale buyers — especially food hubs, groceries, restaurants and cooperatives. The Training drew a huge diversity of farmers from about a 100-mile radius.

In a pre-training survey, farmers cited a number of barriers to entering wholesale markets, including knowledge, time, money, infrastructure and transportation challenges. After the Training, most farmers reported feeling ready to enter at least one new wholesale market. Farmers had the opportunity to meet a total of 30 buyers at a regional Farmer-Buyer Mixer in Troy, NY a few weeks after the training.

To learn more about the Baskets to Pallets project, visit <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/projects/wholesale/>

## Partnerships Foster Reduced Tillage Info

The Cornell SFP teamed up with Michigan State University and the University of Maine to offer 3 webinars in March and shared the latest research on reduced tillage for organic vegetable production. We discussed soil-building practices for both small and mid-size farms, from permanent beds, tarps, and mulches, to cover cropping, strip tillage, and cultivation tools. Find and listen to webinar recordings at our Reduced Tillage project page, <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/projects/reduced-tillage/>.

## From the Editor:

The spring brings renewal – and the promise of a productive year ahead for farmers. We ease into the season with excitement and some caution, wondering if early killing frosts or too much or too little rain will make our lives difficult. Despite all the unknowns, we've experienced all the possibilities before, and know we can make it through in the end.

All of us at the Small Farms Program wish you a healthy, safe, and productive growing season, and hope you find the enclosed stories and articles inspirational and helpful in your farm enterprises. We are always looking for YOUR stories for our "Lessons from the Land" column, so please consider sending us one!

Steve Gabriel  
Managing Editor

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investment of their food budget. According to the Food and Health Network's 2014 "Helping to Create Hunger-Free Communities" Report, "In 2013, monthly SNAP benefits in the [9 county] region averaged about \$132 per recipient." If a share member receives the least expensive share their cost is \$40 per month or 30% of their food budget.

Another consideration is the unpredictability that can come with living without economic security. Member reminders are extremely important. Both a reminder the day before and having someone that can call members within a half hour of the end of distribution if a share has not been claimed are provided. BFS also utilizes a Share Bank, which is available for member use if a payment cannot be made. Certain times of the month budgets can be tight, and this helps to keep members in the program rather than leaving due to embarrassment of not having funds to pay for a share. Members are able to use the Share Bank twice in a season without paying it back. However, most members do reimburse the money used.

There are programs that farmers can tap into to make CSA programs accessible to members in low-income areas, including asking your own members to donate to a fund for those who may not be able to afford the full price of the CSA. This way, farmers can still be paid the full price for their share and families who most need it can have healthy, nutritious food on their tables.

Food is a commonality among us all. Food brings people together and creates community. Our world is seeking community now and small farms are situated to bring people together through programs like Binghamton Farm Share.

*Kate Miller-Corcoran grew up on a dairy farm in Windsor, NY, where her family has been farming for 4 generations. She received her BA in English from Penn State University and her Master of Arts in English from SUNY Cortland. Currently, Kate is the Program Coordinator for Binghamton Farm Share. She can be reached at [farmshare@vinesgardens.org](mailto:farmshare@vinesgardens.org) or (607) 238-3522.*

For more information visit:

Binghamton Farm Share: [vinesgardens.org/farmshare](http://vinesgardens.org/farmshare)

Food and Health Network Resources: [foodandhealthnetwork.org/resources/](http://foodandhealthnetwork.org/resources/)

Northeast SARE: <http://www.nesare.org/>

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## SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

### Good Farming and Good Living

### Connecting People, Land, and Communities

*Small Farm Quarterly* is for farmers and farm families — including spouses and children - who value the quality of life that smaller farms provide.

**OUR GOALS ARE TO:**

- Celebrate the Northeast region's smaller farms;
- Inspire and inform farm families and their supporters;
- Help farmers share expertise and opinions with each other;
- Increase awareness of the benefits that small farms contribute to society and the environment;
- Share important research, extension, and other resources.

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Anyone is welcome to submit articles for consideration. See our guidelines at [smallfarms.cornell.edu/quarterly/writers/](http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/quarterly/writers/) and contact Steve Gabriel with inquiries. Articles should be 1,000 - 1,600 words in length with 2 - 3 high-resolution pictures.

Topics should be appropriate for a farmer audience, and not promote a single organization or business. We focus on articles with relevant information that helps to improve the practice of farming and agriculture in New York and the Northeast.

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**LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY****Cornell Cooperative Extension Releases Livestock Meat Price Calculator**

by Kina Viola, Project Coordinator, Finger Lakes Meat Project

New York livestock farmers, whether experienced or just getting started, will benefit from the release of a new pricing tool from Cornell Cooperative Extension. The "Livestock Price & Yield Calculator" exists as part of MeatSuite.com, an online directory of over 160 New York State farms selling meat in bulk. The calculator has been designed to allow farms to enter their own data and profit goals, then price their meat with the assurance of meeting those goals. These features make the calculator a vital tool for farmers to create pricing for each marketing channel they utilize, whether selling whole carcasses or meat by-the-cut. For success, users need to prepare in advance by gathering their current meat prices, invoice from their processor, and the weights of cuts from one average animal in their herd. With this information on hand, the calculator takes about ten minutes to use.

Marketing labor, processing and travel costs, and the difficulty of meat-cut inventory management may leave farmers wondering if local food channels, such as farmers' markets or restaurant sales, can yield profits. The calculator can be used to develop the pricing needed for a farm to realize a profit in each channel. In some cases, the prices calculated won't work for the customers in that channel; this is an indicator that the channel is not viable. In contrast, where price adjustments are tolerated, the farm can proceed with sales in that channel, confident that they are receiving a profit with each sale. In this way, the calculator tool is not only for figuring out pricing, but also a means to "test" the viability of marketing channels.

The calculator addresses several barriers in meat direct marketing, most notably that farmers utilizing value-added channels typically underestimate the value of their invested



time. To solve this, the calculator includes features that empower the producer to create a desired level of profit—either as a percentage mark-up or as a flat dollar-per-head value—and set pricing of cuts or whole animals to reach the goal in each channel. Farmers who drive longer distances to truck their animals to processing are compensated for time and gas, for example. Additionally, the price calculator combats the confusion many producers may have about managing inventory, and how inventory can be managed by prices. The "magic" of the site lies in the farmer's ability to manipulate the prices of individual cuts based on their proportion on a carcass and the degree of consumer demand in the farm's channels, all while maintaining the desired level of profit per head.

The calculator is an exciting tool for building up farm viability. But its benefits don't end with the producer—it can also

facilitate a productive exchange with buyers. Wholesale buyers wishing to buy meat by the whole and half animal can use the calculator to understand how to price different cuts, whether for a plate cost or for the retail case. Additionally, farmers can use the calculator with potential wholesale buyers in order to teach them what goes into the farm's prices. Using the site, buyers are able to see costs like transportation and processing fees to better understand the value of the products. Farmers and buyers will be encouraged to collaborate and develop a price that works for both parties.

For farmers to survive over time, the ability to set fair prices for their labor becomes key. With each use of the calculator, producers will take steps to ensure for themselves a more reliable income and feel confident that their hard work is paying off.

NYS farmers are invited to use the Livestock Price & Yield Calculator located at [calculator.meatsuite.com](http://calculator.meatsuite.com). Farms may contact Matt LeRoux, [mnl28@cornell.edu](mailto:mnl28@cornell.edu), for help or with questions.

For more information visit <http://www.fingerlakesmeatproject.com/>

<http://meatsuite.com/>, which houses the Calculator, is an online directory any farm selling meat in bulk can join.

*Kina Viola is a Project Coordinator for the Finger Lakes Meat Project, a project of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County aimed at increasing the freezer trade regionally. She also manages the MeatSuite.com online directory, and the Ithaca Meat Locker, a community storage space for bulk meat.*

**EXTENSION NEWS****Growers Harvest Cornell Expertise at Fruit and Vegetable Expo**

by R.J. Anderson

For commercial fruit and vegetable growers in New York State, winter is a time of reflection, preparation, and guarded optimism. It's also a time to hone one's craft through continuing education and consumption of research-based analysis.

A buffet of that insight drew more than 800 attendees to the 2017 Empire State Producers Expo, which took place January 17-19 in Syracuse, New York. Co-hosted by the New York State Vegetable Growers Association and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), the event featured Cornell scientists, CCE educators, and experts from across the country presenting on topics including weeds, wildlife and pest management; food safety; best growing practices; and business development tactics.



Darcy Telenko, left, extension vegetable specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension, speaks with Richard Ball, center, commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and an attendee at the 2017 Empire State Growers Expo in Syracuse, New York.

"The Expo provides a great opportunity to network with growers, educators, and scientists from throughout New York and beyond," said CCE Director Chris Watkins. "The single goal is that attendees drive home feeling that they have invested their time, energy and resources well, and hopefully with thoughts of how they can make changes in their operation to improve profitability."

Tree fruit growers found sessions especially helpful as standing-room-only crowds packed the Syracuse Oncenter's ballroom Wednesday. Kicking off the day, retired Cornell plant pathologist David Rosenberger detailed sudden apple decline, a troubling condition killing young apple trees across the state, which has puzzled researchers.

The afternoon featured presentations from horticulturist Ines Hanrahan, a fruit safety expert with the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission. She spoke about honeycrisp apple best management practices and reducing the spread of foodborne pathogens through proper orchard management. Joining Hanrahan was Cornell horticulturist Greg Peck, who talked about the importance of soil health in apple orchards.

Highlighting the three-day event was a presentation by New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard Ball covering Gov. Andrew Cuomo's recently unveiled New York Certified Grown Program. Identifying and promoting New York producers who adhere to the state's food safety and environmental sustainability programs, the certification assures consumers that the food they are buying is local and produced at a high standard.

"Many of the attendees indicated that they left the session with a clearer definition of the program," said CCE's Darcy Telenko, extension vegetable specialist with the Cornell Vegetable Program. "As a vegetable farmer himself, Commissioner Ball is able to connect [with] our growers and has a great understanding of food safety and the need to promote New York agriculture through concise messaging."



Here is a wrap up of the annual Empire State Growers Expo, which was attended by many small farm owners. It includes stats and info. from Commissioner Ball's presentation on the Governor's new NY Grown and Certified program. Photos by R.J. Anderson/Cornell Cooperative Extension

Watkins agreed: "Commissioner Ball is a wonderful advocate for New York state farmers, and his willingness to attend EXPO and update the industry firsthand is priceless. It is in keeping with his often-spoken comments about our state being one based on partnerships, relationships and friendships."

With many of the sessions packed, attendance numbers significantly higher than in recent years, and an on-site trade show buzzing with activity, Telenko said the 2017 event was one to build on. "We had a number of very interesting and current topics and we brought in great speakers," she said. "I think anyone who attended an educational session – myself included – learned something new that we can take and implement on the farm to improve vegetable and fruit production in New York."

*R.J. Anderson is a writer/communications specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension.*

**COMMUNITY AND WORLD****A Charter for CSAs in the USA and Canada*****Farmers weigh in on the benefits of CSA's for farm and community***

by Elizabeth Henderson

Similar to what happened in Japan after 30 years of Teikei, CSA in the U.S. is facing something of a crisis. Across the country, CSAs that once had waiting lists are now having trouble finding enough members. So, individual CSAs and CSA networks around the country have decided act together as a CSA community. Taking a clue from the rapid growth of CSAs in new areas of the world (France, UK, all of Europe, China), we are proposing the adoption of a CSA Charter that provides a definition of what CSA is all about. Together, regional networks and independent CSAs launched the Charter on CSA Sign-up Day, February 24, 2017 as a way to attract public attention and, hopefully, inspire many new people to join CSAs. The CSAs that endorse the Charter are posting it on their website along with a logo that identifies them as charter endorsers. In doing this, the CSAs commit to upholding the values of the Charter.

