



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Cornell Cooperative Extension Erie County

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Taylor Scott • *4-H Educator - Urban*
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Sarah Martin • *SNAP-Ed Nutritionist for Orleans, Genesee, & Wyoming*
Unique B • *SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator*
Josephine Morrissey • *SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator*
Everett Sauter • *SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator*

CREATING HEALTHY SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES (CHSC)

Laura Corrin • *CHSC Educator*

HEALTHY COMMUNITY STORE INITIATIVE (HCSI)

Sheila Bass • *HCSI Program Manager*
Moet Grooms • *HCSI Educator*

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Judson Reid, Elizabeth Buck, Margie Lund, Lori Koenick

LAKE ERIE REGIONAL GRAPE PROGRAM

Jennifer Phillips Russo, Dr. Terry Bates, Megan Luke, Andrew
Holden, Kim Knappenberger

SWNY DAIRY, LIVESTOCK & FIELD CROPS PROGRAM

Amy Barkley, Katlyn Miller, Katie Callero, Kate McDonald
Polakiewicz

HARVEST NEW YORK - WNY

Cheryl Bilinski, Becky O'Connor, Mallory Hohl

Board President & Executive Director's Message

With most of 2025 behind us, it is time to reflect on another CCE year. A huge thank you to all of our volunteers, stakeholders, staff, community partners, and county residents, for the opportunity to work with you in a variety of capacities to share knowledge and improve our communities. In the following pages, you can read about a few highlights from the year:

- 4-H ThriveLab connected teens to food system learning in afterschool program.
- Maryvale Middle School started a garden with assistance from Creating Healthy Schools and Communities.
- SNAP Ed and Harvest NY offered food and nutritious recipes at Buffalo Saturday Academies.
- A new Master Gardener class was held in Buffalo with key partner support.
- A Farm Supper created a sense of community for area farmers.
- The Healthy Community Store Initiative engaged kids at Buffalo summer camp.

- 4-Hers educated livestock buyers about the meat quantities they purchased.
- Volunteers collected tools for Providence Farm Collective.
- Free soil testing was offered to community gardens.
- 4-H Dairy in the Classroom program wowed students at Orchard Park Middle School.
- Master Gardeners kept an eye out for emerging pests.
- Seed to Supper training blossomed into a block club establishing a garden.
- Clean Energy Hub educated people about home, business, and farm energy options.
- Taste NY connected customers to the tradition of cutting down a Christmas tree, and showed how local food connects to local pride at UB Men's basketball game.
- Regional agriculture specialists helped to troubleshoot farm problems and supported best management practices on Erie County farms.
- 4-H poultry show was held at new CCE Erie pavilion at Burton Road property.

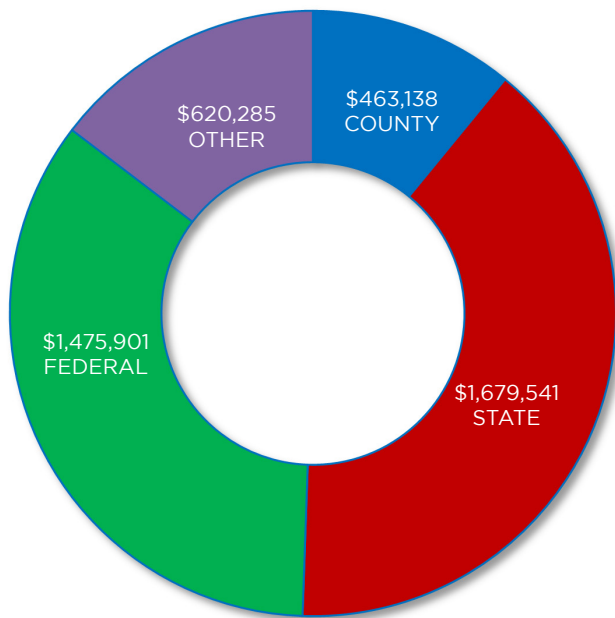
CCE Board President, Brett Kreher



Executive Director, Diane Held



ESTIMATE OF 2025 OPERATIONS FUNDING



COUNTY

Appropriation	\$ 453,138	
Grants & Contracts	\$ 10,000	
Total County	\$ 463,138	11%

STATE

County Law 224	\$ 70,000	
Grants	\$ 566,354	
Fringe Benefits	\$ 1,043,187	
Total State	\$ 1,679,541	39.5%

FEDERAL

Smith-Lever	\$ 41,606	
SNAP Education	\$ 1,234,965	
Grants & Contracts	\$ 199,330	
Total Federal	\$ 1,475,901	35%

OTHER SOURCES

Grants & Contracts	\$ 56,559	
Specialist Contract Support	\$ 12,968	
Enrollment & Program Fees	\$ 21,590	
Contributions	\$ 24,780	
Fundraising (incl. 4-H Market Sale)	\$ 462,788	
Interest & Miscellaneous	\$ 41,600	
Total Other Sources	\$ 620,285	14.5%

TOTAL OPERATIONS FUNDING

\$ 4,238,865

AGRICULTURE

CCE Erie agricultural educators and specialists provide research-supported training and technical assistance to established and beginning farmers with a wide range of operations: small to large, urban to rural, organic to conventional. The association enrolls in three regional agriculture teams: the Cornell Vegetable Program, Lake Erie Regional Grape Program, and the Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Program. Enrollment in these teams gives Erie County farmers access to 16 highly skilled specialists in the areas of dairy, livestock, field crops, vegetables, grapes, and agriculture business management.

