



County-wide Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan update

Compilation of Notes from the February, 2014 Focus Groups

Meeting dates and topics:

Agri-Tourism & Direct Sales, February 4, BOCES

Integrating Local Food into the Local Food System, February 5, BOCES

Livestock, February 6, BOCES

New & Young Farmers, February 10, BOCES

Education, February 12, BOCES

Agencies & Institutions, February 18, BOCES

Dairy & Field Crops, February 19, BOCES

Please note: The comments below are a compilation of the facilitator's notes taken during each of the seven focus groups held for the county-wide agriculture and farmland protection plan update in February, 2014. Italics indicate editor comments or clarifications.

Agri-tourism & Direct Sales Focus Group Notes

Feb 4, 2014

5 Attendees

Land Use – what issues are you having with local land use regulations?

- No one knows that the wine store and gourmet market is in Aurora because can't put up a sign. Can't use a green DOT sign because the grapes are not grown at the store. Can use a blue sign but not sure where to put it, outside the village limit?
- In the Village of Union Springs (or Town of Springport?), organic farm was told that the process to get a sign put up to direct people to the farm would take one year. If you want to get people to farm? Show people where the farms are.
- Want to bring people to the sugar house, do tours that generate some revenue. Make a better profit by bringing visitors to the farm. Built a shelter to do events like pancake breakfasts. There may be setback requirements, etc. but it hasn't been an issue (Town of Brutus). The town doesn't allow home occupations but agricultural uses are no problem (Town of Brutus). Hold open house weekends during the season. 500-600 people came to the open house on second weekend last March. There are some state regulations because I'm processing.

Future Plans for businesses

- Land is limited. May expand down the road
- Would like to expand but need more woods. There aren't a lot of woodlots in central New York, maple operations look to lease what is available. It's an education issue, property owners with woodlots don't know they can use them for syrup.
- Rent the building that the store is in. Store is outgrowing the space. The business is becoming a destination, but since we don't own the building we can't enlarge it, and it's difficult to relocate a business like this, since it's so important that people know where we are and how to get to us. Even changing the phone number would be difficult because it's been the same for so long.
- The county tourism way-finding project will be great in several years.
- Connections with motor coach operators have helped generate business, but need signage and facilities that are large enough to accommodate the big buses.
- The smaller-scale agricultural businesses need marketing staff, but it's expensive. It would be great if multiple businesses could share a marketing person. Was going to host a chili cook-off but the logistics of putting it together was complicated, food permits, etc. It would be great if someone could coordinate these types of events for multiple agri-tourism enterprises.
- Dickman Farms has a marketing staff, they do very well. They host events and hold classes, etc.

Business Development

- Small winery production, 600-700 cases wine. Planning to grow, but must do slowly, can't take on debt. 80% of sales are through shop, 20% is through other venues. Since the store can't get bigger, the key to growth is to increase distribution, which Kit does himself. But, have to find the markets first. Winery industry expands and contracts annually. We make the wine we like to make, not to please the crowd. The production facility in Seneca County is large enough to expand. On a good Saturday during the season, we'll get 3-4 dozen, 100-150 people in the tasting room. A lot of the visitors are wine touring, get some people attending weddings at the Aurora Inn, the Barn Sale at Mackenzie-Childs and the Route 90 garage sale day.
- At organic farm just outside Union Springs, have not noticed a difference in sales during the Route 90 garage sale day or the Mackenzie-Childs Barn Sale. Growth strategy is slow and smart. We're figuring

out what we can grow and sell without borrowing a lot of money. Going to start a CSA, just 20 shares or so. Don't see us getting big, just want to be viable.

- The key to bolstering agri-tourism is SIGNAGE!!!

What educational or training resources do you access to help you manage your business?

- Read a lot, learn from others. Need to manage risk. Looked for support through USDA for hoop house grants, CCE for a few questions. A lot of times just get referred to a website but don't get someone to sit down with. Resources out there tend to defer and refer to others.
- The key to business development is the market: finding it, gaining credibility, logos and branding.
- Selling to restaurants: it's challenging to establish relationships with them. Drop off gift baskets with meats for them to try. The timing is challenging, farmers are busy when chefs are not, and vice versa. Also, chefs want something quick and easy; it takes effort from them to make connections with local farmers

Where do you process your meat?

- Hogs go to Schrieder's Meat Market in Romulus (USDA). Can sell these at the farmers market. Poultry – on-farm. Other facilities are NYS certified, can only sell ½ or whole. Need more slaughterhouses. In Vermont, can sell cuts that were processed in a state certified facility, if they're sold within the state.
- USDA certified facilities: Moravia, Romulus, Canandaigua. There aren't many of them and they're not conveniently located for many Cayuga County meat producers.
- Could sell ½ a hog to a restaurant but they don't have butchers

Distribution and Market Access

- In the wine industry, it's a challenge to make connections. There a lot of wine around here, so how do you stand out?
- In the maple syrup industry, educating the public is a big challenge, about all the different ways to use maple syrup
- Restaurants have opportunities but they often take the path of least resistance. Restaurants need to market their local food, this is a weak link.
- Farmer's Markets – they're a mixed bag. In a way it's a lesser Wegman's. The Auburn Market: younger people don't go because the food is trucked in, not sold by farmers. Cayuga County should have a regional facility. There are too many small markets. The Union Springs Farmers Market is doing fairly well.