Flashback: In February 1979, a tractorcade of 6,000 farmers tied up traffic in Washington, D.C. to protest farm policy that ended parity, the pricing system that had linked farm prices to the costs of other sectors of the economy. The deepening farm crisis of the 1980s accelerated the loss of family-scale farms. Developers were grabbing up farmland at the rate of many acres a day. In the face of the grim reality that small and mid-sized family-scale community-based farming could disappear completely in the U.S., people who wanted to farm and support farms had to invent creative alternatives; that is how Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was born.

In the words of Anthony Graham, a farmer at Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire, one of the first two CSAs in the USA:

"Ideas have a way of hovering until the time is right or the right person or group can give it form. Booker T Whatley sounds like he was a forerunner in the idea of communities supporting farms and farmers, but I don't think he can be said to have created the CSA concept. In the mid 80's what has now come to be known as CSA was an idea whose time had come, with roots in many places and in many people. It grew out of a sense of community and it came as an answer to a need. When the time was ripe it grew exponentially through the work of many people, not the least of whom were the farmers who recognized a great idea and ran with it." In the South, Booker T. Whatley researched and taught farmers "How to Make \$100,000 from a 25 Acre Farm." Inspired by Swiss and German examples, Robyn Van En, Trauger Groh, Anthony Graham, and Lincoln Geiger established the first CSA farms in the U.S. in 1986: Indian Line Farm and Temple-Wilton Community Farm. Robyn became CSA's Johnny Appleseed, spreading the concept at Biodynamic and Organic conferences across the country. Now in 2017, there are over 7300 CSAs in the U.S.

At the 1993 New York State CSA Gathering in Syracuse, I shared my thoughts on the significance of CSA: "A CSA is an idea – a tremendously flexible concept for a new consumer-farmer connection, an alternative system of distribution based on community values. The economics of direct sales make this a win-win solution for farmers and consumers. The farmer gets a decent price and the consumer pays less, since there is no middleman. For the farmer, the CSA offers the possibility of a broad support group of people who genuinely care about the farm's survival and who are willing to share the farmer's risks. Consumers have the oppor-



**CSAs that endorse the Charter will proudly post this logo designed by Ruth Blackwell, farmer at Mud Creek Farm in Victor, New York.**

tunity to connect with the earth, know and trust the people who grow their food, and support the local economy and to transform themselves into the much more meaningful and empowered stance of a person who is taking responsibility of one of the most basic needs of a human being. The big question we must answer – will this be sustainable?"

Anthony Graham writes: "When we started the Temple Wilton Community Farm with a series of community meetings in the winter of 1985/1986, one thing we were sure of was that we were not selling anything - we were far more interested in community and in the 'culture' in agriculture. What we were attempting to set up was a way for a community of people to support the existence of a farm through good times and bad by making pledges of financial support over the course of one year. By agreeing to support the existence of the farm our members became co-farmers....At that time we were all talking and thinking a lot about how to bring form to the ideas that were swirling around, and in one of our conversations Trauger was the one who came up with the idea that the members could also be seen as farmers and we also decided that the farmers should make pledges as members (which we still do)."

Interesting to note is that CSAs that stick to their guns are not having trouble. Temple-Wilton, which does not even have a price but asks members to contribute what they can afford and then take as much food as they need, still has a waiting list. Ruth Katz, a core member of a CSA in New York City, writes:

"We at Clinton Hill CSA have been very fortunate thus far (knock on wood!) that our membership has stayed up in the last few years. I'm aware that it can change at any time. I think one reason is that our neighborhood, for all of its gentrification, is still a bit of a food desert, with no really terrific supermarket. Honestly, the CSA is about convenience to some degree. We've kept up a long wait list, and that has been our most reliable tool to fill our membership each year;

we've just almost doubled our winter share membership by offering the winter shares to the wait list. We also have started offering half shares, and that seems to be a strong and important tool to reach people who might not have room in their lives for a full share. And we have a wonderful farmer in Ted Blomgren; his expertise has grown so much in these last 15 years."

Emilie Miyauchi of Just Food, a CSA network in NYC, writes:

"There's been a lot of talk about how to make CSA more 'consumer friendly' and flexible. While we understand this mindset, especially in trying to compete for NYC's attention, we see this as a potentially endless pursuit. Someone else will always be there with an easier platform for food delivery, generally someone with a lot of up front capital. Our farmers and our communities can't play by the same rules as companies or whatever comes next to replace them. The CSA model works and is equitable only when we recognize and try to meet the real needs of farmers and share-holders. We need to get better at listening to one another, expressing ourselves, and finding ways to engage and get creative when we feel our interests are in conflict.

We need to dig down deeper into what community is and what it can mean. Part of the hardest work of keeping the CSA model viable is building back community, protecting what exists, and galvanizing people around a shared sense of our entanglement with one another and the natural world. It is also time for CSA farms to address the tension between farm owners and farm workers to make CSA a model for healthy business and fair labor."

**Charter for CSAs in the USA and Canada**

It is up to each CSA farm and its community to build a model that best suits them and to mutually ensure that the CSA upholds the principles of this charter.

1. Farm members buy directly from the farm or group of farms. There is no middleman.
2. The farm provides member families with high quality, healthy, nutrient-dense, fresh and preserved, local and low fossil-fuel food or fiber, filling the share primarily with products

**See Charter page 7**



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**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT****Should You Let Your Neighbor Borrow That?**

by Reuben Dourte

In the farming community, machinery and implements are regularly borrowed or rented. For the most part, farmers are a close-knit community who look to help each other out when possible. Sometimes situations arise where a tractor may be broken down, and to continue time-sensitive harvest of planting operations, the neighbor's tractor is borrowed. The lender farm may carry insurance coverage on the tractor and as such may not give much thought to lending their equipment to their neighbor, but doing so without adequate consideration or conversation is probably not advisable.

If you are the one borrowing equipment from your neighbor, you will want to consider including an adequate limit on your own insurance policy for borrowed or rented farm equipment. How much coverage do you need? A good starting point is to determine your maximum possible loss to borrowed equipment. If your neighbor lends you a \$50,000 liquid manure tanker, it is probably advisable that you have insurance for \$50,000 of borrowed equipment. If you store the tanker and the neighbor's grain drill in the same implement shed, this limit may need to be increased, since a fire or building collapse could damage more than \$50,000 of machinery.

Hopefully, your neighbor's insurance agent is having this same conversation with him or

her. Since you do not know what coverage they have elected to buy, or how their policy coverage forms read, it is important for you to have a conversation with them before you lend them your equipment. You may want to verify that their policy does not stipulate that a written agreement needs to be in place for coverage to be extended to hired or borrowed machinery. You will also want to verify the coverage limit on their policy. Damage to your equipment will be covered on an actual cash value basis, so the neighbor with \$5,000 of coverage for rented or borrowed equipment may be grossly underinsured, even if they are borrowing an older model tractor. You need to evaluate the actual cash value of your equipment and verify your neighbor's policy limit to determine whether or not coverage is adequate.

If your machinery is damaged while in the care and control of your neighbor, you may have a couple options. Your first option is to ask your neighbor to turn in a claim against his or her own policy. If you have failed to verify their coverage limits, and they are underinsured, their policy may only pay part of the loss amount. You may be left with no other option than to turn the claim into your insurance company, at which point you may receive actual cash value of the item lost minus your deductible amount. If you have your equipment insured to adequate limits, you will not need to worry about an unpaid claim. However, this scenario is less than ideal.

First, as mentioned, your deductible will be subtracted from your claim settlement, potentially leaving you to pay for the difference out of pocket when you go to replace the piece of equipment you lost. Hopefully you could recoup this expense from your neighbor, but they may be in a situation where they are unable to pay.

Furthermore, there is a good chance that your insurance company will attempt to subrogate against the at-fault party, i.e. your neighbor. Again, if your neighbor does not have adequate insurance limits, and they do not have the means to reimburse your insurance company, the company may not be able to recoup their claim payment. This whole legal process could certainly also put a strain on your neighborly relationship.

Perhaps most detrimental is that in the event that your insurance company is unable to successfully subrogate against your neighbor or their insurance policy, the claim will remain on your loss history. Your account's quality of risk has now been reduced and your loss runs will show this activity if you want to shop your insurance coverage in the near future. Some farm companies will not write an account that has had losses within the last three years. Other companies may write it, but surcharge the policy, and still

others may not offer the same aggressive price credits that would have otherwise been available. If you are insured with a company that provides credit for policies that have no claims, you may lose this credit and incur a higher annual insurance cost for the next few years than you would have otherwise realized. If you're lucky, you might be able to get your deductible back from your neighbor, but trying to explain to them the loss of policy credits you incurred is probably a more difficult conversation.

If your policy lacks appropriate and adequate limits of insurance coverage for items of machinery that you are renting or borrowing, you need to have a conversation with a licensed insurance agent about how you can fill that coverage gap. Before you lend your machinery to your neighbor, you should be having a short conversation with them to verify that they have coverage in place to protect you in the event of a loss. A simple, this discussion can save a lot of headaches in the future and go far to avoid the potential fall-out between friends.

*Reuben Dourte is an Account Executive at Ruhl Insurance specializing in Farm and Agribusiness Insurance. He can be reached through <https://www.iruhl.com/>.*

**Charter from page 6**

grown on the farm or, if purchased from other farms, clearly identified as to the origin.

3. Farm members commit to the CSA, sharing the bounty and the risks of farming by signing an agreement with the CSA and paying some part in advance, even if just two weeks ahead of time for those on Food Stamps.

4. The farm nurtures biodiversity through healthy production that is adapted to the rhythm of the seasons and is respectful of the natural environment and of cultural heritage, and that builds healthy soils, restores soil carbon, conserves water and minimizes pollution of soil, air and water.

5. Farmers and members commit to good faith efforts for continuous development of mutual trust and understanding, and to solidarity and responsibility for one another as co-producers.

6. Farm members respect the connection with the land upon which the CSA grows their food and strive to learn more and to understand the nature of growing food in their locale.

7. Farmers practice safe-handling proce-

dures to ensure that the produce is safe to eat and is at its freshest, tastiest, and most nutritious

8. CSA prices reflect a fair balance between members' needs for food that is accessible and affordable, and the farmers' needs to cover costs of production and pay living wages for themselves and all farm workers so that they can live in a dignified manner.

9. Farmers consult with members, take their preferences into account when deciding what crops to grow, and communicate regularly about the realities of the farm.

10. Farm members commit to cooperate with the community of members and to fulfill their commitments to the CSA.

11. Farmers commit to using locally adapted seeds and breeds to the greatest extent possible.

12. The CSA seeks paths to social inclusiveness that enable the less well-off to access high quality food and commits to growing the CSA movement through increasing the number of CSAs and collaboration among them.