The CCE agriculture teams provide cutting edge research and education to Erie County's 918 farms, operating on 141,829 acres with a total market value of \$843,765,000 (land, equipment, machinery) and annually generating over \$192 million for the local economy (USDA 2022 Ag Census). Erie County's \$54,000 investment in supporting agriculture through CCE leverages \$1.6 million in Extension and applied agriculture research programs critical to the success of farms in Erie County. This represents only 0.03% of the value of the county's ag industry per year, a small investment to ensure the growth and profitability of the food industry that is vital to put food on resident's tables and is also an important economic engine in the county!

Supporting Opportunities for New Americans

As a child, Mr. Ali dreamed of going to the United States to start a farm. He immigrated in 1969 to escape years of violence in his home country. After 10 years of working multiple jobs, Mr. Ali saved enough for the down payment on his farm in Alden. He purchased the farm and began a successful livestock operation raising chickens, goats, sheep, and cattle for meat. Now, in his 80s, Mr. Ali is ready to slow down. None of his children want to farm. In just a few weeks, he will sell his farm to Agrarian Trust, a land trust. Agrarian Trust will place a conservation easement on the property before it ultimately transfers to the Somali Bantu Community Organization (SBCO), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that serves the Somali Bantu people who immigrated to Buffalo to escape political turmoil, civil war, and persecution.

CCE Erie has been working with the SBCO and Mr. Ali since 2022. Like so many immigrants, Mr. Ali and Somali Bantu community members came to Buffalo in search of safety and stability. Their stories are embodiments of the American Dream, the idea that anyone can achieve

success in the United States through hard work and determination. Rooted in principles of freedom and equal opportunity, SBCO members and Mr. Ali have rewritten the future for their children by having the courage to leave everything behind for a chance at a better life.

Agriculture / Horticulture

13 Classes
9 Volunteers
90 Volunteer Hours
483 Direct Contacts
238,382 Indirect
Contacts

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*

Farm Supper Sows Open-Hearted Conversation and Connection for WNY Community

On August 27th, the sun was shining and cool breeze stirred at Groundwork Market Garden. Members of the WNY farming community gathered at this Buffalo urban farm for an evening of breaking bread.

Cornell Small Farms Program's idea of a Farm Supper was experimental, and this first iteration was brought to fruition through collaboration with CCE Erie. The partnership was energizing and easeful. Members of the planning team shared their gifts and connections to:

- Find a site.
- Develop a list of invitees from farms of different sizes, enterprises, and maturity.
- Procure locally grown and made food and drink.
- Design a program that encouraged participants to settle in then reflect, share, and listen open-heartedly.

Overlooking high tunnels teeming with neat, tall rows of tomatoes and field beds of young greens and roots for fall harvest, approximately 25 farmers, four CCE Erie staff, and 11 Cornell Small Farms and statewide extension staff convened in small groups. Seated at tables of six to eight, farmers and staff alike listened attentively to understand rather than to solve or fix. Participants shared as much

as they felt comfortable about the sweetness and bitterness of what they are facing this year. The air held the sincerity of laughter and vulnerability of tears.

As the sun set, participants expressed their gratitude for the Farm Supper and how the event met a need or craving for community connection and care that can be challenging to articulate or make time for, especially amidst the farm season.

“ I found both the challenges and opportunities shared by table guests to be genuine and from the heart and while not everyone was facing the same issues, everyone felt comfortable sharing their experience and connecting with each other....I believe everyone felt heard and respected, which allowed folks to be vulnerable and open with each other, even though most of us were strangers before the dinner.” – Garrett Quade, Program Coordinator, Cornell Small Farms Program



Photo: Kacey Deamer, Cornell Small Farms Program – Location is Groundwork Market Garden, Buffalo, NY

Country Pine Farm

The Western NY Welcome Center's Taste NY Program is about more than showcasing products—it's about connecting visitors to the traditions and people that shape our region. This year, we were honored to participate in Commissioner Ball's annual tree cutting ceremony at Country Pine Farm in Holland, NY. The tree, which stood tall at our Welcome Center, isn't just a symbol of the holiday season—it's a living story of Western New York agriculture. By sharing educational materials about the farm and the importance of the tree industry, we're able to highlight the hardworking growers who make these traditions possible.