Integrating Local Food into the Local Food System Focus Group Notes

Feb 5, 2014

4 Attendees:

- USDA and NYSDAM grants are a real pain. Farmers get turned off.
- Farm safety is a concern. A farmer just died.
- Need to do a food system assessment
- There was a recent news article about people complaining about buffalo not being properly sheltered because they were outdoors in the winter weather. People don't understand that this is not actually a problem, that buffalo and other livestock don't need shelter like people or pets. Need better public education.
- Restaurants are getting pressure by public and Culinary Bounty to incorporate local food ingredients into menus. Not sure how successful this is, it's not always posted that local ingredients are used.
- Food Pantries- NYS Dept of Health grant for vouchers for people to go to Central NY Food Bank. Farmers donate to food banks, the Farm Bureau does a press release every year. Food Link in Rochester buys from farmers, gives to banks.
- The Southern Cayuga FFA held a gleaning event – talk to Andy Miller?
- The pantries prefer to get people to increase positive behavior. Have “healthy bucks” that are given out and that can be used at farmers markets. It's easy for farmers to get reimbursed with these. Other similar programs, it's not so easy. The NYS-wide food security groups are working on this.
- Senior coupons were late this past year – people really wanted them. The seniors get bussed to the farmers markets. Cayuga Health Network organized buses.

Institutions:

- Port Byron School District - relationship with Guidone? ask the Food Service Director. Need to look at a regional level.
- Wells, Cayuga Community College (CCC), nursing homes, hospital, daycare centers. CCC doesn't prepare any food at all, there's a Subway sandwich shop.
- Other places – finding ways to make this happen.
- Advance Meals – a lot of senior housing meals, the Meal on Wheels program
- There are opportunities to encourage collaborations with institutions
- Loretto and Advance Meals provide a lot of the prepared institutional meals in the county. Need to create customer demand, educate consumers on what they're getting served.
- There is a lot of support of farmer's markets throughout the county.
- Need a year-round market, but this is a farmer niche (*not for all farmers/ farm models?*)
- Need different market channels for each farmer biz model
- The restaurants that claim they use local ingredients – need more transparency here. Some don't really use local food or may only use one or two local items.
- Could do more wholesale at the Auburn farmer's market, if the restaurants/institutions were interested in it.

How to make stronger food system connections happen?

- Need enough demand
- Need right price
- Identify supply of farms to provide products.
- An ambitious farmer/person to do this
 - Regional Access model
 - Heidelberg model/Helderberg model? (spelling?) in the capital district
- ** need aggregation
 - Web-based program/apps/network
 - CNY Bounty – now defunct. Showed some success with promotion in Madison County. Spawned a cool localized local food movement
 - public sector is not the solution to this. It needs to be private

The Public Role:

- identify opportunities
- generating demand through education and promotion of health benefits but also by promoting benefits to the local economy
- State-level work: the state wants to start tracking local food dollars spent. Cuomo has instructed his director to start procuring local, so it's a state priority
- need an understanding of seasonality: education and celebration of seasonality
- Chamber of Commerce is looking at a "buy local" campaign. Want a 10% shift in spending.

Restaurants

- some say they buy local but don't
- some do buy local but don't advertise it!
- Could do a business card campaign, carry cards with you that say, "Where's the New York food on the menu?" and give them to restaurants you eat at. Restaurants respond to consumer pressure

Meat Production

- ** need livestock slaughterhouses
- Bridge gap between livestock farm and customers
- Need right price-point for institutions
- Meat: more mature local demand than for other products (Mesa Grande would purchase if it was possible, but doesn't have access b/c not enough slaughterhouses)
- A non-profit meat resource is CAID. Always have SWCD from each county on its advisory council.

Food Hubs/ Distribution

- We could have a regional food hub. We have Route 90.
- Wholesharing – buying club in Moravia (*group of residents that together purchase wholesale to get better prices and products*). Wholeshare.com software system. They get a share from Regional Access.

Regulatory Burdens

- Food safety certifications
- GAP
- CCE could be doing trainings
- Food safety modernization act – FDA. Farmers are in a "wait & see" mode

- Distributors and buyers are demanding standards for farm products

Local small-scale food processing facilities

- CCE- had a commercial kitchen that is licensed, but the building is getting old. CCE will have to relocate at some point.
- Montezuma Hotel – use as a community center, visitor’s center, and had a commercial kitchen. Used to prepare senior meals in the county, but the kitchen got sold off.

