Cornell Cooperative Extension | Erie County

FALL 2025

Erie County Ag News

IN THIS ISSUE

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Contents

Follow CCE Erie on social media to receive up to date news and announcements!

Cover photo Cornell CALS, Allison Usavage

UPCOMING AGRICULTURAL EVENTS

CCE Erie Master Gardener Fall Gardening Classes

Sept 9, 17, 27 2025

Join Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County (CCE Erie) Master Gardener Program volunteers as they host three in-person Fall Gardening Classes in September 2025.

More details: https://erie.cce.cornell.edu/events/2022/09/20/master-gardener-fall-gardening-classes

2025 Cornell High-Cannabinoid Hemp Cannabis sativa Field Day

September 10, 2025

8:30 am - 6:00 pm

DEC Credits

Geneva, NY

Join us for a full day of learning and discussion, connecting and having fun! The Cornell Cannabis sativa L. (Hemp) Field Day features interactive workshops, demonstrations, and panel discussions on the latest industry advancements for New York growers and other stakeholders.

More details: https://harvestny.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=156

Organic Cover Crop & Soil Health Field Day

September 11, 2025

10am - 12pm

Hinz-Sight Dairy Farm Camp

Fillmore, NY

Please join us for a morning of hands-on learning with expert insights from local farmers, industry representatives, and extension. We will have some demonstration plots in action along with discussion about how cover crops influence soils and demonstration showing impacts on farm resiliency. Free lunch provided following field walk.

More details:https://swnydlfc.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=2623

Rochester Soil Health Field Day

September 16, 2025

2:30 PM - 6:00 PM

Foodlink Community Farm

Rochester, NY

Join us for a hands-on soil health field day! This event is for small-scale and urban growers, gardeners and farmers, with a focus on best practices for building soil health and cover cropping, and is a part of the 2025 Soil Health and Climate Resilience Field Days. It will offer valuable insights and hands-on demonstrations to enhance soil health.

More details:https://cvp.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=2082

NY FarmNet Free Webinar: Tax Advantaged Retirement Accounts for Farmers

Oct 8, 2025

1:00pm

In this webinar, we'll cover how to pick the right plan, how to qualify for tax credits, and how to start investing even if money is tight. In this webinar, we'll focus on investment strategies that are aligned with important values so you can take care of yourself, your family, and your business without breaking the bank.

More details: https://cornell.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_cMIwdVU2QD2hpnlUCqcCVA#/

Agritourism Program Work Team 2025 Monthly Webinar Series

Oct. 14, 2025: Agritourism for Christmas Tree Farms

Join the CCE Agritourism Program Work Team for webinars supporting both new and established agritourism operators.

More details: https://bit.ly/3VngowY

Niagara County Orchard Helps Grow Cornell Ag Innovation

Jacob Pucci College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

This article originally appeared in Cornell Chronicle, August 11, 2025

Bittner-Singer Orchards, a 400-acre farm in Niagara County along the shores of Lake Ontario, has been growing fruit for over a century. But what looks like your average orchard is also a site of cutting-edge Cornell research.

The orchard is owned by Jim Bittner '80, a first-generation farmer who works closely with Cornell researchers who visit the farm weekly and collaborate with him on testing new varieties, integrated pest management, weather modeling, water potential and more.

With so much commercial attention on row crops, Bittner said he and other fruit and vegetable farmers depend on university-led research for everything from combatting pests and disease to designing their farms for optimal yields and crop health.

"If we didn't have university research," Bitter said, "it wouldn't get done."

Cornell Impacting New York State

Bittner runs the farm with his sons, Kevin '04 and David Bittner, both of whom are also graduates of LeadNY, a program in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) aimed at training New York state's leaders in food and agriculture.

Bittner began his career in dairy but later pivoted to fruit. Apples are the top crop at Bittner-Singer Orchards, accounting for about half the total acreage. The other half is stone fruit, including cherries, plums, peaches, apricots and nectarines.

As are all fruits, vegetables and nuts, apples are categorized as specialty crops, as opposed to row or commodity crops such as corn, soybeans and wheat. Bittner said that because row crops account for far more total acreage than specialty crops, commercial interest and research tend to focus on the former.

By bringing research trials to farms, both growers and researchers can see how the research directly impacts their operations.

"These partnerships are tremendously important," said Terence Robinson, professor of horticulture (CALS), who has worked with Bittner on numerous trials over the years. "The implementation of the findings is much more rapid when it's done on a grower's farm."

Each July, the farm fills with visitors picking from the 50 varieties of cherries at one of the largest dwarf cherry orchards in the eastern United States. Many of the varieties Bittner grows were never formally named – leftovers of completed Cornell breeding trials. "It's one big experiment," Bittner said of his cherry orchard.

Bittner likes to say he'll "play" with any fruit varieties developed by Cornell. He's currently growing a one-acre plot of Everest Seedless grapes, bred at Cornell AgriTech in Geneva, New York, to be the first seedless Concord-style grapes ever released. The grape has proven to be a popular seller on his farm.