*Elizabeth Henderson started one of the first three CSAs in New York State – Peace-work Organic CSA, in its 29th year in 2017. She is lead author of *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture* (Chelsea Green, 2007) and Honorary President of the international CSA network Urgenci. She can be reached at [elizabethhenderson13@gmail.com](mailto:elizabethhenderson13@gmail.com)*



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**FARM TECH****Use of GIS in agriculture**

by Kyle Dornich, NYCAMH Research Assistant

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a tool that creates visual representations of data and performs spatial analyses in order to make informed decisions. It is a technology that combines hardware, software, and data. The data can represent almost anything imaginable so long as it has a geographic component. The hardware can be anything from a desktop computer or laptop to satellites, drones, and handheld GPS units. There are a few different software packages, but ESRI's ArcGIS suite is the industry standard. The public, private, and non-profit sectors all employ GIS to do everything from manage public utilities to organize the movement and dispersion of goods and services. GIS is very functional in traditional map making, to plot things like fire hydrants along a road, or to draw boundaries, like the area of different crop fields on a farm.

The real power of GIS, though, lies in its ability to analyze multiple data layers or variables. Simple examples of this within the realm of agriculture would be; a map showing the number of farm injuries by county, or the number of crop acres lost to flood by tax map parcel. The polygons representing different ownership or municipalities can convey the



**Illustration of GIS data being used in Precision Ag** (<http://www.cavalieragrow.ca/ifarm>)

change in values in different ways, the most common being a changing color ramp.

More complex spatial analyses for agriculture might compare variables like soil type, wind direction, rainfall amount, slope, aspect, topography, or elevation to assist with crop management, site suitability, and drainage planning, as well as risk prevention from flood, drought, erosion, and disease. GIS can help a farmer adapt to these different variables, monitor the health of individual crops, estimate yields from a given field, and maximize crop production. There are many sources for GIS data free of charge and also for a fee. Universities, government agencies, and private companies are all repositories of spatial data. The New York State government hosts a GIS clearinghouse with a great variety of datasets, some available to the public and some to clearinghouse members only. Some of these data include addresses, watersheds, aerial photography, municipal boundaries, district boundaries, tax map parcels, and road networks.

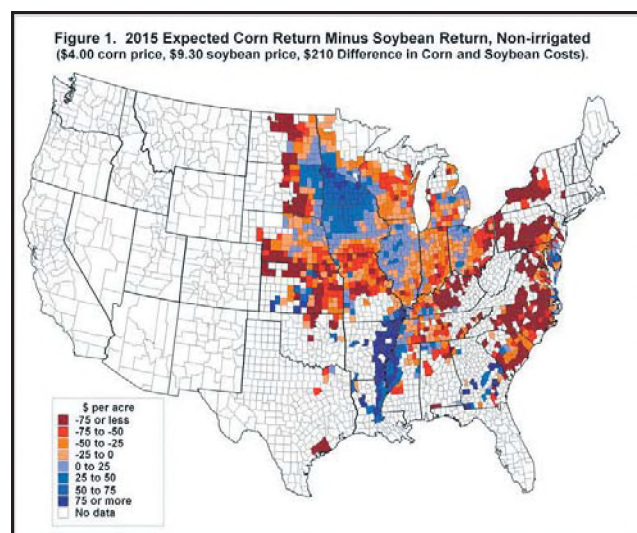
Another GIS-based resource available for free to the public is the USDA's CropScape, an interactive web-based mapping application which shows the type, quantity, and location of crops growing across the country. By using land-use and primary food crop statistics, along with data collected by satellites and mobile devices to identify areas in need and underlying causes of food insecurity, GIS is also instrumen-

tal in the efforts to end global hunger.

Satellites, drones, and manned aircraft are used for remote sensing, which is the gathering of information about the earth's surface by scanning it from high altitudes. The Landsat 8, a joint effort of the USGS and NASA, is an observation satellite which orbits the earth every 16 days. It captures 9 bands of the visible light spectrum which can be used to calculate factors like plant disease, nutrient deficiencies, insect infestation, or crop moisture excess and shortage. It also captures thermal infrared radiation (TIR) which is outside the range of human vision. Depending on the surface temperature, the intensity of the wavelengths emitted by different types of vegetation and various manmade and natural landscapes differs. The recorded data is converted to visible digital imagery and can be applied to general objectives like managing water for irrigation consumption or plant disease detection.

It can also be applied to very specific objectives like evaluating the maturity of fruits. The aerial and TIR imagery

**See GIS** *page 9*



**Using GIS data to measure crop yield financials** (University of Illinois, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics; [http://farmdoc.illinois.edu/manage/newsletters/fefo15\\_06/fefo\\_15\\_06.htm](http://farmdoc.illinois.edu/manage/newsletters/fefo15_06/fefo_15_06.htm))

**RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT****Book Review: The Greenhouse & Hoophouse Grower's Handbook**

by Andrew Mefferd

by Sharon Tregaskis

**By the Book: New Reference Promotes High Tunnel Yields and Profits**

For organic growers facing an increasingly uncertain climate — ecologically and economically — Andrew Mefferd offers a 245-page compendium on the best practices for managing eight high-profit crops in *The Greenhouse and Hoophouse Grower's Handbook: Organic Vegetable Production Using Protected Culture*.

Published in February by Chelsea Green, the Handbook boasts full-color photographs of recommended practices (and those to avoid), plus appendices on hydroponics, pests and diseases, and tools and supplies, as well as an extensive index and a bibliography of additional resources. If only the encyclopedic reference were laminated, to prevent the inevitable potting soil and water stains it's sure to acquire with regular use.

Mefferd devotes the first half of his effort to five chapters covering the basics of protected culture — the history of indoor growing, the contemporary rationale for the practice, and such details as structure types, siting, and management of both plants and economic considerations. While much of the material in this section will be familiar to growers with a few years of indoor management under their belts, the sec-

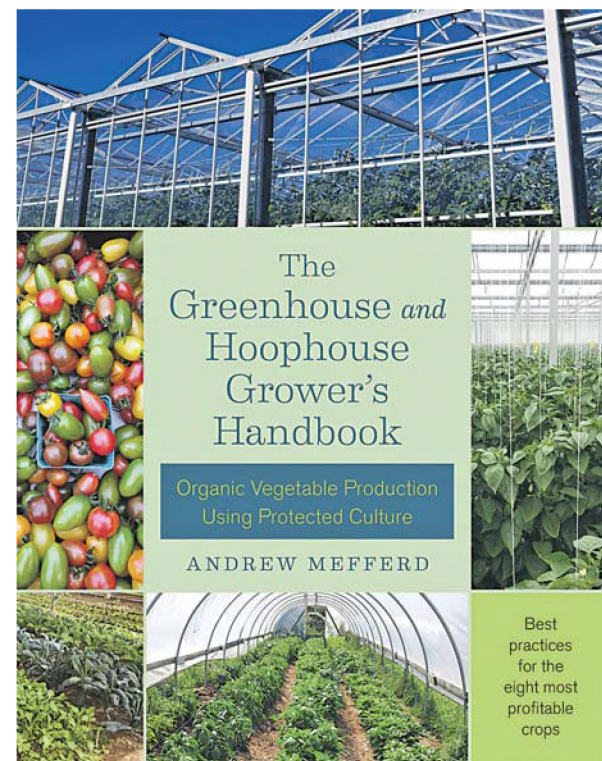
tion should be required reading for commercial growers weighing whether to diversify their efforts by growing under glass or plastic, as well as aspiring farmers still refining their business plans.

The second half of the book tackles crop-specific practices associated with the eight high-profit crops teased on the cover. (Spoiler alert: Mefferd tackles tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant, and "leafy crops," a category that spans lettuce, herbs, and microgreens.) In addition to such issues as optimal spacing, trellising options, and crop-specific techniques for managing the diseases and pests most likely to plague indoor cultivation, the author also tackles such intermediate skills as grafting and tactics for promoting either vegetative or generative growth.

Mefferd knows of what he speaks. He apprenticed on farms in Pennsylvania, California, Washington, Virginia, New York, and Maine, and worked for seven years in the Johnny's Selected Seeds research department, traveling around the world to consult with researchers and farmers on best practices. He field-tested his observations on his own farm in Maine, and serves as editor and publisher of *Growing for Market*. "One thing I've discovered," he writes, "is that the principles of protected growing are the same whether your house covers 100 square feet or 100 acres."



**Example of data collection technology in Precision Ag** (<http://www.cema-agri.org>)



GIS from page 8

captured by remote sensing are widely used layers in a GIS, and the data collected by the Landsat 8 is made available to the public for free. Higher resolution imagery is collected by low altitude aircraft which make flights over longer cycles ranging between 3 and 10 years. The Farm Service Agency, a department of the USDA, conducts a few such programs. One of the greatest benefits of remote sensing is that it is non-invasive and does not negatively impact the area which is being observed.

With the rapid developments in GPS, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and robotics technologies, many farm tasks are becoming computerized. GIS is an integral part of automated field operations, also referred to as precision agriculture or satellite farming. Using data collected from remote sensors, and also from sensors mounted directly on farm machinery, farmers have improved decision-making capabilities for planning their cultivation to maximize yields. Previous crop yields, terrain specifics, organic mat-

ter content, pH, moisture, and nutrient levels of the soil all aid in proper preparation for precise farming. Combine harvesters equipped with GPS tracking units can measure crop yields along with crop quality values like plant water content and chlorophyll levels in real time and at the exact location in the field from which they are harvested.

Variable rate technology (VRT) is the component of precision agriculture, which really enables the data to be put directly to use. It joins farm

machinery, control systems, and application equipment to apply precise amounts of growing inputs at exact times or locations. Precision farming with VRT has both economic and environmental advantages. Applying seed, fertilizer, nutrients, or pesticides only where and when they are needed can have a substantial cost savings for the farmer and boost revenues. Additionally, negative environmental impacts from over application of some chemicals are alleviated, and the use of certain chemicals could potentially be eliminated entirely based on data analysis. Persistent dilemmas like nitrogen application can also be addressed, helping the farmer find the right amount between excessive and insufficient. Once a system is in place, a precision agriculture operation follows a closed loop cycle that would look something like: collect/analyze data, plan the harvest, apply the plan, and analyze the results for the following season.

GIS has thousands of applications. It is an ever-growing field, which is already heavily integrated into many sectors of the government at all levels, as well as many types of private businesses. It continues to make innovations which benefit our everyday lives.

Kyle Dornich joined NYCAMH/NEC in December 2017 as a Research Assistant. He will initially be working on two research teams, the Maine Logging Workers Health & Safety Study; and the Agricultural, Forestry & Fishing Traumatic Injury Surveillance Project.