Livestock Focus Group Notes

Feb 6, 2014

12 Attendees

Neighbor conflicts

- Some participants do experience neighborhood trash, abuse of land.
- New neighbors don't respect agriculture or the land: knock over hay lots, new generation is disrespectful. Lack of public education about agriculture.
- One participant's operation borders state land, which is an illegal dumping site. Spends a lot of time cleaning out the trash, mattresses, washing machines, etc. Need better policing, although resources are limited.
- 4-wheelers cross private land without permission. Some vehicle vandalism.
- Manure spreading: some participants notify neighbors beforehand, helps a lot with complaints. One participant sends out fliers in the beginning of the year to ask about dates when he should not spread (i.e., if a neighbor has a big event at their house on a certain date). It's a timing issue.
- The biggest complaint issue is mud on the roads. Road sweepers on the tractors can address this but they are expensive.

Land pressures

- Participants haven't really felt much development pressures. A bigger issue is land availability, having to compete with the bigger farms for land. Small farms don't stand a chance. This was attributed to ethanol driving up corn prices.

Planning Board or Town Board issues/Zoning/Sub-division/ Site Plan issues

- One participant recounted a negative experience with a building inspector when trying to put up a new farm building. Felt that he was singled out for a supposedly required permit that other new buildings didn't seem to need (Sempronius).
- Other participants who recently moved from out of the area to establish their farm business asked about a sign and also wanted to do a farmstand but were told they can't do it, even though their didn't seem to be a local law restricting these things (Sempronius).
- These issues depend on a lot on the codes person.

Business Development – how did participants gain the knowledge they needed to run their farm businesses effectively?

- Lots of reading
- The internet was helpful
- Writing, goals, business planning only helps to an extent, not all that helpful in the end. A lot of resources are superficial.
- Trial by error. (*This comment from a participant got a lot of nods from others in the room, but they said that that they don't recommend it*)
- It would have been really helpful starting out to have had a legal and licensing checklist to cover things like DBA, insurance, etc. Participant pointed out that there are more workshops on this sort of thing now
- One participant got a Bachelor's degree in Ag. Business from SUNY Cobleskill
- One participant got a Bachelor's degree in Ag. Engineering from SUNY Morrisville, but it wasn't that helpful for the business side of things.

- One participant attended a few CCE meetings but they were hard to get to. Would be useful if they were webcast.
- Another participant did CCE classes, but they were expensive. Content was good, though. Small Farm Program courses, “Beginning Farmer Series”
- Mentorship or a relative to help you figure things out is very important
- For a horse business, the equine school helped. All success can be attributed to this resource.

What do you see in your farm’s future?

- Have to get bigger
- If you do it right, you’ll grow. There was discussion about Wake Robin, a farm just outside Cayuga County, located in Onondaga County. They had a lot of pressure to get bigger because there was a lot of demand for their product. Their yogurt was being sold in Wegman’s but they stopped that because they intentionally decided to stay smaller.
- One participant doesn’t plan to expand his herd, but does plan to diversify, maybe by adding a greenhouse and/or aquaponics so that the chore cycle is “stacked”
- Similarly, another participant noted that since he was already making the trip to the Syracuse Regional Market, he might as well take more there, so he’s adding a high tunnel to his existing operation.
- Another participant is also interested in diversifying. They’re still learning about farming. Just got their organic certification. They want a sustainable farm to serve the local community, including chickens, goats, vegetables, fruits, maple syrup, honey. Don’t plan to get bigger, just to access more markets.
- One beef producing participant plans to stay doing what they’re doing now
- Participants with a relatively new beef operation wants to diversify, says that they can’t do just beef because the price fluctuates too much. Looking to do meat goats, harvest timber on property, maybe raise pigs. But, need buildings to do all that.
- One beef and hog producer just put up a new barn. Meat goes to NYC and hay to Long Island and Connecticut
- Another participant is interested in maple syrup in addition to primary farm business. Also has 50-60 apple trees that produce, so want to find some way to use them.

Business Support

- One participant said that there is a need for better networking. People are very busy, takes time to learn about existing resources. Learned about SWCD because they knocked on his door.
- Regulations and licensing are very complicated and very difficult to find out the real answers. Specifically with regards to product labeling for sale at markets, food safety. Every two years NYSDAM changes regulation rules about how to sell chickens and eggs, frozen temperatures versus fresh temperatures. Very complicated. Tatiana at Cornell has helped.
- Organic inspectors – what passes depends on the person doing the inspection – NOFA.
- It took one operator 9 months to get their organic certification through ICS.
- One participant noted that it wasn’t worth doing an organic certification for his operation because the cost of organic feed was too high.

Processing

- USDA –except for chicken, there are not enough USDA certified facilities to meet demand. Existing ones are in: Moravia, Romulus, north of Oneida Lake, and northern Pennsylvania.
- Cuts of meat that are sold must be processed by a USDA certified facility. Cuts for personal consumption can be processed in a state certified facility.