Bittner has also been experimenting with organic apples since the '90s. The 15-acre apple orchard has been the site of numerous Cornell-led trials over the years, including mating disruption studies to ward off codling moth. Further mating disruption studies for Oriental

Jim Bittner '80 owns Bittner-Singer Orchards, a 400-acre farm in Niagara County along the shores of Lake Ontario. Phohto by Jacob Pucci

fruit moth were so effective that Bittner prefers that method over conventional insecticides in the farm's peach orchards.

"It's economical and more effective," Bitter said, "and Cornell AgriTech proved that."

Rootstock Trials Bear Fruit

As one of the relatively few commercial organic apple growers in New York state, Bittner has been a valuable partner for the Geneva Apple Rootstock Breeding Program's goal of boosting organic production of apples, Robinson said.

A pair of rootstock trials led by Robinson and Gennaro Fazio, a plant breeder and research geneticist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service Plant Genetic Resources Unit and adjunct associate professor of horticulture at CALS, discovered that the Geneva 890 and Geneva 925 rootstocks performed well in Bittner's organic orchard. Those three-year trials, which concluded in 2023, have led to Robinson and Fazio recommending those rootstocks to organic growers across the eastern U.S.

Some apple trees in Bittner's orchard have shiny, insulated wraps protecting special sensors called microtensiometers. These devices, developed by Cornell researchers, measure how much water stress a tree is experiencing. These sensors are more commonly used in California vineyards, where water conservation is crucial, but Bittner was quick to embrace the technology. Starting with just one sensor, the orchard now uses 11, helping them precisely manage irrigation across the entire farm.

Bittner is also involved in the development of the Cornell Apple Carbohydrate Thinning Model, which uses information from farm-based weather stations to predict photosynthesis and carbohydrate assimilation in apple trees. This information gives growers data-backed guidance on the most effective methods for thinning trees. Too much chemical thinner and the yield will be small, with apples too large. Too little, and growers will end up with golf ball-sized apples that have little market value.

This model is among many that make up the Network for Environment and Weather Applications, a partnership between Cornell, Cornell Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the Northeast Regional Climate Center. The network, which covers 26 states, provides farmers with access to more than 40 weather, crop management and IPM tools. The individual farmers pay for the weather stations.

The data, Bittner said, is even more valuable. "Either the farmer is using these models, or their spray consultant is," Bittner said. "This information is being used on their farm, whether they know it or not."

Is What You Learned About Money Holding You Back?

Michael Robertson, Farm Business Management Specialist, NY FarmNet

Image Canva

Every farm family carries beliefs about money. These beliefs shape who makes the financial decisions, what gets talked about or avoided, and how power and information is shared, or not shared, across generations.

Maybe a lone family member is simply expected to "handle the books". Maybe there's a constant push to keep going or expand the farm, even when the numbers say to do the opposite. Maybe success is measured in new and shiny equipment. Maybe a farm is hesitant to raise prices or look at cost of production, because "it's not about the money." Or maybe there's an unspoken rule to spend nothing, DIY everything, and equate success with self-reliance.

These are actually common family patterns often driven by something called money scripts.

What Are Money Scripts?

Money scripts are subconscious beliefs about money that were formed in childhood and shaped by experience. These beliefs are often deeply rooted in our family history and carry a lot of emotional weight. Because they remain mostly unexamined into adulthood, money scripts can drive financial behavior even more than numbers on a spreadsheet. These beliefs can also hold families back from farm viability, orderly succession, and family harmony.

"People do crazy things with money. But they're not crazy. They're just shaped by their own unique experiences."

– Morgan Housel, The Psychology of Money

Four Common Money Scripts

The term comes from the field of financial therapy, particularly the work of Brad Klontz and the Financial Therapy Association. According to Klontz and colleagues, most money scripts fell into four broad categories:

- **Money Avoidance:** Believing that money is negative or unimportant, leading to avoidance of financial planning or decision-making.
- **Money Worship:** Believing that more money will solve all problems, often driving overwork, debt, or constant expansion.
- **Money Status:** Linking personal worth to financial success, fueling competition, comparison, and image-driven decisions.
- **Money Vigilance:** Believing that money must be saved and guarded carefully, often with secrecy and reluctance to share information.

These scripts are especially potent on farms, where money, family, land, and legacy are deeply intertwined.

How Money Scripts Show Up on Farms

These scripts often play out in everyday choices, shaping how money is handled, avoided or used as a source of control:

- Money Avoidance: "I don't look at the books until tax season, when I'm forced to." Avoidance leads to delayed decisions, financial anxiety, putting off hard conversations, and missed planning opportunities.
- Money Worship: "If we can just expand a little more, things will finally get easier." This belief equates more money—or more land, more infrastructure—with security or success, even if it means taking on unsurmountable debt.
- Money Status: "He must be doing well—look at that new tractor." When net worth, acres, or equipment become status symbols, comparison replaces clarity, and financial decisions are driven by pride, envy, or fear.
- Money Vigilance: "We save every penny and we don't talk about it." Over-emphasis on frugality, scarcity, and secrecy can create isolation, mistrust, and lack of shared goals within a farm family and a farming community.