Guests don't just see a decorated tree; they learn where it came from, who cared for it, and why buying local matters. The ceremony and display embody our mission to celebrate agriculture and support local businesses, while sparking curiosity and pride in visitors who carry that story home. What begins as a holiday decoration

becomes a powerful reminder of how deeply rooted our communities are in farming—and how Taste NY helps keep those roots strong.

“A locally grown Christmas tree at the WNY Welcome Center is much more than just a decoration—it's a symbol of local support, sustainability, and community pride, and an educational opportunity. It enhances the holiday atmosphere and helps create a positive, lasting impression for everyone who visits! We are so excited and proud to be able to showcase an impressive NYS Grown & Certified Fraser fir from Country Pine Farms this year!” – Molly Vigrass, Taste NY Market Manager at the Western New York Welcome Center



Commissioner Ball loading the tree. Photo: Moly Vigrass

UB Basketball

When Taste NY took center stage at a University at Buffalo Bulls men's basketball game in January, it wasn't just about sharing samples—it was about showing thousands of fans how local food connects to community pride. Our table in the concession area became a gathering place where visitors could taste the flavors of Western New York, learn about local producers, and discover products they might not have otherwise encountered.

The gift basket raffle and on-court recognition sparked excitement, but the deeper win was introducing a new audience to the value of supporting local farms and businesses. By being present in a space dedicated to energy, teamwork, and tradition, Taste NY highlighted that agriculture is part of the same community spirit that fills the stands.

From the radio interview to playful moments with Victor E. Bull, we were able to weave the story of New York's growers and makers into an unforgettable experience. The night wasn't just a game—it was a celebration of local agriculture's role in fueling our communities, proving that Taste NY can make local food a part of everyday life, everywhere.



Molly with signed game ball. Photo: Molly Vigrass



Patrick at Taste NY table. Photo: Moly Vigrass

Taste NY

23,196 Customers
315 Total Vendors
175 Current Vendors
900 Products

GARDEN-BASED LEARNING

The mission of the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Master Gardener Program is to prepare peer educators who interact with community audiences to share local experience and research-based knowledge in support of gardens, lawns and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship. Master Gardener Program volunteers provide programs and resources for adult and youth populations. Our Erie County Extension Association works with the Ithaca-based Cornell Cooperative Extension Garden Based Learning program to offer this volunteer training to local residents who are interested in serving their communities to provide sustainable focused horticulture education. Throughout the year local volunteers staff a hotline answering garden and pest questions, help community members diagnose horticultural problems, offer educational workshops on current gardening topics, and host an annual spring plant sale.

Seed to Supper Training Blossoms into Garden

After taking the Seed to Supper training on low-cost gardening on a budget in mid-February with CCE Erie and Cornell Garden Based Learning, Gina from Jes Breathe Block Club offered the classes for her friends, church and neighborhood in March and April. Plans were made for a garden. The garden beds were secured quickly thanks to support from CCE Educator, Laura Corrin, who is part of a grant called Creating Healthy Communities and Schools.

Then everyone patiently waited a few months to make sure we had the proper approvals from the City to Buffalo to build the beds and establish a garden.

Approval was gained in July with the garden planting taking place on August 8th. The garden planting was supported by the neighborhood with three generations from one of the families lending a hand.

Seed packets cost \$0.25 and by early August kale, carrots and radishes went in the ground. Gina also received the plants used at the Master Gardener Erie County fair display. Herbs, yummy!

Two heads of garlic from a local farmers' market were planted this fall. Soil was donated by a nursery in the City. So far plants for this garden have cost less than \$5!

A harvest party for all involved was held in mid-October. It's been a joy to watch Gina work with her friends and

neighbors adding a food garden to their neighborhood and see the seeds of garden education grow!



Garden planting on August 8th. Photo: S. Bachman

Master Gardener Volunteers

106 Volunteers
4,522 Volunteer Hours
2,518 Direct Contacts
**275,106 Indirect
Contacts**

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*

Master Gardener Volunteer Training Class of 2025

From late June to late September, CCE Erie hosted its first new Master Gardener Volunteer training fully in the City of Buffalo. The process started in January with a survey of urban partners to determine when and where CCE Erie could host the training. We found long-term and emerging CCE partners to host locations in the city.

The training reached a diversity of people with varied skillsets, from a trained landscape architect, to project managers, college professors, those carrying on the legacy of the first food forest in the City of Buffalo on public lands, to those who just have a passion to bring local and healthy foods to their neighbors. Our speakers included experts from Cornell as well as a number of partners from the city of Buffalo working in areas such as composting, urban landscapes, and permaculture.