- In Vermont, farmers can sell cuts of meat within the state that have been processed in a Vermont-certified facility. How to get a NYS-USDA reciprocal certification? Ask Marty Broccoli about this (*Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, Oneida County CCE*).
- Brutus Hardware runs a mobile chicken processing unit.
- One participant noted that he was ready to invest in his own processing facility for his own products because there is just not enough capacity available to meet his needs.
- Another participant already has his own processing facility, and is planning to upgrade it later this year
- Another participant shared that he would love to be able to sell cuts in state especially since he has a connection to a local convenience store, but that he only has access to a state certified facility which makes this impossible.
- Market access is dependent on access to processing facilities
- Yet another participant skips over the local market entirely and sends his meat to Tyson and JBS USDA-certified facilities in Pennsylvania. Beef gets marketed under the Pineland Farms label and is sold in Wholefoods.
- Most culled cows get slaughtered in PA.
- A participant mentioned that Happy Hooves farm is certified organic, probably sends their animals to the certified organic USDA facility in PA. Farmer has various drop off/sale points in the local area where she sells, in and out of the county.

Marketing

- One participant mostly does freezer beef. Has done beef for about 35 years, hogs for about 10 years. Sell through word of mouth. Been around a while. Business can't get bigger because of land, but costs are increasing.
- One participant sells under the Pineland Farms label. The farmer-mentor that participant had worked with sold his beef this way, so that was the initial connection. The premium price they get from this arrangement is definitely worth the trip to PA. Wants to do freezer beef, gets a lot of questions from the local public about it, but aren't set up to do it yet.
- Local market – it's hard to get a good price for it, but don't have the price problem downstate, so that market is more appealing.
- One egg producer-participant sells at the Syracuse Regional Market, the Syracuse Real Food Cooperative, a summer farmstand, a CSA in Rochester, and several other places. There is a big demand for local food, people at the markets want to meet the farmer. Before, was wholesaling to NYC but it was less rewarding. Enjoys the relationship marketing aspect of the farmers markets. *Are the farmers markets economically rewarding also?* It varies from farm to farm, farmers value their time differently. We continue to sell out at the farmers market. Have to sell a large volume of eggs to break even and finally make a profit. The cost of feed is constantly going up. The cost to rent land has increased, which drives up the cost of growing the feed.
- Another egg producer-participant sells eggs to restaurants, Mesa Grande and Elderberry Pond, both in the county. Goes to the Skaneateles Farmers Market and sells at the Skaneateles Tops Market all year round. Would like to do more restaurants, do not want to do wholesale. The Skaneateles Farmers Market is expanding. It's managed by the farmers, which can be challenging. There is no coordination /collaboration among the various farmers markets in the area. A lot of them are controlled by the town or village that it is located in, they can control when and where, signage, and other things. Wants to see CCE be 3rd party Farmers Market managers – to advise on what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong. Would like to see farmers working together to purchase collective inputs in bulk to save money (pooling purchasing). Very interested in participating in something like this.

New & Young Farmers Focus Group Notes

Feb 10, 2014

6 Attendees

- Need to address OSHA. Probably not a farm in NYS that would pass. Farms with 10 or more non-family workers or with less than 10 but provide housing are subject to the new regs. Dairy is targeted in NYS but this may end up including grain storage.
- One participant took over multi-generational family greenhouse business. He's the only family member of his generation still involved in the business. He started at the bottom and worked his way up. Now he's general manager. They have about 115 employees, about 70 full time equivalents. Have about 10 acres under cover. Has a degree in marketing. Biggest challenge for the business is labor. There isn't a big pool of new and young farmers out there. They hire a lot through temp agencies. The Cornell Horticulture program toured our farm, there were only 9 students in the group – very small group. It seems like he's the only young person in trade shows.
- One beef farmer-participant didn't come from a farm background, grew up on Long Island. In high school, she would visit relatives upstate who had animals and got interested that way. Went to SUNY Cobleskill for an Ag Business degree and started a farm with partner. Just bought a farm in an "under cover mission," got lucky that the property never went on the market. Partner had a long relationship with the farmer who was selling, worked on a feed lot in Conquest. He got an Ag Technology degree from SUNY Cobleskill. Works at John Deere and also runs the farm.
- Another participant runs a dairy farm. His father started the farm, he grew up there. Knew that was where he was headed, so didn't go to college. Just formed an LLC with his father, so now they are co-owners of the business. 1200 acres, 175 cows. Made some mistakes at first but doing well now.

Education

- One participant got his knowledge of farming and running the business as he grew up on the farm. Went to Skaneateles High School, there's no ag education there. Toured the BOCES campus when he was in school but he's stuck in his ways and didn't see the point of taking the ag courses that were offered. In retrospect, he should have looked at the business offerings more seriously. As he goes, it would have been helpful to have more business knowledge.
- Young people 10-25 years old, it's difficult to get them interested in ag. Why? No one wants to work, and farming is hard work.
- *What about FFA and 4-H? Did anyone here participate in these organizations as a kid?* No. Would have if it was available. Auburn, Red Creek, and Skaneateles High Schools- no ag presence.
- 4-H youth development through CCE: the program is mostly horses with some dairy and small animals. "Kids with calves."
- Perhaps a way to get kids/young people interested in agriculture is to make a connection between technology and ag. For example, O'Hara's employs computer technicians. But you need to go to school out of the area for this.
- Ward O'Hara Museum holds a youth fair, and it is gaining momentum.