In many families, these scripts are reinforced by traditional roles and generational hierarchy:

- "My wife handles the finances—I just do the farming." Financial responsibility is outsourced to one person and becomes another form of "invisible labor", frequently to a partner who is already strained with responsibilities.
- "Junior's not ready to see the numbers yet." This delays learning, undermines trust, and sets up future transitions to fail.
- "When things are going well, we keep quiet." Farmers may believe that acknowledging success will create its own bad luck or look like showing off.
- "When things are bad, we don't talk about it—it's too shameful." Silence breeds stress, confusion, and conflict - it short circuits opportunity for a community to learn, grow and overcome together.

These beliefs might protect pride or peace in the short term. But over time, they lead to stress, distrust, and missed opportunities to build more profitable and resilient farms. In the worst case scenarios, they can destroy farms and families.

Where Do These Scripts Come From?

- Stories passed down: "Grandpa never took out a loan!"
- Early childhood experiences: Our first experiences with money can become the most potent and long-lasting.
- Traumas: A bankruptcy, a foreclosure, or unprofitable years and unpaid bills.

Continued on page 7 >>

>> Continued from page 6

- Culture: Regional and family values about work ethic, self-reliance, and stoicism.
- Religion or morality: Messages that frame money as either virtuous, dangerous, or corrupting.

Why It Matters

Money scripts shape every financial decision from investing in your farm, pricing your products, expanding your farm, and planning for your personal future.

If you're avoiding conversations about money, delaying planning, or stuck in an inherited pattern that no longer serves your family or business, it may be time to pause and reflect.

Financial decisions are often less about spreadsheets and more about psychology. It makes sense, since our brains are wired as much to prioritize emotional survival as rational optimization.

"The intersection of psychology and finance isn't a niche concern—it's the whole game." – Dr. Daniel Crosby

What You Can Do

Step 1: Identify Your Scripts

Ask yourself some questions about the role of money in your life:

- What was my first experience with money?
- Who handled money in our family growing up? Who didn't?
- When I was an early teenager, was my family more well off or less so than our neighbors? How did that affect me?
- What financial roles have we assigned (intentionally or not) in our farm family?

Step 2: Talk About It

Bring the conversation out of the shadows:

- Share your personal money story at the dinner table.
- Ask your successor what they think the farm makes—and what they want to know.
- Invite your partner or kids into financial decision making or ask if they are happy with their current role in financial matters.
- Tell your money story to your fellow farmers.

Step 3: Move Forward

If you notice a money script holding you or your family back, try this mindset: "Thanks for getting me this far. I understand where you came from—but I've got it from here."

Honoring the role your money beliefs played can help you let go of what no longer serves you—without shame or blame.

Step 4: Reach out To NY FarmNet

Our consultants can help you talk through financial stress, family dynamics, and planning roadblocks. You don't have to go it alone.

Resources

- NY FarmNet: www.nyfarmnet.org, 1-800-547-3276
- Mind Over Money by Brad Klontz & Ted Klontz
- The Psychology of Money by Morgan Housel
- The Soul of Money and The Behavioral Investor by Dr. Daniel Crosby

This article is courtesy of: Michael Robertson, Farm Business Management Specialist, NY FarmNet. The original article can be found here: https://cornell.app.box.com/s/0d2h8arhpia60zqpcedwro5b6t33vi0n

Cornell Integrated Pest Management Survey

Cornell CALS NYS IPM

Neonicotinoid seed treatments are used to control soil-borne insects and include active ingredients such as clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam. In 2029, neonicotinoid seed treatments will be prohibited for corn, soybeans and wheat seeds. After 2029, farmers who wish to plant with neonicotinoid seed treatments may

Cornell CALS NYS IPM (integrated pest management program) is working on a large scale on-farm field research trial over the next three years to assess the effectiveness of neonicotinoid seed treatments (NST) in field crops. The field trials are designed to assess, in real-world NYS farm conditions, alternatives to neonicotinoids as well as develop a risk assessment tool that can be used, if needed, as a basis for farmers to request a waiver from the 2029 moratorium on NST usage.

Julie Suarez, Cornell CALS, is conducting social sciences research on farmers attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of IPM practices to generate better information on how farmers make decisions to use or not use a neonicotinoid seed treatment.

This information will help Cornell CALS NYS IPM program in future educational programs and on-farm trials. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Please know that your information will remain completely confidential, and your name will not be retained. The survey is voluntary to complete and will not require spending any time with farm records. Multiple farm partners on the same farm are welcome to take the survey, sharing your own thoughts and experiences independently. Thank you for considering completing the survey.

Take the survey here: https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_72N2yNt0344QERM?Q_CHL=qr

Cornell, Wegmans Partner to Train Growers in Food Safety

Laura Reiley, Cornell Chronicle

This article originally appeared in Cornell Chronicle***, July 8, 2025***

For the last 15 years, Cornell has helped Wegmans and its growers comply with government regulations and keep consumers safe from foodborne illness. Fresh fruits and vegetables account for a significant portion of outbreaks, in part because they are often grown in open fields in soil, and in part because they are frequently consumed raw.