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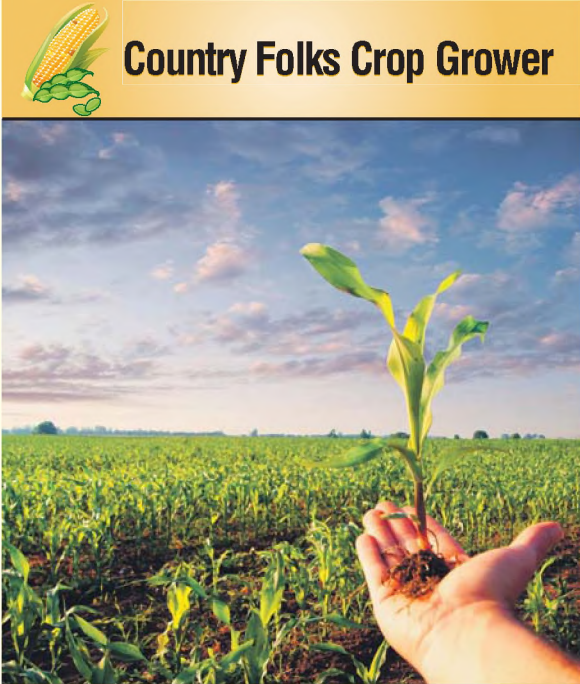


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**SOIL HEALTH****Efficient Use of Cover Crops at the Food Farm***A cool climate organic vegetable farm melds cash crops and cover crops in novel ways.*

by Brian Caldwell and Ryan Maher

Janaki Fisher-Merritt grew up on a pioneering organic vegetable farm. Janaki's parents, John and Jane Fisher-Merritt, started The Food Farm in northern Minnesota in 1975. They moved to their current location in 1988, became certified organic in 1990, and started the first CSA in the Duluth area in 1994. The size of the operation hovered around 6 acres until Janaki actively joined in management in the mid-2000's. Janaki and his wife, Ann Dugan, bought the farm from his parents in 2010. The farm now produces about 13 acres of vegetables, with roughly the same amount of land in cover crops. Farming partner Dave Hanlon manages their two greenhouses and five hoophouses plus transplant production, and they hire three interns each season. About 2/3 of the produce goes to summer and winter CSA shares. The rest is sold to local co-ops and restaurants. The Food Farm also produces chickens, turkeys, and eggs.

The farm's fields are flat. Early on there were some drainage issues, but a series of ditches solved that problem fairly well. However, fields still tend to be somewhat wet in the spring. The main obstacle to successful vegetable production is the short, cool season. The hoophouses and greenhouses help with that, and their excellent winter storage root cellar lengthens the marketing period. Outdoor crops are chosen based on their adaptation to the cool climate and short season. In fact, Janaki is saving seeds from plants that do particularly well in an effort to select them even further.

Crops are managed by the field rather than individual beds. However, since the fields are fairly small (less than 100 feet wide and 300 feet long), tractor wheel traffic is somewhat controlled. Janaki's primary tillage tools are a 7-foot tractor-mounted Falc rototiller and Falc Toro spader. These cover the tractor's width, and allow for passes about 72 inches on center to create planting beds. He uses a 10-foot Lely Roterra power harrow, which can run at a shallow depth of 3-4 inches, for some tillage operations like cover crop incorporation. Two tinweeders, 6 feet and 20 feet, are used for stale bedding (killing small weeds in a seedbed just before planting), cultivating, and working in broadcast small cover crop seed. He also uses up to four Yeomans Keyline shanks to subsoil his fields, and a 7-foot wide flail mower to handle cover crops. Field irrigation is accomplished with traveling guns.

Janaki is committed to good soil husbandry. After college, when he was working into farm ownership, he felt the farm needed to make cover cropping more of a priority. His parents gave Janaki wide latitude to improve farm methods, and he made time to experiment with ways of using more cover crops to improve the soil. Those efforts were very fruitful, and resulted in several novel practices now used at the Food Farm. Growing cover crops for green mulch, or "cut and carry" mulching, efficient interseeding, growing cover crops in hoophouses, using mustard as a biofumigant, and more came out of that period. We focus on a few of these practices here.

*Reduced tillage practices take many forms. This story is the 6th in a series featuring organic vegetable growers that have adopted reduced tillage practices on the way to greater farm sustainability. Experienced growers at diverse scales are tackling weeds, managing rotations, and integrating cover crops while minimizing soil disturbance. Look for past and future SFQ issues to learn the practices that are helping these growers build better soils. Visit <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/projects/reduced-tillage/> or contact Ryan Maher of the Cornell SFP for more information on this project, [ryan.maher@cornell.edu](mailto:ryan.maher@cornell.edu)*

**Chopping rye and vetch cover crop into a self-unloading wagon.****Cover cropping for succession plantings**

A CSA farm grows a wide variety of crops, often with multiple planting dates. Thus, the rotation is often flexible, and a given crop may be grown several different ways, depending on the part of the season during which it is planted. Broccoli is an important crop at the Food Farm. It does well in the cool conditions, and succession plantings are made from early spring through July. Janaki's varied cover crop practices for this crop illustrate the care he takes of his soil.

Early broccoli often follows a winter-killed cover crop, such as buckwheat and crimson clover. This is tilled in with the spader and given a heavy dressing of compost. After 2-3 weeks, a tinweeder pass kills small weeds. Then Janaki uses a water wheel transplanter to set the broccoli transplants, two rows per bed, 6 feet on center. Thirty-foot-wide row covers, which are removed and replaced for cultivation, are placed over all early brassica plantings until July. After harvest, early broccoli plantings are tilled under and cover crops are planted.

Later plantings often follow the termination of yellow sweet clover/hairy vetch cover crops. The covers are flail mowed, then rototilled in after a light application of compost. Yellow sweet clover may host cutworms, so two to three weeks is allowed before tinweeding and transplanting. After the main head harvest, winter rye is broadcast over the crop. It is incorporated with a

hand hoeing, which follows right away. Harvest of side shoots may continue late into the season as the cover crop grows, particularly from varieties such as Bellstar, Imperial, and Arcadia.

The last plantings, grown without row cover, receive a tinweeding two to three weeks after tillage, then are transplanted. When the broccoli plants are 6-8 inches

tall, Janaki broadcasts rye and runs the tinweeder over them again to kill weeds and incorporate the cover crop seed. After harvest, the rye continues growing.

Cover crops thus grow after all broccoli plantings, even though harvest may extend late into fall. This coincides with Janaki's goal of having green plants covering as much land as possible over winter and spring, soaking up valuable nutrients and protecting the soil.

**Cut and carry mulching**

Janaki uses cover crop fallow periods to take land out of production and build his soils. Some of these cover crops are utilized during following season in a unique cut and carry program. After they've put on significant growth in spring, wheat and vetch or rye cover crops are chopped with an old dairy forage chopper and blown directly into a self-unloading wagon. The moist "green-chop" is then unloaded from the side of the wagon alongside tomato plantings, or directly into hoophouses through their open ventilation sides.

The green mulch is then spread with forks around the crops. Janaki has not had problems with off-gassing from the fresh residues, which other farmers have found to sometimes damage tender crop plants. The timing works well for both hoophouse and field tomatoes, since the cover crops are ready to chop from May through June.

Positive aspects of the cut-and-carry system include:

- the weed-suppressing and moisture-holding values of organic mulch;
- production of mulch on the farm;
- making good use of heavy cover crop residue which can sometimes be difficult to handle if left in place;
- use of green material that is much more pleasant to work with than pokey or moldy dry straw;
- not having to store mulch hay;
- avoidance of plastic mulch;
- the ability to grow a between-row cover

**Delivering green mulch through hoophouse sides.**



crop during the cash crop season;

- flexibility to use the mulch on several different crops;
- possibly the biggest benefit, though, is soil improvement. Janaki says he can see a positive difference where tomatoes have been grown after only two years.

Disadvantages include

- the need to own or have access to a chopper and forage wagon;
- hand labor to spread the mulch;
- the need to control weeds while waiting for the soil to warm up before applying organic mulch.

**Mulched tomatoes with cover-cropped aisles.**

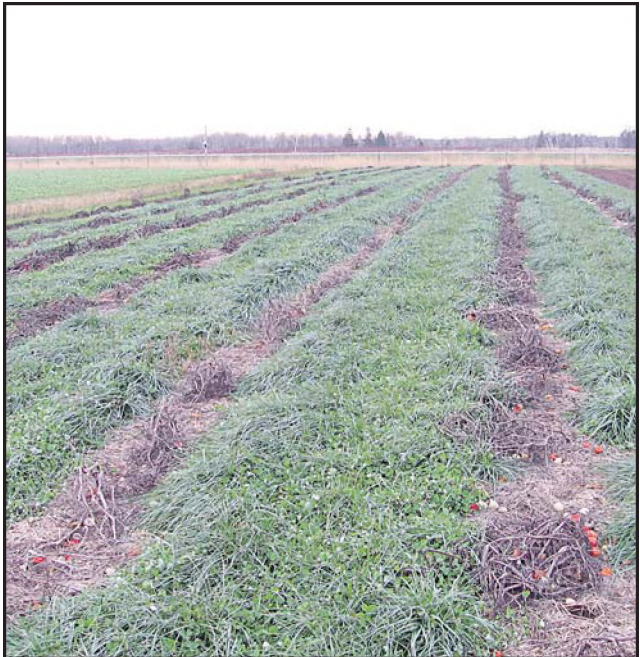
Janaki's field tomato transplants are large, grown in 4" pots to get off to a fast start. Field prep includes tilling and tineweeding twice. Just before the second tineweeding, Janaki broadcasts perennial ryegrass and Dutch white clover. In fact, if he is going into a field of winter rye that was planted late in the previous fall, he will skip tillage altogether and simply broadcast these covers directly into the somewhat sparse rye. The tineweeder goes over everything, and a ryegrass/clover + rye cover crop is established without spring tillage. Then he subsoils down the rows with a Keyline plow; after adding a heavy dose of compost in the slot, he rototills with a hand tiller, and transplants are put in by hand. Thus the tomatoes and ryegrass/clover pathways are established, but the soil is bare next to the tomatoes.

The plants are hand-hoed one or two times, and then mulched with green cut-and-carry material in mid to late June. Mulching waits until the soil has warmed and the tomatoes will soon be trellised. The green mulch is unloaded along the edge of the field, and then distributed by hand into a 6-inch high layer around the plants. This happens in a roughly 2-foot-wide swath down the crop row, but the 4 feet of ryegrass and clover between the rows continues to grow. Note that by planting the ryegrass/clover cover crop first and then mulching, the problem of a strip of weeds next to the mulch is eliminated. This weed strip often bedevils growers who mulch first, then seed their pathway cover crop. But in Janaki's case, the ryegrass and clover grow right up to the mulch. As the season progresses, the grass/clover pathways are mowed 3-4 times. No other weeding or fertilizing is done. After harvest, the ryegrass and white clover strips are left in place and sometimes used again the following season, with a different crop in between.

Janaki notes that paying attention and observing are critical to success on any farm. Take the time to experiment. What works for one farmer may not work for another. There are always tradeoffs—for instance, the tight management required for some of these cover crop practices may save farm crew labor and be best in the long run, but may require extra effort by Janaki during peak periods.

Constant but targeted experimentation is important to the success of the Food Farm. "Experiments are inherently inefficient. Carve out enough time to really pay attention to it. Write things down. Really observe and evaluate. One year of success or failure is not enough." He warns beginning farmers not to go whole hog into an experimental approach. Experiment on a small part of a field: observe, tweak, repeat. "Do mostly what other successful farmers in your area are doing. Experiment on the side, not with your whole farm."

*Brian Caldwell and Ryan Maher research reduced tillage for organic vegetable systems at Cornell University.*



**The soil is protected after tomato harvest.**

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**FOREST AND WOODLOT****Maintaining a Healthy Sugarbush**

by Peter Smallidge

A sugarbush is a special type of woodland. Woodlands include a complex mixture of natural processes and attributes such as soil type, elevation, tree species, types of wildlife, history of use, tree age and more. Foresters can help maple producers gain an in-depth understanding of these factors to achieve a healthy and productive sugarbush, but there are several steps a maple producer can take on their own.