- Ag literacy Week – CCE coordinates this. Need to get more people involved. (just 9 out of 23 school districts in the county are participating this year)
- Farm Bureau is paying for school field trips to farms but are getting very little interest from schools.
- Auburn Headstart has a garden that feeds its students
- There's less participation in FFA and 4-H than there used to be. Part of this could be due to the consolidation of farms, there are simply less farm families.
- Some parents who farm know it is very hard work, they have a hard life, and discourage their children from doing it. Want their kids to do something else.
- Talked to Ag Educator at BOCES about mini-internships. Some students do 1-2 days working with animals. This can really pull them in, some find that they really like it. Seems to be headed in the right direction.
- Farmers bellyache a lot. So, who would want to do this? Need to put on a more positive face. The organic farmers tend to be more positive, get a lot of positive reinforcement from customers.
- Implementation: create a program where young farmers could be showcased, like better integrate young farmers into existing programs such as Ignite through the Chamber.
- It's also important to keep in mind that you don't have to own a farm to be a farmer – farm workers are also farmers!

Financing

- FSA- young farmer program – multiple participants said that there is so much paperwork that it is very discouraging. There's no one there to check up on the program, there's no mentorship. So if a young farmer does go through the headache of all that paperwork and actually manages to get a loan, there's no one there to help make sure the business succeeds. The program is just not set up for mentorship support; if the business fails, FSA can go in and take the collateral. Program is like a bank for young farmers. It's a great idea, but there's no follow through (business support). One participant recounted that they asked for in-person assistance and was turned down. Requires 3 years of Schedule F, OR someone to vouch for you, but close farmer mentor wasn't considered good enough.
- Could possibly gain from a microloan program (put this as part of plan implementation)
- Farm Credit: Really good but not cheap. Nice classes about borrowing, how much capital you need. Mostly second generation farmers, not a lot of new farmers were in the class. Can use the classes if you loan from them. Before the recession, they gave a line of credit with no problem. Now they want an inventory every quarter, etc., so a lot more oversight
- Used to have commercial banks that lent to farms, but a lot are out now. They feel that it's too risky. Banks want projections but for cash crops, beef, milk, it really depends on the weather and the market.
- Risk management resources are offered through Dairylea.

Mentorship and Networking

- Look to older farmers for guidance
- Trade conferences such as the beef producer conference are a great way to meet people. Also, trade groups such as the NYS Flower Industries and AmeriHort.
- Try to attend meetings and learn at least one thing at each

- Farm Bureau has a Young Farmers and Ranchers Program – there aren't a lot of people involved but it is nice to get together with people your own age. Going to combine with Seneca County's. The group talks about farming when it gets together.
- Need to encourage continued participation in Chamber and CEDA.
- There's no incentive for the older generation to help the younger generation, unless there's family involved. No incentive for mentorship or to pass the land on to a new or young farmer once the older farmer retires. Maybe give a tax credit to incentivize this? A transfer tax? Some far-reaching incentive.
- FarmLink – doesn't work so well, probably only 1 in 10 works. Need someone in the middle to facilitate the connections.
- It's also happening that rich people who are looking for investments are looking to buy up farmland to rent to farmers. This relieves the problem of accessing credit for farmers to buy land.

Other

- One participant tried a Profit Team for his dairy farm. Supposed to do 1.5 years of work, but only held two meetings and then the thing fizzled. The consultant facilitator didn't follow through. It's supposed to bring together everyone who has an interest in the farm, such as the nutritionist, the vet, etc. But you have to be careful who you put on your team.
- Cuomo just put a bunch of money into this, the NY Farm Viability Institute to do more dairy Profit Teams. It has potential to benefit farms.
- Through work that the CCE field agents do, have seen a lot of new and young farmers, but they're just not visible. Want to get a group together – maybe with the Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Program?
- CCE – there are less field agents than there used to be. There had been 3, now there is less than 1.5.

Education Focus Group Notes

Feb 12, 2014

4 Attendees

After presentation on project background, there was a question about whether the trend in the increasing number of farms is continuing. We won't know until the 2012 Census of Ag is released. Our large farms can't compete at the international scale like the farms in Chile and China. Those farms dwarf ours. Our land just isn't suited for that really, really big agriculture. This will limit farm consolidation to some extent.

- In terms of education, the educational needs of the big farms is probably not what we're focusing on here? They can access their own resources, right? *We're interested in looking at both.*

4-H

- 4-H mostly meet where the kids are. Most of the work is done by volunteers. Major areas are horses and dairy. Educational events include dairy science knowledge bowls, and the animal husbandry show at the youth fair. This is all "non formal" education, it's very hands-on.
- CCE is offering a tractor youth safety certification training this spring

BOCES

- BOCES teacher focused on ag education is spread too thin. Use vet science as a recruitment tool to the BOCES plant, animal and life sciences program. Then once they're there, they get to explore other options. 95% of classes are female.
- Teaches the book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* in the program, get them to think about their daily food choices.
- The students have minimal exposure to ag. It's a problem. It NEEDS to be a component in every school. Now, 11th graders have no idea what a carrot looks like coming out of the ground.
- It's a challenge to inspire the students to consider taking the ag program in the first place. We took "ag" out of the name and attendance doubled. We rope them in with animal science. We do plant science, entomology, farm visits.
- Have to give them the passion, the inspiration.
- 2/3 end up doing something involving something in the ag industry or outdoors, not necessarily farming. Some are at BassPro.
- 1/3 goes on to college. Get nervous when they go to CCC, because there's no ag there.