Farmers and produce buyers meet these challenges by doubling down on food safety protocols, from practices in the field to new technology in the grocery aisle. The Cornell-based Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) has been essential in effectively disseminating information and instituting new training, according to Steve Strub, manager of produce food safety for Wegmans Food Markets.

The PSA was established in 2010 through a cooperative agreement between Cornell, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration.

Strub said a lot of his growers are people he's known for more than a quarter century, and that he spends much of his time visiting the farms and having hard conversations about what is required to keep fruits and vegetables safe.

"In 2010, we started working with the Produce Safety Alliance," he said. "It was not long after the spinach E. coli outbreak occurred, which affected 26 states and Ontario, Canada; that's what got Wegmans involved."

Strub, who has worked for Wegmans for 28 years, the past nine as produce manager for the company's 110 stores, credits Elizabeth Bihn, director of the PSA and director of the National Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS) Program at Cornell AgriTech, as a central reason the Wegmans-PSA collaboration has been so successful.

"Betsy has been with us since the get-go," Strub said. "Talk about real and practical. She's an annual part of our training; she's the star of our show and has a great connection with our growers. They know her and respect her knowledge and experience. She and her PSA team have been helpful to Wegmans, participating in trainings and sharing their knowledge with our growers."

On every farm, one person must be trained in food safety best practices, per the FDA's Produce Safety Rule as well as Wegmans' own requirement of vendors, he said. The PSA Grower Training curriculum includes seven modules that farmers work through, ranging from worker health and hygiene to agricultural water and postharvest handling and sanitation.

"The trainings are pulled together in whatever states we do business in – we invite the experts, reaching out to land-grant universities and state agriculture departments," Strub said. "And food safety trainings aren't just about food safety – they're about decreasing plant diseases, increasing shelf life, less shrinkage at stores and a better overall customer experience."

Elizabeth Bihn, director of the Produce Safety Alliance and director of the National Good Agricultural Practices Program at Cornell AgriTech. Photo by Ryan Young, Cornell University

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) went into effect in 2011, but its Produce Safety Rule was not completed until 2015, representing the first time produce had been federally regulated. A further phase of FSMA will be instituted in the next few years, adding greater traceability for food categories like produce, as well as increased record-keeping requirements, especially for "high risk" foods.

This will increase the urgency of the work the PSA and Cornell AgriTech do, Bihn said, and challenges persist: Foodborne illness outbreaks in the U.S. rose in 2024, with confirmed cases increasing by 25% compared to the previous year. Several factors contributed to this increase, including changes in food handling practices, increased consumption of certain risky foods, a wider distribution of contaminated products and better science for the detection and tracking of outbreaks.

"So much of this is dependent upon trust," she said. "We work to make sure growers have the information they need to discern between hazards and risks, and are able to effectively do what they need to do to reduce risk."

Steve Strub, Manager of produce food safety, Wegmans Food Markets. Still from video by Ryan Young, Cornell University

Manufactured Housing – Affordable Housing in Rural Communities

Josh Randall, Natural Resources Educator Niagara County CCE

Manufactured housing (MH), or traditionally referred to as mobile homes, is a widespread form of affordable housing common across urban, rural, and suburban areas. However, in NYS 74% of MH is in rural communities and there was a 7% decrease in urban available sites in the last 30 years compared to a 2% decrease in rural areas. In Erie County alone, 51 MH parks are registered with at least 4,600 sites for families available across all of them. As housing and energy prices increase across the state, many municipalities and prospective homeowners will look toward manufactured housing as a means to achieve housing access. However, MH comes with several characteristics that differentiate the homeowning experience from traditional single-family homes and even multi-family complexes.

Many homeowners across rural communities are finding energy costs are growing. Manufactured housing owners are more likely to experience this burden at a higher rate than their 'stick-built' single-family homeowner peers. MH housing pays an average of 5% or more of family income on all types of energy usage, compared to 2% for single family homes. This is a result of two features of MH that current and prospective owners should be aware of: fuel type usage and structural constraints. Approximately 500 new manufactured homes added propane fueled heating systems in New York State in 2021. This is one component of the 334,000 propane accounts across the state or 4% of all housing, in which manufactured houses are twice as likely to use propane compared to stick-built homes. Image 1 provides some of this context. Propane continues to be a relatively inexpensive means of installing heating systems, but the annual cost of delivered fuel continues to rise and lags in affordability relative to more efficient natural gas and heat pump systems. Beyond fuel choice, manufactured housing itself has several structural drawbacks that also lead to high energy costs.

As a result of the need to physically transport MH to its destination, it cannot be as structurally strong as stick-built homes. As a result, MH owners have found improper installation of the home to be the most common Uniform Code violation in NYS. This can directly lead to utilities not being properly installed, wasting electricity and fuel as well as the underbelly being more likely to be unsealed through time. Without an airtight underbelly, moisture problems and loss of conditioned air is far more likely. Alongside many MH either having never been insulated if built prior to 1976 or still requiring less insulation than stick-built peers, heating per square foot remains higher in MH. Much of these structural concerns can also be exacerbated as MH parks are frequently within or adjacent to flood hazard areas. In Erie Couty, 2 of 51 parks are in high-risk areas and many of the others are very close to these hazard areas; see image 2 for more information. Making use of newer recommendations in the NYS Stretch Energy Code, NYS Fuel Gas Code, and local laws regulating the construction of MH, homeowners can see comparable energy usage in their homes.