We sought to represent the breadth of our partnerships within the city. Relationships have been formed among the 22 class members who plan to devote volunteer time with those who came into the training with existing or planned gardening/permaculture projects. The training reinforced for these new volunteers the mission of serving as an extension of our agriculture and horticulture staff, allowing CCE Erie staff to expand our outreach even further

and reaching partners we might not otherwise have time to serve.

At the conclusion of the class, class members presented their final projects. These serve to help define next steps as they become more active in our program. With one of our host partners, a next step will be to partner with CCE Erie to train Cornell Climate Stewards, adding additional knowledge and skills to volunteers working with Extension to provide education on environmental stewardship.



CCE Erie Master Gardener Training Class in July after an activity with Buffalo Olmsted Parks. Photo: Jeanne Sebesta <jeanne@bfloparks.org>

Volunteers Collect Tools for Providence Farm Collective

On May 6, 2025, Master Gardener Volunteers and CCE Erie Cornell Climate Stewards from the Town of Aurora Climate Action Taskforce and other community members collected gently used tools for donation to Providence Farm Collective (PFC). Providence Farm is a nonprofit based in Orchard Park dedicated to empowering under-resourced communities by providing education and access to rural farmland.

Between hoes, shovels, rakes, hand tools, and gloves, approximately 80 items were collected and are now in use at the farm.

This effort to collect materials came about when a Master Gardener volunteer saw a staff person from PFC during a late winter garden show and asked how they could help. A great example of our Extension Volunteers making a difference in our community!



Photo provided by Providence Farm Collective.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Our Natural Resource program supports private land and community forestry projects as well as ag and consumer energy and climate initiatives. The benefits of trees are well documented. Studies show that trees improve air and water quality, intercept stormwater, reduce building heating and cooling costs, increase property values and improve the quality of life for people and wildlife. Areas with trees create a sense of community, provide a space for people to gather and contribute to overall well-being. Our energy programs provide the end user, whether commercial or residential, with a better understanding of their energy usage, and helps them to evaluate potential energy technology upgrades to increase efficiency and save money. Cornell Climate Steward Program trains volunteers to help their communities respond to changing environmental conditions.

Natural Resource Staff and Master Gardener Volunteers Continue to Assist the Public in Keeping a Lookout for Emerging Pests

In the space of a week in late August, we received three possible reports of an emerging invasive pest in our area. One was a red and black moth: a potential spotted lanternfly a distance from the known infestation in Erie County. The second contact was concerned about some ailing oak trees on Grand Island. The arborist thought this might be oak wilt. And finally, a landscape professional was concerned about a potential invasive grass.

Thankfully we worked with these contacts and determined what they were seeing was not the invasive pest or pathogen suspected. In each case, we worked with our Cornell contacts or aligned agency professionals to determine what was going on.



A Scarlet Underwing moth
Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org.

The red and black moth was a red underwing moth. Similar characteristics, but definitely not the spotted lanternfly that folks are encouraged to squish on sight.

On the ailing oaks, the NYS DEC Forest Health team suggested Tubakia or a similar leaf spot. They also provided easy maintenance steps the homeowner could take to protect the health of their trees. The forester noted that usually these diseases are just aesthetic and do not seriously stress the tree, and that the trees will most likely bounce back on their own.

The suspected invasive grass, Kikuyugrass, a grassy perennial weed that can form thick mats with stems that can grow up to a 1" a day was instead confirmed by Cornell IPM to be escaped ornamental grass plants from nearby planting beds.

Our MG volunteer hotline is a great resource for the public to contact and help determine what is happening when an unusual insect or pest is observed in our area.



Ornamental grass and nearby escaped plants.
Photo: Randy Prostak.

Building Energy Awareness: The Western New York Clean Energy Hub's 2025 Initiatives

The Western New York Clean Energy Hub continued its efforts in educating Erie County residents about energy in their homes, businesses, and farms this year. This included continued use of Save Energy, Save Dollars and similar presentations in community centers, along with the delivery of associated DIY energy kits. Attendees developed an understanding of residential energy across several disciplines, including building science, personal finance, and current state and local policies. This program is not limited by age or location, and additional sites are always welcomed.

Staff have also prioritized the inclusion of new intersections between energy and Cooperative Extension materials. These include structural pest information from Integrated Pest Management, home-based emergency preparedness information from EDEN, and indoor environmental health resources from the School of Public Health. Since the opening of the Sustainable Workforce Training Center associated with the Hub, additional efforts have been made to directly educate contractors and retailers about

NYSERDA programs, including the dryer and electrical panel Appliance Upgrade Program and the dual fuel heat pump Clean Heat Program.

While Clean Energy Hub staff continue to focus on education, enrollment of businesses and residences directly into NYSERDA programs remains a priority. Changes in funding allocations, new priorities at the NYS and federal levels, and regular developments of internal requirements make applications difficult for many would-be energy-efficient homes. These changes require staff to be prepared for more direct one-on-one work with Erie County residents, helping prepare application materials and advising directly about the status of need in the home.