Organic farmer involved in educational outreach

- We have an educational program on the farm, do spring gardening classes. Also go into school classrooms. Give spring, summer farm tours. Our operation is NOT low tech, people are surprised by that.

Regional non-profit sustainable agriculture educational organization

- Has a different experience than at BOCES. People who tend to gravitate towards Groundswell's programs are in their 20's (but it varies), and come in already interested in farming but are ignorant of it. End up wittling out most of them, but it's a lot harder than they realize. 1/100.
- **TCC has just launched a Farm-to-Bistro Program.** They're opening a bistro in downtown Ithaca and are creating a sustainable farm to provide ingredients for the bistro. Offering two AA/AAS degrees, one for the farming and one for the restaurant.
- BOCES has a good culinary school. Instructor there has offered to work with the cafeteria, but hasn't gotten very far.
- *There was discussion of farm-to-school programs and why there aren't more schools getting local foods into school meals.* One participant mentioned that sometimes things like that get stonewalled by one admin person who refuses to play along.

Ag-In-The-Classroom

- Many schools don't participate. It tends to get scheduled during BOCES's Feb break (but not this year, which is in March). Teachers are not given time to do it! Why? Had person at CCE to spread word, full time, but that position was eliminated.
- Usually gets invited to schools by teachers working on environmental subject areas, the web of life, etc. The kids love the presentation, and the teachers end up learning a lot, too. They often don't realize how relevant it is to what they're trying to teach, that it demonstrates real-life applications of the concepts they discuss on class.
- The reality is that Cornell University has very little interest in *organic* farming. Their organic farming board doesn't do much. Ag student numbers at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences are declining, every year there is discussion about dropping ag programs. There is no push from the top to push ag education, sustainable farming, etc. *Led to discussion about the lack of support for ag education in the leadership of Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.* Cornell University leaders don't understand the importance of K-12 ag. education to Cornell's own ag programs. Some ag educators have started working with Ithaca College to ensure that there is a continued regional pathway for students other than Cornell.
- South Cayuga and Moravia both have ag educators. Must have an ag educator in order to have an FFA chapter.
- BOCES also has a heavy equipment and operation program, but mostly focuses on construction equipment such as bulldozers. Also has carpentry classes, which does provide helpful skills that can transfer to ag-related work. Also has an outdoor power equipment program, for machines such as rototillers.
- BOCES just doesn't have enough resources to get ag students on a tractor; there's only one ag educator to go around! The heavy equip. program does help with plowing the 4-5 acres of the garden, though.
- Garden would not be happening if it wasn't for community volunteers. It produces food for area food pantries. BOCES students plow and plant. Volunteers tend the garden in the summer time, then students are also involved during the fall semester. They plant about 2 acres with

vegetables, etc., the rest is buckwheat or some other cover crop. Will probably do white clover this year.

- Used to do corn test plots on the same land, but it meant nothing to the students. (they aren't ready for it. They don't know what a carrot looks like, so they're not at the point of appreciating something like that)
- How does BOCES address **ag-business education**? The Ag program has a huge business planning component in the last year of the program. This part of the program isn't a draw, but students end up seeing the value of it in the end.
- **How does FFA fit into this?** All the students in the program required to participate in FFA. Initially, Julia has to force them to do it, but they quickly come around and a lot of them really get into it and become life-long fans of the organization. Julia puts them on a bus and does a 20 minute ag tour of the area, and has the students list every single ag-related business they can identify. They are amazed by how many there are.

Other Ag-biz planning opportunities?

- CCC- weren't they talking about starting some sort of ag program? Aren't they building greenhouses?
- BOCES has an internship program for the ag students, but it's been challenging finding placements. The public is saying that they really need good people, but they're not taking on interns. There's a breakdown somewhere in placing students.
- Possible solution is to find a handful of farmers that are committed to mentoring, and do a series on 1-month rotations.
- Farmers could buy into the idea of mentoring, but they also need to pay these kids if they do actual work rather than just get training. A good internship experience would solidify interest in these kids.
- One participant gets interns but they aren't local. They're from Vermont, PennState, UMass. Culinary students are also interested, but none from the BOCES culinary program, they come from Paul Smith's. Those students are really interested in the farm-to-table connection.
- Another participant doesn't have interns on their farm but have had high school employees in the past. It hasn't been so easy finding reliable workers of that age. They don't have the work ethic, the commitment that's needed.
- Groundswell plays middle man to make connections, and is also becoming more aware of people interested in becoming ag educators. People interested in ag education are starting to approach this organization.
- Some students end up finding the work fulfilling even if they don't at first – ultimately they get a sense of accomplishment and become more engaged with the work.
- Agriculture is related to science and biology. Teachers and students don't often make the connection between science and agriculture. Colleges don't accept BOCES soils/horticulture classes as science classes.
- Idea: find a handful of farms to do an internship rotation. A one-month rotation at each farm. Need to build a network of farmers interested in the future of farming. This would be CCE's job. Farms with huge resources could financially assist. Has anyone done outreach for this sort of program?
- **need to have direction from Cornell, but aren't getting it from the CCE Executive Director at Cornell University. Also, Cornell has had budget cuts.
- North Carolina Extension is excellent. One participant uses their models extensively on his farm.