For many MH owners, they are likely to find need for costly renovations as the structure begins to age. In many parts of New York, including Erie County, mobile home repair programs supported by NYS Homes and Community Renewal are able to connect homeowners with contractors and funds to complete those jobs. However, for far more MH owners they are likely to find themselves unable to access funds or contractors. To follow federal regulation,

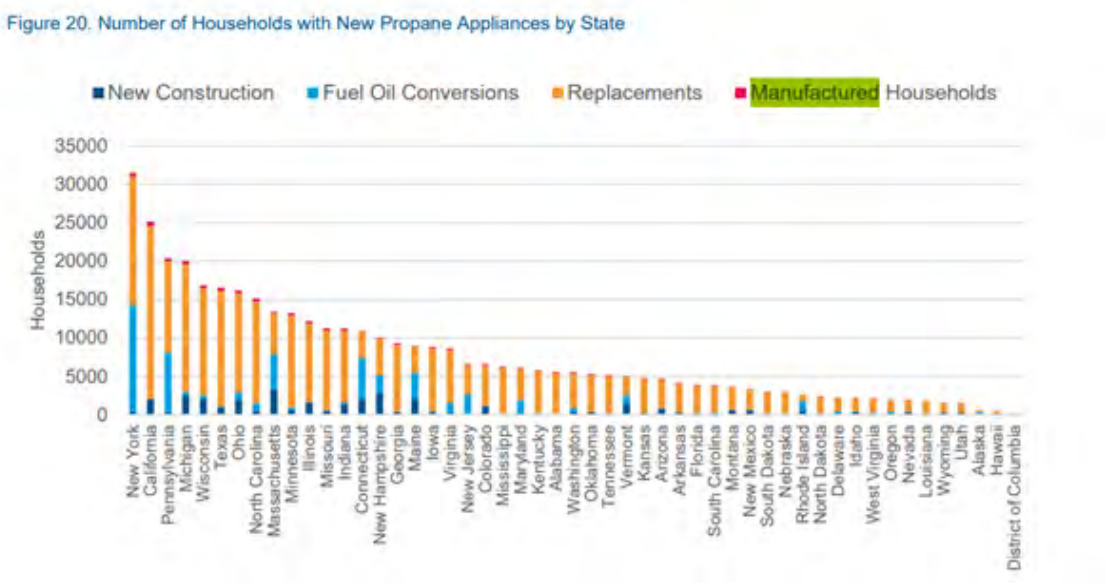


Image 1: New York remains the largest household propane state, source ICF.

NYS requires contractors to hold specifical certification for manufactured homes to install electrical, sewage, water, and repair structural components of the MH. In Erie County, NYS Department of State has only certified 4 installers and 2 mechanics to perform work on manufactured housing, but several additional contractors are certified in nearby counties. Compared to the 175 Master Electricians certified to work in the City of Buffalo, MH has far fewer opportunities to receive service. In terms of funding, many MH owners have found themselves ineligible to receive grants or low-cost loans because of the ownership structure. For MH in parks, the park frequently, but not always, owns the land under the MH. For many programs, this places MH owners in a similar category as renters without the expectation that a landlord will provide necessary repairs. However, they can have the expectation that essential services like water, electricity, and heat be provided by the park owner under the Manufactured Home Park Tenants' Rights Law in NYS.

Some of the concerns that come with renting in a MH park can also be partially alleviated by moving toward resident owned communities. In Erie County, Marilla Country Village was purchased by its residents in 2011. While they continue to work as a community and elected board to pay off the cost of the purchase, they have been able to make several important capital improvements to the park property and ensure additional safety during ice storms by controlling vegetation and plowing. This strategy can allow for MH parks to be more responsive to owners and support finding access to funds to maintain the community. ■

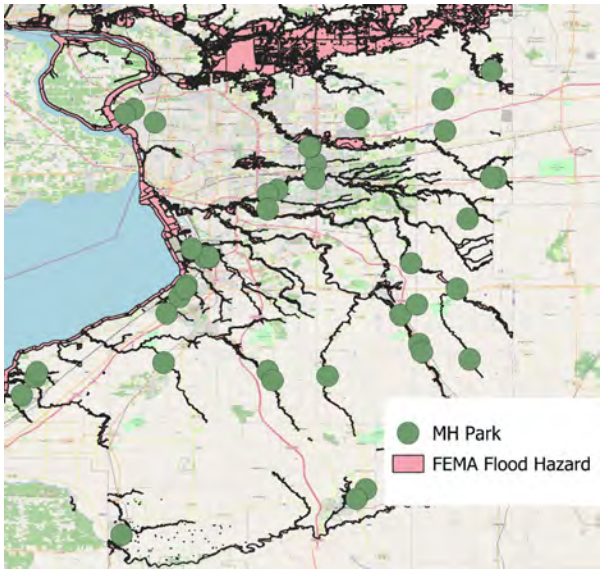


Image 2: MH housing clusters around streams in Erie County, data source NYS DOH and FEMA. Without basements, they can more easily meet flood hazard mitigation rules in NYS Residential Code.