These home visits are especially important, as right-sizing heating and cooling equipment and addressing whole-home energy concerns are difficult topics to learn over the phone and often carry emotional weight. Hub staff are looking to 2026 to see more effective planning for home-based energy decisions and targeted education surrounding manufactured homes.

Natural Resources

6 Classes
20 Volunteers
100 Volunteer Hours
108 Direct Contacts
200,500 Indirect Contacts

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*



Josh Randall, Natural Resources Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension Niagara County.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The 4-H Program gives young people ages 5 to 18 hands-on experiences to teach them leadership, citizenship, and life skills by working with volunteers, youth organizations, and school districts to put research-based knowledge to work. The 4-H Program has served Erie County for over 100 years by bringing high quality, experiential learning opportunities to youth related to: agriculture and life sciences, civic engagement, healthy living, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Beyond the Bid: Visualizing Meat Cuts with 4-H Youth

How much will I get? A question that our 4-H members receive when soliciting bidders for the market auction. To help 4-H youth understand, we developed a meat display showcasing the cuts and amount of meat that will be received from the processor.

4-H youth and volunteers worked together to research and cut out all the cuts that could come from a steer, lamb, goat and hog. Youth learned about the cuts and then wrapped each cut in butcher paper to create a visual of the entire package buyers can plan to receive for their freezers.

4-H
Livestock
290 Volunteers
1,300 Volunteer Hours
4,405 Contacts at
Education Programs
626,256 Indirect
Contacts

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*

“Wonderful display, now I know how much freezer space I need to have for my purchases!” – Market Auction Buyer



Photos : JoAnne DePue.



A Year of Change and Connection in Erie County 4-H

This year was a year of new opportunities and growth in 4-H Youth Development. The arrival of a new educator could have been difficult, but everyone stepped up to help with this transition. As a team, educators and volunteers ensured that we could continue to provide quality programming to the youth of Erie County.

It has been an exciting program year full of new activities and traditional workshops and challenges with new twists. In this period of change and growth, we've made new connections to adults and youth. We've established a connection with the Orchard Park Middle School, which is a significant addition to our Dairy in the Classroom (DITC) program. Over the course of three days in May, we visited around 300 youth! We educated these students on how butter is made and had them experience the process as well as use their butter to make baked goods in lessons following our DITC visit.

In addition to educating all these students, interested teachers at Orchard Park Middle School have also requested to become 4-H volunteers. We value these new connections and the expansion of our 4-H community.

For our seasoned volunteers, we've encouraged them to join committees, become evaluators, and step into positions of leadership. Our team of educators remains committed to empowering those who are interested in these opportunities to pursue them.



CCE Erie 4-H Educators: Top l-r, Caitlin Riley, Sara Jablonski, Tammi Kron; Bottom l-r, Nandini Agarwal, Taylor Scott Photo: Diane Held.

“

It is amazing that the Extension offers programs which can help support teachers and provide such unique experiences to students.”- Val Velasquez, Orchard Park Middle School

4-H Club/Independent

235 Volunteers
1,953 Volunteer Hours
1,655 Contacts at
Education
Programs



Orchard Park Middle students transformed the butter they made into buttercream frosting and other treats. Photo: Caitlin Riley.

Youth CAN Expands in Erie County

We are excited to be able to continue and scale up our signature teen leadership program called the 4-H Youth Community Action Network (Youth CAN). Thanks to various funding sources, we will be able to offer this program to more schools in Buffalo and Lackawanna. With some of the groups, we are focusing on food systems education and action through a program called ThriveLab. Teens are taking local field trips to learn more about food and farming in Erie County then carrying out projects to improve their communities.

As part of our summer workforce development program, 11 teens traveled to the NYS Fair via Amtrak to speak with the Deputy Commissioner of NYS Ag & Markets. The teens presented their research and opinions on priority issues they identified, including food safety, increasing food prices, and climate change.

“What stands out for me about the summer was that I found it fun helping at the garden and eating healthy food.” – 4-H teen participant

4-H Urban

16 Volunteers
28 Volunteer Hours
2,092 Contacts at
Education Programs



4-H teen leaders in the 4-H Youth Development Building at the NY State Fair after presenting their research on key food system issues. Photo: Sara Jablonski.

NUTRITION AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County is invested in helping people make healthy food and activity choices. SNAP Education (SNAP Ed), Healthy Community Store Initiative (HCSI), and Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) are all housed within a growing portfolio of Cornell Cooperative Extension's work. Our programs strive to increase access to fresh, healthy foods, develop confidence in safely planning, shopping for and preparing nourishing meals, increase understanding of the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle, and more. Our work is based in the community, targets traditionally under-resourced areas and people, and much of it aims to reduce the structural barriers to healthy living and reframe how we attain a healthy Erie County.