- The Cornell Research Farm is losing SARE funding because Cornell doesn't support sustainable agriculture. Someone needs to go public with this!

Ag Business Planning Resources

- Groundswell does a business planning course. Has gotten a VERY good response. A lot of interest. Students already in business or in serious planning mode, it's not for those who are just toying around with the idea.
- Farm Viability Institute in Syracuse does farm business planning. Give grants. One participant got one for his farm restaurant. They paid for the wait staff at the restaurant for the first 6 months when it was just getting started.
- There is a Ag Biz education program at Cobleskill. A business plan is VERY important to lenders.
- CCC – talked about offering Cobleskill classes, but it didn't happen. This is too bad because some of the BOCES students are interested in continuing with ag education but are not ready to leave home. There's a GIANT transition problem between BOCES and post-BOCES (and also between pre-BOCES and BOCES)
- As a major funder of CCE, CCC, the County Legislature needs to decide that this is important and pass this down as a priority to the institutions that it supports.

Agencies and Institutions Focus Group Notes

Feb 18, 2014

6 Attendees

Current activities to add to those listed on powerpoint slides:

- Farmers markets are getting a lot of support by various entities, Towns and Villages, and others
- Owasco Watershed Management Council – a lot of research and policy development
- Across-the-board research and policy, NRCS, SWCD, Cornell, etc are involved

Discussion of possible future implementation strategies, using suggestions on the powerpoint slides as a starting point:

- Assistance in developing business plan and market analysis – CEDA dabbles in this but not a lot. Looking to do more. CCE used to do this but doesn't really do it anymore since things were consolidated at CEDA. Still does some business planning assistance for very specific purposes (applying for a grant, for example)
- FarmNet – director is based in Tompkins but lives in Cayuga County. Uses CCE meeting space for the 15-20 transfers in the county that have been done through them.
- County Office of Tourism is working on a tourism business start-up kit.
- New York Farms – what's happening with that now? The non-profit status (*missed the terminology here*) was transferred to FL Culinary Bounty.
- Finger Lakes Grants Information Center is run by the chamber and is a good resource for businesses to find grants.
- SWCD used to do an ag tour every year, had low attendance. Thinking of starting up again. Cayuga Milk Ingredients could be a good draw. County Tourism office does an annual "Familiarization Tour" for people involved in tourism
- Farm Bureau has field trip money but not a lot of schools are taking advantage of it.
- BOCES coordinates meetings with supervisors, principles, workshops major policies coming from the state, etc. Common Core is a problem-solving model, so will be GOOD for agriculture in that it can provide opportunities for applied learning.
- Cornell needs to focus/ rethink Ag-in-the-Classroom
- Creating a new ag festival would be difficult, maybe it would be better to take existing events and enhance the agricultural/local food presence at them.
- The county could create a single online portal, heavily marketed, that would collate all ag resources and information in the entire county. Would be a cooperative, or a joint effort. CEDA and others provide resources for farmers and ag-businesses but it does not currently target its marketing to those groups.
- Food-to-restaurant: find another model
- Launch a buy local campaign – Chamber is planning to do this beginning in Summer of 2014. Planning to be similar to the Syracuse First campaign, with an obvious ag focus.

- New NYSDAM commissioner is interested in pushing farm access to new markets.
- Work with Culinary Bounty/Pride of New York to get restaurants/schools to advertise locally-sourced foods.
- Idea of an agricultural economic specialist – CEDA is moving in this direction. This person could help connect up new farm businesses with similar existing ones.
- Small scale food production – how to facilitate this?
 - SUNY Morrisville: hear some good things, some not so good
 - There are existing commercial kitchens in the county, so that is not needed
 - What’s really needed is to help make connections between new enterprises and old ones that can help (an ag economic specialist could facilitate this)
- Slaughterhouses- Farm Bureau and NYSDAM advocacy. To finally address the shortage of processing facilities, 12 counties in the north country formed a trucking co-op that sends its meat to a facility in Lancaster, PA. Must be costly to do this.
- The big problem with Ag Education is that it is not mandated by the state, so it gets lost in the budget cuts. There is some space in the middle school curriculum for ag education.
- CCE can create an Agriculture Resource Toolkit for teachers, maybe even do two, one for general education and one for ag educators (*or one for younger kids and one for high school students?*). Could work with schools to adopt the toolkits.
- School bids – bid is for items like bread and milk, not for fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Need a local volume
 - Could there be easier economic avenues for farmers? Wouldn’t this be a lot of effort for relatively little benefit? Have to also consider the educational benefits for the children and the general public educational benefits of these types of connections, as well as possible health benefits and the overall benefits to the local economy
 - Will Calandro (produce wholesaler in Auburn) use local food in aggregate?