NY FarmNet Free Webinar –
Tax Advantaged Retirement Accounts for Farmers
October 8, 1pm-2pm EST
Register online at www.nyfarmnet.org/trainings-events
Michael Robertson, CFP®
Farm Business Management Specialist
NY FarmNet
NY FARMNET
1-800-547-3276 | www.nyfarmnet.org
SCAN ME


NY FarmNet Free Webinar –
Estate Planning for Farm Families with Children
November 5, 1pm-2pm EST
Register online at www.nyfarmnet.org/trainings-events
Michael Robertson CFP®
Farm Business Management Specialist
NY FarmNet
NY FARMNET
1-800-547-3276 | www.nyfarmnet.org
SCAN ME

Cornell Grain & Fiber Hemp Field Day

Cornell Agritech School of Integrative Plant Science

Thursday, September 11, 8:00 – 4:00
Cornell AgriTech, Geneva, NY
Jordan Hall, 630 West North St.

Hemp growers, processors, and product developers are invited to see trials of hemp cultivars, including new lines from the Cornell hemp breeding program, hear updates on the NYS hemp program, and learn the latest on using hemp products for animal feed. We will demo combine harvest of grain, baling hemp straw, and decortication with a FiberTrack 660 decorticator.

Cost: $40. Registration includes lunch, morning coffee break, and water stops on the field tour. Please register by September 5.

View program line-up here: https://hemp.cals.cornell.edu/news/2025-grain-and-fiber-hemp-field-day-agenda/

Register at: https://agritechevents3.securepayments.cardpointe.com/pay

More information: Larry Smart lbs33@cornell.edu, Kimberly Paul kmp245@cornell.edu

Photo courtesy of Cornell Agri Tech

Kate McDonald Polakiewicz Joins SWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team

Amy Barkley, Livestock Specialist and Team Leader with the SWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Program

Kate McDonald Polakiewicz has joined Cornell Cooperative Extension's Southwest New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Program (SWNYDLFC) as its Farm Business Management Specialist. She will be offering programming in financial management, production economics, business planning, and market analysis.

Kate is a production and extension systems specialist with 15 years of experience working in federal government, private sector, academic, and international settings. She comes to CCE from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) where she managed the Farmer-to-Farmer program, a longstanding agricultural extension program that provided short-term technical assistance from US-based farmers to other farmer communities abroad. She also managed large-scale agricultural research awards in horticulture, agronomy, aquaculture, and in scaling new technologies for practical farm use. Before USAID, Kate worked on agriculture programs with farmers while living in Ghana, Ethiopia, and Uganda. Her work in research and extension also brought her to lead education on soil fertility and plant pathology in Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. Kate holds a master's degree from the University of California, Davis, and lives with her young family in Amherst, NY.

Kate is interested in applying her knowledge of agriculture to be of service to producers in Southwest New York production systems. She'll spend her first few months with CCE becoming familiar with local farm operations, meeting and learning from farmers, and building her network. If you are part of our region's farming and ag service community, reach out to say hello at kem348@cornell.edu or 716-640-0522.

SWNYDLFC is a partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Steuben counties. Their team includes Amy Barkley, Livestock Management Specialist and Team Leader (716-640-0844); Kate McDonald Polakiewicz, Farm Business Management Specialist (716-640-0522); Katelyn Miller, Field Crops and Forage Specialist (716-640-2047); and Katie Callero, Dairy Management Specialist (607-422-6788). Cornell is an equal opportunity employer. For more information click here.

Kate McDonald Polakiewicz, Farm Business Management Specialist, SWNYDLFC Program

Cornell AgriTech to Host Hemp Building Workshop to Support Sustainable Construction

Cornell AgriTech, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Cornell University

Cornell AgriTech invites builders, architects, engineers, and sustainability enthusiasts to a hands-on, three-day Hemp Building Workshop focused on the innovative use of hemp-based materials in construction, September 16–18, 2025. This immersive event blends expert-led presentations with practical demonstrations, offering attendees a unique opportunity to explore the potential of hemp in sustainable building.

Workshop Highlights:

Day 1 – Theory & Experience: Learn from leading experts about the science, sustainability, and real-world applications of hemp in construction.

Day 2 – Hands-On Demonstrations: Participate in live demos of tamp-in-place, flowable, and spray-on hempcrete techniques.

Day 3 – Harvest & Processing: Watch a hemp harvesting and processing demo, followed by a group discussion and workshop recap.