Three principles should guide the way a maple producer looks at a sugarbush. These principles apply to all woodlands. First, managing the sugarbush to produce a specific product (in this case sap) is really about managing which plants receive sunlight. Sunlight feeds the leaves that make sugar, which of course is needed for high quality sap. Second, trees are biological organisms, similar in some respects to a tomato plant, a cow, or a human being. Biological organisms are born, grow and eventually senesce. They also respond to stressors in their environment, and their vigor determines how well they respond. Third, as trees get larger they require more space. Because trees cannot move as they become crowded, some trees will die as the sugarbush matures.

With these principles in mind, a reasonable goal for a sugarbush is to make sure that trees of good vigor and potential longevity have adequate sunlight, stress events are minimized, and the effects of crowding are controlled by the owner who selects which trees will remain. Following are a few actions that maple producers can take to help keep their sugarbush healthy and productive.

1. Monitor crown health. The leafy part of the tree, the crown, is perhaps the most important part of the tree to monitor. Be alert to evidence of unhealthy crowns. Symptoms of poor crown health may include dead branches in the upper part of the crown, poor leaf color during the growing season, unusually small leaves, or a transparent crown. There will always be a couple trees in a sugarbush with poor crown health, but if several trees show these symptoms it is a sign that a

problem exists. A symptom tells you a problem exists, but it doesn't usually identify the problem. Crown health may decline as a result of root problems, such as compaction from machinery.

Repeated injury to the crown can also reduce health because of reductions of energy reserves in the roots, as occurs when defoliation coincides with drought. Crown problems often result in less sugar production and lower yields the following sap season. In extreme cases, minimize or avoid tapping to allow trees to recover a healthy crown. Unfortunately, the causes of unhealthy crowns often can be difficult to change. Some of the following actions also help maintain good crown health.

2. Assess competition for light among trees. Trees need light to grow. Although sugar maple is tolerant of shade, it does not thrive in these conditions. Maple producers need their trees to thrive, not just survive. The appropriate stocking, that is the number of trees of a given size per acre, is a numeric index of competition for resources, specifically light. There are also visual indications of too much competition for light. First, if the upper canopy, collectively the crowns of the tall trees, is closed and does not allow sunlight through, then there may be too much competition for light. If the canopy is closed, and some trees have rounded crowns while other crowns are flattened on two or more sides, there is likely too much competition.

If the maple trees produce seeds, but there are no seedlings, there is either too much shade or too many deer. Before taking action, visual cues to competition should be assessed by a forester who will measure stocking. In many cases the state forestry agency can provide a public forester to do the assessment. These foresters are pre-paid, i.e. your tax dollars at work. If competition is high, thinning around the best trees will ensure they have enough light to continue to thrive. Look for resources on Crop Tree Management to guide the selection of trees to cut and those to leave. Woodlot and sugarbush thinning webinars are archived at [www.youtube.com/ForestConnect](http://www.youtube.com/ForestConnect).

3. Look for interfering plants. Interfering plants are either native or non-native (or "invasive"), and interfere with something the owner wants to accomplish. Examples of interfering plants include multiflora rose, ferns, beech, striped maple, bush honeysuckle, and many more. For maple producers, interfering plants may complicate access for tubing or buckets. Interfering plants may also impede efforts to establish young desirable maple seedlings. In some areas, deer pressure is high and they browse desired plants. This browsing gives a growth advantage to the interfering plants that deer do not browse. Strategies and techniques to control interfering plants depends on the problem plant, its abundance, how thoroughly the maple producer wants to control the plant, and the producer's use of herbicides or organic strategies. The author's website includes numerous resources to help control interfering plants.

4. Monitor tree diameter growth. Tree diameter growth is critical to maple syrup producers. Diameter growth is an index of crown health. Diameter growth also helps to heal tap holes, adds new wood for future tapping, and acts as a reservoir for sap. A tree may produce the same amount of wood each year, but the thickness, known as the diameter increment, will decrease because the wood is spread around a bigger tree. Tapping guidelines assume tree growth is sufficient to add new wood and prevent future tapping into columns of stain from prior tapping. "Pattern tapping" helps prevent tapping into a stain column, and so does adequate diameter growth.

Producers should expect annual diameter increments of 1/8th to 1/10th of an inch for trees less than 16 inches, 1/10th to 1/12th of an inch per year for trees 16 to 20 inches, and 1/12th to 1/16" of an inch for larger trees. The actual growth necessary to provide a sufficient thickness of new wood depends on the depth of tapping and the offset of the tapping pattern between years. "Band tapping" high versus low bands of the tree will reduce the expectation for diameter growth (but why would you strive for slower growing trees?).

Annual measurements at the same position on the stem with a tape measure will reveal tree growth. Producers can place an aluminum nail in the tree at 12" high, and use a 3.5-foot stick to locate consistent height to annually measure diameter at breast height (dbh). Measure a minimum of 30 to 40 trees, and at least one per acre. Just as producers should measure sugar concentration, so they need to measure tree diameter growth.

5. Consider tree age and longevity. Sugar maple can be a long-lived tree, with some trees reaching 300 to 400 years of age under ideal conditions. Under normal conditions, maple will likely have reduced production between 150 and 250 years of age. Maple producers could assess if there are patches of old or otherwise unproductive maples and regenerate a couple small patches every few years. Cutting within patches needs to be sufficiently intense to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. Patches could be 0.25 to 0.75 acres, and vigorous trees within the patch could be retained. Young seedlings should be protected from deer by fencing or dense continuous



**Ferns and beech are native species, but can form dense thickets that complicate production for maple producers. The canopy may be vigorous and healthy maple, but the understory portends future problems.**

piles of brush around the perimeter. A forester can help assign vigor-ratings to trees, and producers can monitor sap production for individual trees. The location and timing of patch cuts should synchronize with planned changes of tubing and mainline.

6. Livestock. Historically, many farm woodlots and sugarbushes have allowed cattle and other livestock to free range. In these cases, grazing involved a perimeter fence and then free choice of consumption by the livestock. This continuous or set-stock grazing proved detrimental to the animals, the trees, and the land where the stocking rate (same concept as for trees, see #2) was too high. Sustainable grazing is possible, but requires considerable work. Silvopasture is a deliberate process of integrating livestock into woodlands while also managing for nutritious forage plants. Management-intensive rotational grazing in small paddocks with herd/flock movement daily ensures ample rest periods for the land and intensive, restorative grazing of the forages. With careful planning, silvopasture practices can solve some interfering plant problems. Any plans for deliberate grazing should assure that root damage is avoided; pigs in particular can cause root damage through their tendency to "root." The author's website has several references and resources for silvopasture.

7. Avoid soil ruts and compaction. While tree crowns are perhaps the most important part of the tree for producers, tree roots tie for first place or are at least a very close second. The roots anchor the tree to the ground, pull water from the ground into the stem for sap, and feed the foliage. Damage to roots by tractors, skidders, or livestock can cause irreparable damage. It is easier to prevent than to fix a problem. Producers with buckets need to access the sugarbush, but they should limit the number of trails. In



**The tree in the center of the picture is shorter than the tree to the left, and has a smaller crown. The tree on the left is winning in the contest for light, but the shorter tree is still having a negative impact.**

**LESSONS FROM THE LAND****The Cycles of Life**

by Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming

*The Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming and the Cornell Small Farms Program are teaming up to create a new column called Lessons from the Land, which captures and shares the stories of and lessons learned from farmers, homesteaders and land workers around New York and the Northeast. We want to hear stories from growers of all types and sizes, on real topics, that matter!*

*Each issue has a theme, and upcoming themes and deadlines can be found at <http://groundswellcenter.org/lessons-from-the-land/>.*

*Submissions of 400 – 800 words are requested, and can be submitted at the website above.*

**Upcoming Topics & Deadlines:**

*Stocking Up – June 9 (Summer 2017 Issue)*  
*Diversity – August 11 (Fall 2017 Issue)*

**The Lifecycle of a Managed Forest**

During the winter of 2014-15, timber was harvested from the forested portion of our property, for sale to a commercial lumber company. There has been a forest stewardship plan in place on the property since 1994, recorded with the State of Connecticut and updated several times since the initial plan was written. A stewardship plan is a management document developed by a certified state forester, constructed around the goals of the forest owners. So I knew it was appropriate to harvest mature trees. I also understood that the timber sale would not only provide money for reinvestment in the farm, but that careful logging would help us

to achieve other goals of our forest management plan, like improving wildlife habitat and our system of trails.

In spite of this knowledge, it was hard for me to stomach the thought of cutting down those beautiful, stately trees. This forest had been a playground for many of my childhood adventures and explorations. I now own this small, New England hill farm and its woods as the third generation of my family to steward this property. Through the stories, memories, and photos shared by my dad, I know a history of the property that is longer than my own years. I know that the 18 acres of pines had not always been there, but had been planted in the mid 1930's by my grandfather and his two boys, my father and my uncle. What had once been a worn, upland pasture was now a forest; a legacy left by my forbearers.

My father passed away at age 93, in November of 2014. The timber had already been sold, and the loggers were only waiting for the ground to freeze to commence their work. As I grieved, I braced myself for what was to come. The aftermath of logging, even when it is well done, can look horrific to an untrained eye. I remember listening to a professor from the Yale School of Forestry on a field day several years prior. As we looked out at an area that had been recently logged, the professor commented that while some people would see this area as a mess, he saw a young, healthy, vibrant forest. It was a forest in its infant stages, and to him it was lovely. I tried to keep his words in mind as the winter and the logging progressed, but I cried when I saw the first load

**See Lessons page 14**

**Sugarbush from page 12**

chronically damp or soggy areas, install corduroy with a continuous mat of small logs and poles to float the tractor. Use as small a machine as possible that is safe and effective, and add high floatation tires if practical. Other types of

woods work should allow equipment only during seasons when the ground is firm: usually summer, dry falls, and during cold winters. Repairing ruts with fill or corduroy may help avoid the need for a new trail and more damage in a new area, but this will not repair the damage to the roots.

8. Mixtures of species. Your sugarbush will generally be healthier and more resistant to stresses such as insect defoliation if there is a mixture of species. When thinning a sugarbush to provide more light to desired trees, avoid the temptation of a monoculture. Providing adequate sunlight to keep a thrifty maple healthy may be best accomplished by cutting another maple... there, I said it, it is okay to cut a maple. Seriously though, most producers can look at a maple with a small crown,

weak fork, or old scars from maple borers or tractors and know that the tree is not productive or is otherwise risky. Bucket producers have the advantage of truly knowing a tree's productive capacity. Paint or mark a tree of low productivity during the season, and cut that tree later in the year when time permits. When cutting firewood or thinning, set a target for the main canopy to be about 75% sugar maple or red maple and 25% other species. These aren't hard numbers, but use them as a guideline.

Time is of course the biggest obstacle to maple producers working in their sugarbush. Start with the easy tasks, and keep a list of priorities. Use this list to guide a discussion with a forester from your state forestry agency or your consulting forester. Let them know your goal is a productive and healthy sugarbush. A forester can help you develop a plan and a schedule to optimize the use of your time. Finally, be safe in the woods; there are too many stories of maple producers hit by trees and crushed by tractors.

Acknowledgements – Joe Orefice and Steve Childs provided helpful reviews of this article. This article was adapted from an article by the author that was published in the Maple Syrup Digest October 2016.

*Peter Smallidge is the NYS Extension Forester and Director, and works in the Arnot Teaching and Research Forest as well as at the Department of Natural Resources and the Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY 14853.*

*Support for ForestConnect is provided by the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and USDA NIFA.*

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Disease and damage can cause weak stems that are prone to failure. Trees like the one pictured should be removed to avoid complications during the season and free growing space for nearby maple trees.