Dairy and Field Crops Focus Group Notes

Feb 19, 2014

10 Attendees

Shouldn't give up property rights

Regulations

- There are layers of regulations. For example, when you want to clear out a ditch. It took 1.5 years for one participant to go through the process of getting permission to get one ditch cleared out.
- It gets complicated if you're involved in government support programs, if you've gotten government grant money or loans.
- Gas field development could be a game-changer of it's ever allowed.

Neighbor conflicts

- One participant recounted a conflict with his neighbor about the location of a fence. Even though it was on his property and didn't violate local ordinances, etc., the neighbor felt it was too close to his residence.
- Manure spreading causes problems with residential neighbors, who don't like the smell. It has led to bad feelings. The question was posed whether anyone gives notice in advance of spreading, which others in a different focus group had said worked well for them, but no one in this group said that they do that.
- Some participants do coordinate spraying with neighboring farmers, particularly when there were conventional fields next to organic ones, or cash crop fields next to orchards. Group discussed the benefits and limitations of buffers, horizontal and vertical buffers. Also, how spray can drift several fields down before it settles.

Zoning/subdivision/site plan issues

- None identified. The farmers could do pretty much what they need or want to do without local government interference. Some towns don't have zoning at all, some have it but it doesn't affect their ag-related activities.
- There have been some subdivision activity going on, mostly in the north and southeastern areas of the county. Some relatively small parcel with a farmhouse on it, around 20-50 acres, aren't getting farmed. Someone buys up that property, subdivides the house off, then sells the acreage to a farmer and the house to a separate buyer. At least one participant expressed disapproval of this practice, stating that farmhouses should stay with the farmland as a single unit.

One attendee posed the question, "Is the ag exemption worth keeping?" Based on a conversation about the tax burden that the participant had with a farmer a few days prior.

- It depends on the town. If there are a lot of farms in a town, then there is less of a benefit to the tax exemption because most properties in the town would have it but the same amount of revenue would have to be raised.

- You need to keep an eye on town assessors – some do a really good job of working with farmers but others put the onus of getting the ag exemption on the farmer.

Land Prices

- The reality is that land prices are increasing all over the country.
- It's mostly bad for the new guys.
- Nationwide, there is speculation going on by entities outside the USA, international investors buying up land to later use to grow food for their native market. The nearby Plainsville Turkey Farm was bought up by Chinese investors.
- Corn prices are going down, so that will curb the high land prices. Crop insurance is also artificially increasing land values. The government is driving up the price of corn (*because of ethanol mandates, or some other reason?*).
- There is a strong demand for milk, so the big dairies have the money to buy up land. Our county is not driven by grain prices, it's driven by milk.

Why isn't there more conversion from cash crops to specialty crops? A participant made a comment about how there should be more people making this switch.

- Labor limitations. Cash crops allow you to be more self-sufficient whereas specialty crops requires more dependency on labor.
- Been doing cash crops, so focused on that. It's what we're already doing.
- There are barriers to switch over – need different equipment, new investments. We used to have a lot of snap beans but there were not enough processors. Labor costs might have also been an issue.
- Smithfield Farms – getting bought up by Chinese investors. This may be good or bad for hog farmers.

Are farms diversifying?

We're seeing more vertical integration than diversification. For example, instead of paying someone to do it, you can invest in the equipment and spread your own fertilizer. Technology is very relevant to cut costs.

Technology

- Challenge to access services because it is difficult for service providers to keep good, trained employees. The industry looks to the dealerships to keep a staff of experienced, capable technicians who know how to work with today's sophisticated machinery. Now, the equipment has gotten user-friendly enough so that operating the machines is manageable, but the barrier is maintenance and repair.
- When you buy equipment from a dealer, they set it all up for you and go over it with you to answer your questions on how to operate it, etc. If you have issues going forward, the dealer should go out to the farm and assist you. Is this an opportunity for BOCES or CCC? There's also customer service hotlines. Typically, the first year of support services is free.

Market Access – how do you get your products to market? Participant responses:

- Send to broker that sells to whoever will pay the most
- Send directly to end processor: Corn to Cargill and West NY Energy, soy to Bunge in Canada. Had some bad experiences with broker, didn't get paid. So do it myself.
- Milk (organic) – sell to Dairylea. Gets sold as Horizon organic milk
- Little feed mills have disappeared. There was a niche market for custom mixing. Barsky's still mixes for horses, chickens, backyard stuff.
- Follow Bloomberg for RFD and call to see what we can get. Pre-sell the soy. The beef goes to JBS in Souderton, PA, owned by a Brazilian company.
- Last year, soy was sold to Bunge in Ohio, base price was best. Drove it over there in his own truck and takes processed soy back to New York. Made about 10 trips (10 truckloads).
- Brokers his own, a lot goes to Genoa. Uses an independent trucker that has his own clients down south.
- A lot of corn goes to the Fulton ethanol plant
- Beef gets sent to JBS, grass-fed gets sold locally, but processing facility he had been using burned down