Featured Experts Include:

- Sergiy Kovalenkov (Hempire): International hemp building expert with 15+ years of experience
- Americhanvre: Live demo of blow-in-place hempcrete insulation
- Chad Frey (Bison Biocomposites): Flowable, lime-free hemp insulation
- Hempitecture: Showcasing hemp wool insulation and building products
- Greg Wilson (HempWood): Hemp-based flooring and wood alternatives
- Alex Escher (Hemp Hollow Processing): Architectural integration of hemp
- Henry Gage Jr. & Jeff Gagnon: Hemp building in New York State

Location:

Jordan Hall, 630 W North St, Geneva, NY

Event Details & Registration:

https://cals.cornell.edu/events/cornell-agritech-hemp-building-workshop-september-16-18-geneva-ny

Day 1 Only: $110 | Limit: 65 attendees

Full Workshop (3 Days): Limit: 35 attendees

Lunch included dail

This workshop is a rare opportunity to connect with industry leaders, gain hands-on experience, and explore how hemp can help shape a more sustainable future in construction.

Tar Spot of Sweet Corn: Time to Scout

Julie Kikkert, CCE Cornell Vegetable Program
Jaclyn Eller and Sarah Pethybridge, Cornell AgriTech

Sweet corn growers and crop consultants are advised to be on the lookout for tar spot, which is already reported this season in several US states and Canada. Since the first US tar spot report ten years ago, the spread is tracked and reported at https://corn.ipmpipe.org/tar-spot/. In 2024, tar spot was detected in 23 counties across western, central, and northern New York.

Disease Development

The fungus that causes tar spot, Phyllachora maydis, overwinters in infested corn residue. There are no alternative hosts and the fungus can only infect field or sweet corn. Infections and disease spread are promoted by mild to moderate temperatures (59 to 70 °F), high humidity (>85%), and leaves wet to touch for at least 7 hours. The fungal spores that initiate new infections are contained within the tar spots of the fungus and dispersed by wind-driven rain and storms.

Symptoms

Symptoms of tar spot are small, raised black spots with dark borders and a 'tarry' appearance that may be present on the leaves (Fig. 1), leaf sheaths, and husks. As the spots age, they may develop a 'fisheye' appearance. The tar spots are fungal structures called stromata which contain spores that are responsible for pathogen dispersal. Tar spots usually first appear in the lower canopy. As disease severity increases, symptoms spread to the upper canopy and are associated with premature leaf death.

Figure 1. Tar spot on a corn leaf. Note the irregular raised black lesions.

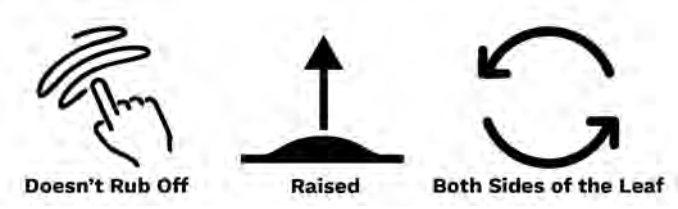


Figure 2. Three key factors for identifying tar spot of sweet corn in the field.

Scouting

Tar spot can be challenging to find while scouting when disease incidence is low. Tar spot lesions can be easily confused with insect frass or other diseases such as some rust pustules. However, tar spot lesions cannot be rubbed off the leaf with your fingers. The lesions are also raised from the leaf surface and go through the leaf so they are visible on both sides. Use this key (Fig. 2) to determine if the symptoms are likely to be tar spot. Please contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension sweet corn or field corn specialist or a diagnostic clinic for assistance with symptom identification.

Economic Significance

Losses caused by tar spot in sweet corn have varied across regions and between years. Symptoms primarily appear on leaves causing reductions in photosynthetic area. The disease can also affect the size, shape, and uniformity of the corn ears. For processing sweet corn, recovery of kernels may also be reduced. Tar spot lesions on the husks may make them unsuitable for fresh market sales or incur extra labor costs due to the need to dehusk prior to sale.

Management

Tar spot is managed by crop rotation, incorporation of crop residue, cultivar selection, and fungicides if needed. We have initiated variety trials and a fungicide trial this year and will be reporting results in winter articles and workshops. ■

IPM for Weeds?

Bryan Brown, Cornell IPM

We don't use spray thresholds for weeds like we do with other pests (since we know the weeds will keep coming and we know what happens if they set seed), but many aspects of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) can still help us with weeds.

Prevention

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," the old saying goes. This is especially true for preventing weeds from producing seeds. In my past experiments, fields with weeds that went to seed the year before had ten times the number of weeds emerging as neighboring fields!

Except for dandelions, thistles, and horseweed, most agricultural weeds have round seeds that drop to the ground below where they grew. And contrary to popular belief, many species have seeds that don't live longer than a few years in the soil – so the number of weeds in your soil is mostly determined by the past few years' management. In this way, good weed control leads to even better control, whereas bad weed control becomes even worse.

Mulches, PRE herbicides, and extra bed preparation passes are also preventative. It's a numbers game. Even if you only kill 5 out of 10 weeds ahead of time, that makes your post-emergence weed control efforts that much more effective.

But for August, it's all about minimizing weed seed production. If you have weeds that escaped earlier controls and are just starting to flower, cutting the tops or applying a fast-acting contact herbicide can reduce seed production. If they have already set seed, it can make economic sense to remove these from the field by hand.

Accurate identification

Every weed species has different susceptibilities to herbicides, tillage, flame, electricity - you name it! So, it's important to identify them accurately. Smartphone apps have come a long way (I use the free app, PictureThis), but it's best to verify with other sources like Cornell's recently updated weed ID website, or the book Weeds of the Northeast, which now boasts an expanded second edition.