**Lessons** from page 13

of logs stacked and waiting to be loaded onto the logging truck. The end of these trees seemed symbolic of my dad's passing, particularly since the events coincided so closely, and my grief doubled.

Eventually spring came, and once again I took to the trails. While I felt the absence of those large old trees, I now saw the beauty of the smaller trees that were left behind. No longer overshadowed, these trees seemed to be basking in sunlight. I hadn't realized how dark the forest had become when dominated by those large, mature trees. I felt as if the saplings were rejoicing in the new openness, air, and light of the forest, and I rejoiced as well. Life was visible everywhere, including many kinds of birds, wild flowers and wild berries. The rebirth of a forest is indeed a lovely and miraculous thing to behold.

**Ann Wilhelm**  
**Wilhelm Farm**  
**North Granby, Connecticut**

Today I got a phone call from a man who told me that he was going to die soon. It wasn't exactly consistent with the scope and tone of inquiries we receive here at the CCE office, but then again, it kind of is. We get so many different calls here that I am no longer surprised by the questions and comments we receive over the phone and by email. My new motto in my office is "we got you covered," and I feel that this is true of all of the departments here in the Ulster County Extension office. From "how many calories are in a Big Mac," to "my dog was attacked by a raccoon last night," we get all kinds of inquiries here, and are happy to do our best to point each of our clients in the right direction. So when I got this phone call, I was not particularly surprised since this individual had come across an article that I had written about the process of composting human remains.

Most people do not realize the intimate connection that farmers have with death and dying. Breeding many generations on the farm, and living in and with nature, provides both a frame and magnifier into the mysteries and processes of death. Farmers and ranchers understand that death is part of life, and deserves the same reverence and respect as the beginning of life. This man on the phone had a preference that most of us can understand... he wished to be buried on his family farm.

I was more than happy to guide him to the appropriate channels and safeguards to ensure that what he was doing was both legal and safe. To most farmers, a human body is relatively easy to compost simply because we are much smaller compared to some of our livestock. And since nothing on the farm is wasted, most ranchers compost their animals and use the nutrient rich fertilizer that is produced to enrich their pastures or gardens.

Besides farmers, the other major composter in the area is the highway department. With the overpopulation of both deer and cars on our roadways there are many wildlife fatalities every day. The highway department soon realized that piling up the roadkill would be offensive to both the nose and eyes and would attract unwanted attention from wild animals. They realized that their best option was to compost the remains of the roadkill, which would safely dispose of the animals, would not attract wild animals to the area, and would make a value-added product out of what was previously considered waste. The only caveat is that the composting needs to be carefully controlled and monitored. There is an art to composting. When done right it is beneficial to everyone, but when done wrong, or neglected, there is a real opportunity loss.

The man who called was already aware of the issues and intricacies of composting, and I think that he was seeking more than just technical assistance in that he was looking for some kind words and support in his endeavor. I let him know that I would do all that I could to ensure that he was in compliance and that he could spend his eternity in the most comfortable place he had ever known... home.

It is not often that I get calls about death, but it helps me to know that death and farming are sisters, and it is in the ac-



knowledge of their intimate relationship that we are able to our better understand our place and our farm in nature.

**Jason Detzel**  
**Livestock Educator**  
**Cornell Cooperative Extension Ulster County**

**Raising Beef Cattle**

"What is growing in this pasture?" asked the Cornell 'expert' as she walked Twin Brook Camillus Farm with us. Besides thistles, we didn't know the names of all the other weeds that appeared on our land, after 30 years of commercial farming. We wanted to make the land environmentally productive and the soil biologically organic by raising beef cattle to market directly to customers.

Thankfully, not all the fields were in as bad a shape as the one we walked, but nothing was sustainable. We started in 2011 with minimum fencing, two feeder calves, and a pre-owned John Deere tractor with a loader and forks. Having just retired, my husband said, "I'm doing this the easy way!"

The 'farmer' (my husband) bought a post-hole pounder, for we knew that we needed two to three years to complete the fence around the farm, and thankfully, the 'farmer' is a handyman.

Intent on raising grass-finished beef, we bought two more feeder calves the following year so that we could begin our beef enterprise by selling two grown beef cattle in 2013.

While grain-fed beef grow to full weight in a year and a half, most grass-fed beef takes two years to get to maturity. The benefits of all grass to a ruminant animal is found in the fats becoming 'good' fats, high in Omega-3 and conjugated linoleic acid, a type of fat that's thought to reduce heart disease and cancer risks. We did not want to compromise the health benefits.

When we realized that our profit would be short the \$10,000 gross needed for an agricultural assessment that first year, we raised up pastured broilers that got us to the mark. That, and we flipped a couple of cattle at the auction.

Each year we built more fencing and bought more feeder calves, until we were selling 4, then 6, then 8, then 9 (because one broke its leg and froze overnight), then 10, which meant we were raising 8, then 12, then 16, then 18, until we reached 20, the maximum for our 47-acre farm.

All that time, we were building 3-walled mobile sheds for protection for the cattle from the cold and wind, which they seldom use but which was important for our Upstate NY weather. By dragging the sheds in the Spring to new areas, we use the tractor to scoop up the manure into a pile for composting (good garden soil!).

Many people think that grass-fed animals are just let loose in a big open field until they are butchered. We learned about rotational grazing, so we use temporary fencing to move cattle every two to three days through small paddocks of grass within that larger pasture. We learned that cattle ought to be moved out of a pasture when they've eaten down to the last 3 to 4 inches of grass. The remaining grass with its leaves creates new growth through photosynthesis, thus making it possible to rotate the cattle back into that same paddock in two to three weeks. This is what makes small farms sustainable, all while protecting the environment from overuse.

At first, we struggled with hay supply for the animals, so we bought a baler, but now we only bale a little of our own grass and we buy in most of the hay. We should probably sell the baler, but we get free hay from a neighbor if we cut and bale it.

We eat our own beef. We read. We learned that Europeans will never eat an animal that is less than 2 years old, for they claim that older animals have better flavor. While we thought the flavor of our beef was good, we wanted to improve it. We attended pasture walks, conferences, and seminars, continuing to learn. Anything worthwhile takes patience, experimentation, and endurance.

About two years ago, the 'farmer' learned how to marble our meat with outstanding flavor. At the end of summer, he separates out the cattle intended for harvesting, then grazes them through 3-4 rotations over a period of 4-6 weeks in a paddock of brassica and millet greens, annuals that are high in carbohydrates.

Oh my! I never want any other beef! And our customers agree. We're thankful now for sustainable customers. Our patience and learning paid off, and those thistles are gone!

**Elaine J. Kennedy**  
**Twin Brook Camillus Farm, LLC**  
**Camillus, NY**

See Lessons page 15



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**LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY****Meat Processing Workshops a Cut Above***Cooperative Ext., SUNY announce spring class schedule*

by R.J. Anderson

When Samantha Schriber-Vanstrom decided to drive nearly five hours from her western New York home to attend the Harvest New York poultry-cutting workshop at SUNY Cobleskill, she did so looking to maximize her small farm's profits.

"I wanted to learn about how other people operate and ways to process my birds for better cuts," said Schriber-Vanstrom. "I'd been quartering some birds for a couple years, but was curious about other ways to attract more customers through other types of cuts. I found that, and more, at the workshop. It was well worth the drive."

Schriber-Vanstrom was one of 12 attendees at the October 12 session, part of a series of meat processing and marketing classes co-organized by SUNY Cobleskill and Cornell Cooperative Extension's (CCE) Harvest New York economic development and sus-

tainability program. Held at the SUNY Cobleskill Meat Laboratory, the one-day workshop was led by Meat Lab Manager Betsy Jensen, Harvest New York Livestock Processing & Marketing Specialist MacKenzie Waro, and Culinary Arts Instructor Mike Lapi, who led a hands-on butchering session.

Participants spent time learning the regulations for poultry slaughter, processing, and marketing, then visited the meat lab where they observed Lapi butchering a bird, after which they processed one themselves.

"This was the third class in the series, and it was a big success," said Waro. "We have been very excited about the success of these workshops. Participants ask great questions, and walk away with new knowledge about meat cuts, marketing and processing."

Based on the positive feedback following

last year's meat cutting workshops, Waro said Harvest New York and SUNY Cobleskill are beefing up their 2017 schedule. "Participants have been asking for additional workshops on cooking meat, and we will be adding that into our 2.0 meat workshops for the spring," she said. "Workshop participants gain skills that they can bring back to their business and apply towards the future of their farms."

At Schriber-Vanstrom's farm in Kennedy, New York, which she operates with her husband, Eric, and his father, they milk 85 dairy cows while raising goats, sheep, pigs and Red Cornish chickens. The grass-fed meat is sold directly from the farm and at area farmers' markets.

For Schriber-Vanstrom, the highlight of the poultry session came during the processing



**Farmer Samantha Schriber-Vanstrom processes a chicken at the Harvest New York poultry cutting workshop held October 12 at SUNY Cobleskill.**

**See Meat** *page 16*

**Lessons** *from page 14*

It has only been within the last 4 years that farming seemed as though it would be a viable solution to make an honest living. Since 2009, when my wife and I kept our first garden, there has been some intriguing force that continues to set me on this path, but it was never my intention to be a farmer.

Most of my childhood was spent outdoors wandering in the woods looking for something, but some of the most enjoyable memories that I can recall are of driving through the mid-west, nearly hypnotized by the large fields of corn and soy passing beside our vehicle. Some years later, I now stand in my own field, observing cover crops and dancing bees, planning future systems on our farm, and wondering if my children will view the land in the same way, if not better.

Being a steward of the land was something that just seemed right. After three deployments with the Marines, it seemed reasonable to find time to place my hands into the soil and

sow seeds, all the while wondering how a small piece of matter could become a plant capable of feeding many. I found myself investing more time in the garden, viewing other plots, interested in other people's methods. This childlike wonder still exists, but its sole purpose was to lead me to understand food systems, our relationship to them, and how we can utilize farm practices to sustain our future generations.

I am a farmer, a designer, and a builder. I am engaged with my community and provide opportunities for them to view the landscape through an ecological lens. I assist veterans' transition into agriculture, and help them to navigate resources and programs that are beneficial to any farmer. But I am a father and husband first, and think of ways to provide nourishing food for my family, while also raising them to understand where their food is derived from and how our influence will either create resilient or detrimental systems.

Much of the world is witness to the impact that inconsistent weather patterns are having on the landscape, and more importantly, to our food supply. For too long, we have implemented practices that uproot soil carbon, leach nutrients,

and deplete the fields of any biological activity. Though I do not agree with these methods, I do understand that they have served a purpose, and those large fields of corn and soy are still what inspire me to make appropriate changes within our annual design and plans that will lessen the impact we have upon the landscape.

Our communities are faced with difficult circumstances in all areas of life and our future relies heavily upon the ways we alter or adapt our lives to embody the whole system, not just a part of the system. Often, I ask visiting students if anything in nature grows alone or in a straight line, hoping that someone will say, "actually...", but that has not yet been the case. My point is, if the foundation for existence, our planet, works in collaboration with other ecosystems and species, then why is it that we have not yet adopted this more diverse approach to growing and raising our food?