A Year of Growth and Transition for SNAP-Ed

October 2024 started out extremely positive for SNAP Ed as this was the first year of a 5 year grant cycle. The team hired two additional nutrition educators in Erie County, one in Niagara County, and brought in CCE Genesee as a full subcontractor with a new nutritionist there too.

The first quarter of the year included training of new staff while planning for new workshops with our existing staff.

As staff were trained SNAP-Ed partnered with Harvest NY and BPS community schools to table at Saturday Academies during the 24/25 school year. Harvest NY obtained and facilitated a grant to provide free farmer markets for the Buffalo community and partnered with community schools to offer these as a part of the well-known Saturday Academies program. SNAP-Ed offered food demonstrations and recipes using the foods distributed through the free markets. Over the 24/25 fiscal year, we participated in over 40 markets.

As summer started we learned the federal funding for the SNAP Education program will not continue into the next financial year starting October 2025.

In New York State, unspent funds from FY2025 will allow us to gradually wind down programs and continue supporting communities with the resources and staff we still have. Programming will begin to look different across the State. We remain committed to educating, supporting, and strengthening efforts around food, nutrition, and physical activity. We are continuing to search for other funding opportunities, and talking with partners, in efforts to continue this impactful work.



Group photo of regional staff at SNAP Ed conference in Albany May 2025. Photo: Xyricka Ferry.

Regional SNAP-Ed

2,023 Classes
10,856 Direct Contacts
232,756 Indirect
Contacts

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*

From Garden to Table: Expanding Food Access at Maryvale

In May 2024, teachers who have operated the Maryvale Middle School Food Pantry since 2022 were driven to provide healthier food options for their students and families. With limited funding from the Maryvale district, the teachers reached out to Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) proposing a school garden to supplement the pantry.

Fortunately the CHSC grant was able to provide essential support. After many months of careful planning, a thriving garden was established directly behind the school pantry in 2024. The project was a true community effort, with students, staff, local volunteers, gardeners, and landscapers coming together to build and care for the garden weekly.

Now, over a year later, the garden is providing fresh produce—lettuce, kale, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, garlic,

onions, strawberries, and more—to more than 60 students and families each week. Maryvale educators Kelli and Nicole have also integrated gardening education into the 6th-grade science curriculum, encouraging students to get involved. To help students try new foods, garden tastings are offered seasonally at the pantry. Additionally, Erie 1 BOCES, our CHSC partners added lettuce towers to the science room, complementing the outdoor garden.

This grant initiative has become a model of collaboration and sustainability, demonstrating the powerful impact of community effort in providing nutritious food access. The Maryvale School Pantry Garden implementation perfectly reflects the goals of the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities grant—producing meaningful, nutritious, and lasting change.



Photos by Kelli Cookfair and Nicole Floss, educators at Maryvale Middle School in Cheektowaga NY.

CHSC

3 Early Childhood
Education Sites
4 Food Pantries/
Community Sites
2 Work Sites

Full Circle Opportunity

“Full Circle” best describes the success of the Healthy Community Store Initiative (HCSI) engagement with a group of 5th and 6th-graders at the First Shiloh Youth Foundation (FSYF) STEAM Discovery Camp. The FSYF Board of Directors President invited HCSI to participate in a six-week youth camp focused on various topics, including healthy food access. FSYF President was also a former HCSI strategic planning committee member in 2015.

Each week, participants engaged in group activities and were assigned a specific topic aligned with the HCSI 5 Phases (Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Healthy Beverages, Healthy Snacks, Whole Grains, and Packaged Produce). After each education session, they were encouraged to engage in a food demonstration and activity. A highlight of the camp was the participation of students volunteering to lead activities that involved sharing information with the group. The group worked in teams to create a “big production” project—a survey about healthy food access. One youth, Kayden, led the teams to develop a 5-question survey. Some of the questions he crafted to encourage youth participation included: “Do you know that what you eat can impact or affect your health?”; “Do you know that eating fruits and vegetables is important for a healthy body?”; and “If the store closest to your house carries healthier food, would you buy it?”

Throughout the camp, the youth learned about healthy food access and the importance of advocacy—aiming to raise awareness and promote best practices for building a healthy community. Designated HCSI trained Youth Advocates were responsible for presenting and sharing information with the younger camp participants, specifically 3rd and 4th-graders. The adapted train-the-trainer model proved highly effective, with HCSI also engaging the younger camp group in a workshop.

Youth recognized that creating a healthier environment should extend into their homes and community for the greatest impact. The STEAM Camp Program Coordinator, Lisa Queener, a former HCSI trained Adult Advocate, shared positive feedback from the youth experiences in the HCSI series. She shared a comment from a parent whose child

participated in the HCSI series, “My son was so excited about what he learned. He told me when we get groceries, we have to buy more healthy stuff now.”