The permaculture movement has been moving forward for four decades, regenerative or restorative practices are becoming better known, agroforestry systems are being further examined, and the reason is not because it's a buzz, but because they work, and our communities are beginning to see that. Preparing for the future means that we focus on planning for resilience through limited tillage, crop rotations, rotational grazing, perennial intercropping, diverse polycultures, etc.; all methods that our ancestors utilized which are capable of lessening the impact of, if not preventing, pests, diseases, compaction and nutrient leaching.

We as farmers can help our families and friends maintain optimal health and vitality. We can rebuild communities by bringing them to the farm and engaging them with the source of their supper. We can plan for and prepare our future generations for any difficulties that they may endure because farmers, designers, and pioneers chose to view the landscape differently and learn from our past, providing wholesome opportunities for our grandchildren. What mat-

ters the most is doing the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do, and sometimes that means breaking old habits and being humble in the face of uncertainty. The land reminds me to be grateful and find time to listen; nature knows best.

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**NEW AND BEGINNING FARMERS****Trading Boots: a Veteran's Transition into Agriculture*****Samuel Palmer works at Cross Island Farms to gain experience for his budding new career: farmer.***

by Alyssa Couse, Agricultural Outreach Educator,  
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County

Jefferson County, NY is home to two prominent ways of life: agriculture and the military. The proximity of Fort Drum to local farms and agribusinesses creates an opportunity for the two worlds to collide. As different as these lifestyles seem, there are actually many glaring similarities. Each requires dedicated, responsible, compassionate, hardworking people who have the ability to wear multiple hats. Technology is being incorporated more and more into each industry, thus creating more opportunities in information technology and engineering.

As farms expand with more animals and employees, management skills are required to keep the operations moving efficiently. Soldiers with experience in diesel mechanics could apply their skills to farm equipment and hauling trucks. These are just a few examples of how the agricultural industry is in need of a workforce that is remarkably compatible with the skills of the military service men and woman who are transitioning into civilian life.

Through the Cornell Small Farms Program, whose mission states "We help farmers get expert assistance to facilitate all phases of small farm business development, from initial growth to optimization to maturity," the Farm Ops program was born. This effort brings resources to veterans who want to enter the agriculture industry. From starting their own small farm, to working for a local farm or agribusiness, veterans have access to a statewide network. Online courses, business planning resources, workshops, and on-the-job training opportunities are available to guide veterans in their transition from military to agriculture. As the Agricultural Outreach Educator for Jefferson County, I wanted to explore a real-life example of the project at work.

Here is a local success story for inspiration. Infantry Captain Samuel Palmer is trading his Army boots for muck boots.



**Sam Palmer attended the Armed to Farm event this summer in Madison County.**

Photo courtesy of Matt Weiss

With a love for the outdoors and a passion to help the food system, Sam decided that agriculture would be his next venture. This spring, the Palmer family will be returning home to New Hampshire to start Sapling Forest Farm. The farm name is a product of Sam's initials S.A.P. with his son being the "sapling." Although he had worked on a few farms throughout high school and college, Sam did not come from a farming background. Utilizing the Beginning Farmers Project resources such as business planning materials and attending events/workshops, Sam's dream has become a reality. He most recently received a certificate from the Produce Safety Alliance's Grower Training which satisfied FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act) regulation by attending a training held at Jefferson County Cornell Cooperative Extension.

To gain some hands-on experience, Sam sought guidance from a local farmer from whom he was buying organic pork. Sam has been spending most weekends helping Dani Baker and Dave Belding of Cross Island Farms on Wellesley Island, NY. This was a perfect pairing: Sam was interested in learning about organic livestock and produce, and Cross Island Farm is a very diverse organic farm with livestock including pigs, goats and beef cattle, greenhouses of fresh produce, and an edible forest garden. Sam's military experience has helped him handle high-pressure situations that arise, such as a "goat rodeo", or goats escaping from their pen. Remaining grounded and having strong communication and management skills are crucial to farming and were instilled in his years in combat. In addition, building spreadsheets and online marketing skills are tools from the military that he can now add to his farming toolbox.

On the weekends when he isn't on Cross Island Farms, Sam is traveling to New Hampshire to work on his own farm. After a weekend spent planting winter rye on his land, Sam was elated to share the experience with Dave and Dani. "Guess what I did last Saturday? I worked on MY farm." The support and guidance he has received from his mentors, local educators, and the Cornell Small Farms Program were unexpected benefits for Sam during this transition. He encourages anyone who is interested in agriculture to simply

contact a farmer and get out there!

After sitting down with Sam, I wanted to enrich his story with the perspective of the local farm he has worked on. Dave Belding of Cross Island Farms explained how the relationship with Sam Palmer began. Sam and wife contacted the farm for organic foods for their family. Sam had heard about the volunteer opportunities offered and asked how he could help. Shortly after, Sam began helping out on the farm on weekends. Sam is the first veteran to work as a volunteer, but the farm has been host to many volunteers in different programs. The WWOOF program, or World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, has brought volunteers from New York City, Chicago, Spain, Switzerland, Singapore, Austria, and Germany. Cross Island Farms also has local volunteers and has had interns from SUNY ESF and Clarkson University. After such a positive experience with Sam Palmer, perhaps more veterans will be added to the list of regular help.

Dave describes Sam as a joy to have on the farm and that his work ethic, discipline, and resourcefulness from his military experience make him productive and independent. The farm has gotten great satisfaction from helping people to experience agriculture and it seems that learning is a two-way street. For example, Sam's interests in practices like rotational grazing and forestry have been an asset to Cross Island Farms, as Sam brings knowledge from his own research and can implement it on the farm. Because of these skills, Dave feels that there will be "abundant fruit coming from the seeds planted through Sam's experiences on Cross Island Farms," in reference to the success of Sam's future farm in New Hampshire. In general, Dave thinks that veterans have what it takes for the agriculture industry. Regardless of experience level, having the right personality traits are key. "The skills are one thing; the work ethic may be an even bigger thing."



**Goats munching in one of Cross Island Farm's pastures. Sam hopes to have goats on his own farm in New Hampshire**

Photo by Alyssa Couse

Sam Palmer's transition into farming is evidence that having a farming background is not a pre-requisite. Experience can be taught. What cannot be taught as easily are the fundamental attributes of a successful farmer: work ethic, dedication, responsibility, passion, and the desire to work hard for an ideal they believe in. Sam and Dave agree on the advice they would offer to other veterans curious about agriculture: reach out to those in the industry and get a taste of what it has to offer.

*Alyssa Couse is the Agricultural Outreach Educator for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County. Part of her job is to help connect transitioning soldiers and veterans with resources and connections in the agricultural industry. She can be reached at amc557@cornell.edu or 315-788-8450.*



**Cross Island Farm, a certified organic farm on Wellesley Island, has hosted Sam Palmer as a volunteer on weekends**

Photo by Alyssa Couse at local meat producers' conference

**Meat** from page 15

component of the workshop. "Mike was really good at showing us different things, answering questions, and making sure the information was useful," she said. "Seeing how other people cut their birds and then actually doing my own processing was a great learning experience. Hands-on is the way I learn best, so it was really beneficial to me.

"And having Betsy and Mackenzie there to cover the marketing and regulations aspect in the same day was also really helpful," she added. "They were good about getting into the nitty gritty of some of the things we as farmers don't necessarily think about."

Upcoming schedule of classes for meat producers:

April 21- Lamb 2.0 (processing and cooking) hosted at SUNY Cobleskill

May 17 - Pork 2.0 (processing and cooking) hosted at SUNY Cobleskill

May 31-June 1 Cured Meats hosted at Cornell University

*R.J. Anderson is a staff writer/communications specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension.*

*To register or for more information, call Linda Serdy, SUNY Cobleskill Office of Professional and Continuing Education at (518) 255-5528 or SerdyML@cobleskill.edu.*

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**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT****Conservation Easements: The Top Tax Tool in the Farmer's Estate Planning Toolbox**

by John H. Lavelle, CPA, LL.M.

Most farmers have a substantial real estate portfolio. Depending on the geographic region, this can be extraordinarily valuable, but in every case, land is always a critical asset for the succession of the farm business to future generations. In many cases, the value of the land is also a planned retirement asset for the senior generation of farmers. These two ideas, critical asset and retirement asset, often combine to doom family farms that do not plan for the future.

Conservation easements can often save the day for families struggling with the transition

of farm businesses to the next generation. But what exactly are these, and how can they work for the typical farm situation? This short article is designed to raise farmers' and planners' awareness of how this powerful tool can solve otherwise intractable conflicts over the role of land in the estate plan.

**Cash Out Without Selling?**

For the lucky few, a conservation easement can facilitate a large payment to the senior generation farmers, while keeping the farm in the family. For farmers whose land is very valuable as a conservation asset, they can get paid for agreeing to restrict their land to agricultural uses indefinitely. Generally known as a "purchase of development rights" or PDR, this technique trades cash for the creation of a conservation easement.

Where does the cash come from? State and federal funding programs, as well as private land trust funders, devote money from time to time to conserve farmland. This money is scarce, and changes according to government budgets every year, but it is possible for the best land to qualify for these programs. Ordinary farms need not apply, but in high growth areas or very special conservation areas, farmland may be eligible. If you join the queue early and often enough, every

year someone is approved.

So what happens? The farmer agrees to restrict the land to its current uses (i.e. agricultural, open space, woodlands, etc.) with perhaps some limited development areas needed for farm expansion. The land is appraised before and after the proposed restrictions, and the decrease in value is how the PDR is computed. Some program or combination of programs might pay the farmer 100% of that value, while others might be less than that. For most farmers, cash received in a PDR transaction will be taxed as a capital gain.

If you are lucky enough to get a PDR, it can solve the senior generation retirement income problem. At the same time, it lowers the value of the farm for the purpose of transferring it to the next generation. In addition, certain tax benefits might be available, discussed below.

**Tax Planning with Conservation Easements**

For very successful farms and large landholdings that are not farms, a conservation easement presents many tax planning benefits. The vast majority of conservation easements are donated in full or part and are not sold as in the PDR situation above. In exchange for donating or giving up the development rights, very powerful tax benefits are available.

These tax benefits for high bracket taxpayers can sometimes make the difference between retaining legacy farms, vacation properties, and forest lands, and needing to sell them to plan for estate taxes or to otherwise work out estate planning issues. Here is a quick summary of the possible tax benefits when a PDR is not available (which is most of the time):

**Income tax deduction.** For high earning farmers and wealthy landowners, a charitable income tax deduction is awarded for simply agreeing to restrict the land under a conservation easement. In many cases, the government gives you this benefit even though it is what you want for the land anyway. The deduction is equal to the difference between unrestricted land and the value after the restrictions. Your use of the deduction depends on your individual tax situation. For qualified farmers, this "paper" deduction can completely offset the tax on your income for up to fifteen years. In addition, New York has a conservation easement tax credit granting New York donors a refundable income tax credit of 25% of their school and property taxes paid during the year (maximum credit is \$5,000).

**Estate tax benefits.** First off, whether you



The clouds above Middleburgh nailed this impersonation of the snowy field.

believe the estate tax will still be around or not (it just celebrated 100 years in 2016), getting benefits for something you would do anyway still makes sense. The conservation easement lowers the value of the land for gift and estate tax purposes. This means more land can be transferred within today's large exemptions from the gift and estate tax than without the easement.

Secondly, an additional 40% off the value of the encumbered land, up to \$500,000, is available at the death of the landholder(s). None of these benefits cost a single dollar (other than the cost of doing the easement, of course). So, the easement provides lower value to begin with, and 40% on top of that in many cases. The more significant the impact of the easement, the more likely the landholder will get the full 40% reduction. Farmers in high growth areas usually qualify for the maximum benefits.