The experience represented a full-circle moment, illustrating the success resulting from our strong partnerships and the Healthy Community Store Initiative’s commitment to community impact.



FSYF STEAM Discovery Camp HCSI series. Photo by S. Bass.

HCSI

44 Events
1,341 Direct Contacts
400,628 Indirect
Contacts

**Indirect contacts refers to media and outreach.*

REGIONAL TEAMS

Harvest New York is an innovative Cornell Cooperative Extension team, funded by New York State that focuses on development projects in the farm and food industries of rural and urban New York.

HARVEST NY - Urban Gardens

Urban soils are often heavily contaminated due to historical industrial activities at many sites. Community gardens, which transform vacant lots into multi-purpose, productive spaces, play a vital role in growing not only food for the community, but plants that serve a variety of ecosystem services. However, when communities consume produce grown in these soils, they may be exposed to harmful contaminants such as lead, and other heavy metals without knowing. Because these gardens are often run by non-profits or volunteers with limited funding, expensive soil testing is rarely prioritized over immediate operational needs. Yet, it is crucial for community growers to understand what's in their soil, not only to identify contamination risks, but also to prevent environmental harm from excess fertilizer use and nutrient runoff. Soil testing also empowers gardeners to improve soil health, make informed decisions about where and how to grow, and ultimately increase yields.

Soil testing plays a critical role in supporting the growth and expansion of community gardens by ensuring the safety and health of the food they produce. To make this essential service more accessible, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Harvest NY, partnering with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (AGM) and the Cornell Soil Health Lab, launched a no-cost soil testing program for food-producing gardens across New York State. The program combines soil analysis for heavy metals and nutrient levels with technical support and education provided by CCE Harvest NY's Urban Garden Specialists. Additionally, the simplified application process, approachable eligibility criteria, and intentional program

marketing has contributed to its 2025 success thus far. Since its launch in March of this year, nearly 300 gardeners have participated, far surpassing the initial goal of 100 in 2025. Program lead Mallory Hohl, CCE Harvest NY urban garden specialist, has also advocated for the option of a Shipping Kit for growers, which eliminates the barrier of a grower-funded shipping cost to send the soil to the lab, a program perk that hundreds of participants have taken advantage of.

Thanks to strong partnerships with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Cornell Soil Health Lab, this program is available to gardeners statewide. Statewide, this program boasts participation from more than half the counties in NYS and continues to expand.



Photo provided by Harvest NY.

REGIONAL TEAMS

Cornell Vegetable Program (CVP) is a partnership between Cornell University and CCE Associations in these counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Niagara, Ontario, Orleans, Oswego, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, and Yates.

CVP

Following are ag projects and technical assistance conducted throughout the CVP fourteen county region. Some of the work was done in multiple locations/counties and is part of the team's regionalized approach to programming.

- ❁ 65 urban and small-scale growers and agricultural service providers gathered in Rochester for a hands-on soil health field day, a collaboration between Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) and numerous other entities. The event was a part of the 2025 Soil Health and Climate Resilience Field Days series from New York Soil Health. Attendees came from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, and surrounding areas for a half day of learning, connection, and skill sharing.
- ❁ Cornell Integrated Pest Management (IPM), Cornell University's Department of Entomology, and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), with support from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, have launched the largest on-farm field research and extension project in program history. The project is designed to better understand, identify, and support the transition away from neonicotinoid insecticide seed treatments in conjunction with the New York State Birds and Bees Protection Act. Growers from more than 80 farms across New York State are participating in the trials, which aim to determine where and when there is a significant risk of pest damage; aid in the development and deployment of a seed pest risk assessment tool; and test and demonstrate IPM alternatives, including the viability of not using insecticide seed treatments.
- ❁ Cornell Vegetable Program specialists support WNY urban vegetable growers' implementation of best management practices in soil management using science from Cornell faculty.
- ❁ Using lessons learned from working with growers this dry season to provide more guidance on irrigation efficiencies, figuring costs of irrigation, and looking at technology to provide new tools to better aid growers ahead of future conditions like this growing season.
- ❁ 2025 Niagara Region Summer Meeting in Ransomville in August. Forty WNYers, from next generation growers in their first years to producers with five decades of experience, from industry members to university professors, came to share a meal with their vegetable community and to learn new knowledge and skills to improve their farms' performance.
- ❁ Collaborating with a 2-acre urban farm in Erie County to investigate effects of cover cropping on urban soils and crop health by cover cropping to build soil health in the farm's caterpillar tunnels.



Margie Lund, CVP Potato and Dry Bean Specialist, speaking on new Colorado potato beetle control recommendations and late blight prevention at the Erie summer meeting hosted by Marty and Caroline Rosiek in Brant, NY on 7/24/2025.

REGIONAL TEAMS

Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Program (SWNYDLFC) is a partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in these five counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Steuben.

SWNYDLFC

Following are ag projects and technical assistance conducted throughout the SWNYDLFC five county region. Some of the work was done in multiple locations/counties and is part of the teams regionalized approach to programming.

- ❁ A new corn disease, known as corn stunt, was identified this fall in four New York counties, including Erie County. The identification of this disease was made possible through the strong working relationship between our region's farmers, bringing together local and statewide experts to address the issue.
- ❁ There are often regulation changes and requirements that are implemented quickly and quietly—causing anxiety and stress for farm business owners. One such requirement was for LLC businesses to file with the Department of Treasury. Our team shared information to farms through emails, paper mailings, and in individual conversations about this change.
- ❁ The team in collaboration with Southern Tier West, the NYS Department of Labor (DOL), and farmer and processor partners has received approval of the trade, “Butcher”, the fourth agricultural apprenticeship program in the history of the NYS DOL. This will increase livestock processing capacity in WNY and across the state
- ❁ Five regional farms, one in Erie County, representing nine corn and soybean fields are participating in the statewide neonic project, the largest on-farm research and demonstration project in Cornell Integrated Pest Management's history. There are 80 fields on the project state-wide. Over the next three years, the team will be implementing study plots and taking samples from these fields to help determine where and when there is a significant risk of seedcorn maggot pest damage, aid in the development of a seed pest

risk assessment tool, and test and demonstrate IPM alternatives, including the viability of not using insecticide treatments. This work is a proactive step to support New York's growers as they prepare for the transition away from neonicotinoid seed treatments mandated by the Birds and Bees Protection Act, which will come into effect in 2029.

- ❁ Katie Callero provided a farmer with key workforce resources, including connection to Cornell's Agricultural Workforce Development team and access to future bilingual training opportunities. She also shared Spanish-language materials to help strengthen on-farm training and communication.
- ❁ Over 125 farmers and ag service providers attended the 2025 Stockmanship and Stewardship event at the Erie County fairgrounds in October. This event brought in nationally renowned speakers who discussed topics including industry trends, the national BQA quality audit results, facility designs, and a live cattle low stress handling demonstration.



Photo provided by SWNYDLFC.

REGIONAL TEAMS

Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (LERGP) is a cooperative program between Cornell and Penn State Universities, Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations in Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Erie, and Niagara Counties, and Penn State Extension – Erie County, PA.

LERGP

Following are ag projects and technical assistance conducted throughout the five county region (in NY and PA). Some of the work was done in multiple locations/counties and is part of the team's regionalized approach to programming.

- ✿ Continued the popular Coffee Pot meetings which were started years ago to connect with local growers to address their needs during the growing season. These meetings are typically hosted by grape growers in the region who are willing to invite the group into their barn/garage. LERGP brings coffee, donuts, the latest research information, and re-certification credits.
- ✿ Annual grape growers conference in March included navigating times of financial and economic turbulence, managing risk & remaining profitable, the latest research-based production tools and IPM tools, the latest on spotted lanternfly, and pesticide recertification credits.
- ✿ Collaborated on research on grapevine cold hardiness and phenology, and on a webinar to demonstrate the Grape Cold Hardiness Risk Assessment Tool.
- ✿ Pesticide sprayer calibration services and coverage



Photo provided by LERGP.

demonstrations to growers continued.

- ✿ LERGP has become a significant presence at all regional and national meetings and research regarding spotted lanternfly due to the risks to the Lake Erie region.
- ✿ Held program: NYS DOT Regulations for Farm Trucks & Equipment at the Cornell Lake Erie Research and Extension Laboratory in Portland, NY. This was a free program. Topics discussed included: Defining a Commercial Motor Vehicle, Licensing and Registrations, Rules of the Road, Size and Weights (permits), and Equipment.
- ✿ Collaborated with NASA Acres and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) on a mission set to transform how grape growers monitor and manage vineyards. This summer, NASA aircraft captured detailed imagery across thousands of acres of Cornell research farms. Detailed imagery from NASA enables precision agriculture practices at an unprecedented level. Growers can fine-tune irrigation, fertilization, and pest control to cut costs, boost sustainability, and improve vineyard health and yield.



Photo provided by LERGP.

CAPITAL PROJECT - BURTON ROAD

CCE Erie's Headquarters Campus Update

2025: Constructed a pavilion and shed that can be used for educational meetings and events. In July, the 4-H Poultry show was held here. Received site plan approval from the Town of Orchard Park for construction of the educational/office building. The Board of Directors is currently assessing next steps in the build out of the campus.



Burton Road pavilion and shed. Photo by Diane Held.



4-H Poultry show at the Burton Road pavilion. Photo by Tammi Kron.



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Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Program



**HEALTHY
COMMUNITY STORE
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**Creating Healthy
Schools &
Communities**



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