**Summary**

Conservation easements have a long lead time. It might take years to get a PDR. For a full or partially donated easement, a year is the minimum amount of time. Qualified appraisers are needed for the before and after valuations, which drive the purchase price in PDRs and the tax benefits for donated easements. Legal documents are involved and a land trust or government agency is a key partner.

However, the benefits are substantial, and farmers and other landowners should be alert to this opportunity. Together with professional advisers familiar with the technique, farm families can greatly benefit their own estate planning when this tool fits the situation.

*John H. Lavelle, CPA, LL.M., is a founding partner of Lavelle & Finn, LLP, Attorneys at Law, in Latham, NY and co-owner of Windhorse Thoroughbreds and Cotton Hill Farm in Middleburgh, NY. He can be reached at (518) 869-6227 or john@lavelleandfinn.com.*



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**FOREST AND WOODLOT****Chenango Begins Work on Statewide Value Added Forest Products Initiative***Farmers and woodland owners have opportunities to generate income from their woodlands*

by Rich Taber

CCE Chenango has received a grant from the New York Farm Viability Institute "Increased Farm Viability and Diversification through Value Added Forest Products". The impetus for this project was due to the fact that 66% of New York Farms (23,576) have large amounts of forest land, which add significantly to the purchase prices and tax burdens, and yet less than 2,000 farms use their forest land to generate significant income.

Sixty percent of New York's 30 million acres (about 18 million acres) are covered with forests, and most of this land is owned by private forest landowners, with a good share of that owned by farmers. Much of this land has the potential to generate income, but is currently underutilized.

The purpose of this project is to help farmers and landowners become more profitable and diversified by developing value-added forest (woodland) enterprises that complement existing farm operations and which can generate more than \$10,000 per year.

It is acknowledged that many forest owners own their woodlands for a diversity of values, such as hunting, hiking, bird watching, aesthetics, cross country skiing, and innumerable other activities. Sometimes these same properties can be encouraged to produce goods and services that will return income to the owners. With the right mindset and efforts, a viable woodland business can generate income, which will contribute to local economies and lower the chances of having to sell off land due to onerous ownership costs.

The value added products that are encouraged are maple sap and syrup products, firewood, saw timber and sawmilling production, and woodland cultivated mushrooms.

Possibilities for other potential forest value added products will be considered as well.

To achieve the goals of this project the following activities will take place:

1. Presentations will be given to farmers across the state to introduce them to farm-compatible forest enterprises that can gross more than \$10,000 a year. \$10,000 is the minimum gross income level that is required to be generated per year in order for farms to be eligible for property tax reductions.

2. Videos will be produced on forest income-producing enterprises and posted to the internet and social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Cornell Cooperative Extension Websites.

3. The project is developing a Forest Value Added Business Plan Template, and will provide one-on-one help for farmers/landowners who are developing plans for a value-added

forest product enterprise. Separate plans for specific enterprises to include maple sugaring, saw timber/ sawmilling, firewood production, and agroforestry enterprises are being developed.

More information will be developed soon regarding this exciting project.

New York State's forest resources are always at the risk of being sold and subdivided for development. This project aims to keep the landscape in forests by providing farmers and landowners with viable income-generating possibilities.

Anyone desiring more information on this project should feel free to contact the author. We will also be soliciting landowners who may already have established viable woodland businesses to be interviewed and filmed for our video production component.

An excellent place to mingle with other successful woodland business owners is at the New York State Woodmen's Field Days, held each year in Boonville, NY. See the sidebar for more information on this event. Other excellent places for woodland information can be found at the New York Forest Owners Association website, [www.nyfoa.org](http://www.nyfoa.org), and the Cornell Forestry site, <http://blogs.cornell.edu/ccforestconnect>, or <http://cornellforestconnect.ning.com>.

*Rich Taber, M.S., M.S.F., is Grazing, Forestry, and Ag Economic Development Specialist with CCE Chenango. He lives on a farm in Madison County with his wife Wendy where they enjoy a variety of amenities from their 100-acre woodlot, 607-334-5841 ext. 21 or email: [rbt44@cornell.edu](mailto:rbt44@cornell.edu).*



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**EXTENSION NEWS****CCE Helps N.Y. Brewers, Growers Bet the Farm on Fickle Grain**

by R.J. Anderson

Malting barley is an essential ingredient for brewing beer. And since its very recent reintroduction to New York agriculture after several decades of prohibition and disease-induced dormancy, it has also been very challenging to grow to market grade. Those challenges, paired with the rising demands of the state's three-year old farm brewery law, dominated discussion at the Southern Tier Farm Brewery Summit on November 10.

Hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Broome County at its headquarters, the summit brought together brewers, grain growers, and malt house owners for formal and informal conversations with educators and experts from Cornell University and Hartwick College, and officials from state regulatory agencies.

"The event served as networking hub, sounding board, and research access point for those staked to the state's farm and craft beer industry," said event organizer Laura Biasillo, CCE Broome County agricultural economic development specialist. "It's so important to bring all these groups together to talk about what is occurring both in research and real-world growing scenarios so that everybody is on the same page."

Designed to spur demand for locally grown products and create new business opportunities in and around the brewing industry, the New York farm brewery law has provided tax and fee cuts while easing some regulations for brewers, who must use New



**Presenters and panel members from the Southern Tier Farm Brewery Summit hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County Nov. 10.**  
Credit: R.J. Anderson/Cornell Cooperative Extension

York state-grown ingredients. It also features an escalating mandate for inclusion of New York ingredients — at least 60 percent of a beer's hops and 60 percent of its other ingredients will have to be New York-grown by 2018. Those numbers will jump to 90 percent on January 1, 2024. Currently, the threshold for New York-grown ingre-

dients is 20 percent.

Malting barley, which provides a beer with some of its flavor and texture characteristics as well as its color, is by far the largest piece of the "other ingredients" puzzle. The rising legislation requirements, along with the current challenges of producing malting-grade barley, has many brewers growing increasingly nervous.

Due to its strict moisture and chemical demands, malting barley is a much more sensitive crop than traditional New York-grown grains such as wheat and feed barley. More susceptible to fungal diseases than other

grains, malting barley also has a much smaller harvest window and must be dried with great care and precise timeliness.

Despite those challenges, and the marginal progress made thus far in production-rate success, experts at the Farm Brewery Summit emphasized that the legislation's ingredient inclusion requirements are within reach.

"They are reasonable and we're going to get there," Aaron MacLeod, director of the Hartwick College Center for Craft Food and Beverage, told attendees. A chemist, MacLeod provides quality-control and validation testing for small grains and is a widely recognized expert on malting barley quality.

"Whenever you do something new, there is a learning process," he said, "and malting barley has to meet very tight quality specifications to ensure that it will perform well in the malthouse and the brewery."

To substantiate his point, MacLeod cited work by the Cornell Small Grains program, a team of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences researchers and CCE educators. Led by Mark Sorrells, Cornell professor of plant breeding, plant pathologist Gary Bergstrom, and extension specialists Mike Stanyard, Kevin Ganoe and Justin O'Dea, the group is immersed in trials to pinpoint a handful of malting barley varieties suited to New York's diverse microclimates.

The team also has made significant and immediate strides by delivering current research to growers who are having more success bringing malting barley to market grade.

"At our lab, we have been testing the quality of harvest samples from around the state and are seeing that farmers who work closely with the CCE specialists for several growing seasons are more likely to 'make the grade' on their barley crop than those trying for the first time," MacLeod said. "And those growers are getting more successful each year. That shows that the effort is paying off."

Still, MacLeod emphasized, the malting barley re-introduction process will require time, patience and even more collaboration through events like the Farm Brewery Summit.

"Farm brewing requires very close relationships throughout the value chain, which is why meetings like this are so important," he said. "Bringing the farmers, malsters, and brewers to learn together helps build common understanding. Being involved in farm brewing means you can't have an anonymous supply chain."

*R.J. Anderson is a writer/communications specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension.*

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**EXTENSION NEWS****WNY Farm Co-op Named Friend of Extension**

by R.J. Anderson

Strong friendships typically spring from deep roots. That is certainly the case with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) and Eden Valley Growers, Inc., a 50-year-old vegetable growing farm cooperative in western New York. It's also why CCE recently honored Eden Valley Growers with its 2016 Friend of Extension award.

"Excellent extension and research programming is not possible without grower involvement and that is where Eden Valley Growers comes into the picture," said CCE Director Chris Watkins during the keynote address at the Friend of Extension luncheon on December 2, held at Cornell University's Moakley House. "Their member farms are key in connecting university research to real-world farm utility."

Based in Eden, New York, Eden Valley Growers consists of ten member farms, most of which are third or fourth generation. Members use the co-op for marketing and distribution of produce. Each year, the cooperative ships over half a million cases of fruits and vegetables throughout the United States.

For more than 30 years, the Friend of Extension award has been presented by Cornell Cooperative Extension and Epsilon Sigma Phi to recognize truly outstanding support of



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**Cornell Cooperative Extension Director Chris Watkins, joined other members of organization in honoring Eden Valley Growers, Inc. with the 2016 Friend of Extension award.**

Photo by R.J. Anderson/Cornell Cooperative Extension

and personal involvement in Extension efforts.

In nominating Eden Valley Growers for the award, CCE of Erie County Executive Director Diane Held and CCE Erie Farm Busi-

ness Management Educator Megan Burley, along with Cornell Vegetable Team Specialist Darcy Telenko, described members of the cooperative as always willing and able to answer questions from CCE educators, host farm tours, and sit on panels for grow-

er workshops. In addition, Eden Valley Growers advise CCE staff on research projects and have participated in hiring searches to fill positions on CCE's Cornell Vegetable Team.

On hand to accept the award were representatives from member farms Henry W. Agle & Sons, Amos Zittel & Sons, W.D. Henry & Sons, MCR Farm, and D. & J. Brawdy Farms. In accepting the award, Mark Zittel told the audience that the relationship between Eden Valley Growers and CCE is a symbiotic one and that CCE provides unbelievable resources for vegetable growers throughout the state. The most important of those resources, he said, are extension specialists such as Telenko, who are wholly committed to assisting the cooperative's member farms.

Watkins said those farms in turn provide an important conduit for extending Cornell's research and agriculture expertise. "The member farms' support and willingness to host research trials and implement Cornell recommendations allows CCE to provide current solutions that keep the vegetable industry thriving across the state," said Watkins. "We are honored to call Eden Valley Growers a true Friend of Extension."

*R.J. Anderson is a staff writer/communications specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension.*

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Bejo is a family-owned company with worldwide operations, and is the world's largest producer of True Organic Hybrid Seed. Bejo maintains organic breeding programs which are regionally and locally focused.

**Non-GMO.** All registered and commercially available Bejo varieties were obtained by using traditional plant-breeding methods. Bejo has no genetically modified varieties available for commercial use.

Bejo Seeds are available through quality-minded dealers on both a seed packet and commercial scale. Contact your local sales representative, or call the number at right for a list of seed sources. See the Bejo assortment at [bejoseeds.com](http://bejoseeds.com), and the full lineup of 120 organic varieties at [organicseedfinder.com](http://organicseedfinder.com)

**That's bejo quality ▶ [bejoseeds.com](http://bejoseeds.com)**

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Organic