Accurate ID lets you target the Achilles heel of each species. For example, common purslane is shade intolerant; common ragweed won't emerge after June 1; horseweed/marestail has tiny seeds that can't emerge through much soil or mulch; seeds of giant foxtail are eaten if left on the soil surface in the fall; hairy galinsoga seed has no dormancy, so a short bare fallow gets much of it to germinate; velvetleaf needs a long season to set seed; pigweeds and crabgrasses have relatively short-lived seed; winter annuals tend not to compete with our summer crops; biennials and perennials tend to go away with more frequent soil disturbance, or can be targeted in late summer/fall with systemic herbicides that translocate to the roots.

Much of this information was pulled from the free SARE publication Manage Weeds on Your Farm. There is also a useful online database of which herbicide active

ingredients are effective on which weeds available through the following QR code, but it was put together by Michigan State University, so you'll have to check what is labeled for use in NY.

QR code for direct access to the MSU herbicide database: http://herbicides.hrt.msu.edu

Alt: QR code

Scouting

Before an herbicide application or cultivation, you're looking at which species are present and their size. After the fact, you're looking at how well weeds were controlled and assessing next steps. Were there environmental, application, or tank mix problems that need to be addressed?

If none of these were an issue, and you have one species surviving that shouldn't be, it may have developed some degree of resistance. The earlier you realize this issue, the earlier you can contact us, and the more likely you'll be able to regain control and prevent it from taking hold of your farm.

It's also beneficial to scout at harvest to map out which weeds went to seed so that you can be prepared for these the following year. Or which perennials remained uncontrolled and may require additional management after harvest. There are many scouting apps for this purpose, but paper and pe**ncil also still work well!**

Disclaimer: Changes in pesticide registrations occur constantly and human errors are possible. Read the label before applying any pesticide. The label is the law. No endorsement of companies is made or implied.

Common purslane flowers.
Photo by Antonio DiTommaso, Cornell University

Horseweed plant.
Photo by Antonio DiTommaso, Cornell University

Cornell, NYS Invest in Livestock Farmers as Demand Grows

Caitlin Hayes, Cornell Chronicle

This article originally appeared in Cornell Chronicle, August 19, 2025

On an evening in late July, eight heifers awaited inspection at Hidden Canyon Farms, a 60-head beef cattle farm in Lyons, New York, in front of an audience of 35 New York state beef producers. With a cowboy hat and Southern accent relaying his rural Virginia roots, Adam Murray, Cornell's new beef cattle extension specialist, stepped in to perform a live assessment of the animals as well as analyses of DNA test results and other metrics, to demonstrate how livestock farmers can integrate multiple tools to improve their animals.

It was just the kind of programming that New York state beef producers need, according to Sue Olson, who co-owns Hidden Canyon Farms with her husband, Steve Olson.

"You could actually see things instead of looking at a PowerPoint," she said. "That transferred knowledge of what's coming in the industry, what's working and doesn't work, is vital to us as U.S. beef producers, and I know how important universities are in that knowledge transfer."

The talk in July was one of many outreach efforts laying the groundwork for PRO-LIVESTOCK, a new Cornell program that aims to support New York state livestock farmers, beginning with cattle, goat and sheep farmers. The Department of Animal Science, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), launched the program earlier this year and put out an official press release this summer.

With line-item funding from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the program is modeled on Cornell's PRO-DAIRY, a national leader in extension and applied research that has been supporting dairy farmers in the state for 35 years. Murray and Jessica Waltemyer, Cornell's new small ruminant extension specialist, have been visiting farms and holding meetings and forums all over the state and virtually in the past 18 months, to spread the word about PRO-LIVESTOCK.

"Supporting New York agriculture as a whole is supporting our food sources, our food systems, our food security," said Waltemyer, who previously managed the 250-head Cornell Sheep Flock. "And there's a high demand for local- and state-grown products. I think New York sees that as an opportunity to bring more economic sustainability to the state and to make sure the next generation of farmers can be profitable and sustain the lifestyle."

Annual beef cattle production brought in nearly $500 million to New York state last year, with revenues more than doubling between 2017 and 2022. Demand for local goat and sheep milk and wool is also on the rise, as well as sheep for grazing under solar arrays.

But in a survey of 450 New York livestock farmers, conducted by the Cornell Small Farms Program in 2018, 85% said they need more science-based guidance on production and market development to grow their operations.

Jessica Waltemyer, Cornell's new small ruminant extension specialist, works with sheep from the Cornell Sheep Flock, which she managed before joining PRO-LIVESTOCK, a new state-funded program, out of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, that aims to support livestock farmers in New York. Photo by Sreang Hok/Cornell University

"There's such a need for more science-based resources from New York," said Nancy Glazier, small farms and livestock specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), who advocated for PRO-LIVESTOCK. "We need people who producers can go to if they have a specific question about beef cattle – somebody to really help us get producers to that next level. And then the same thing with sheep and goats."

With additional funding, the program's strategic plan is to add a poultry and swine systems specialist, a livestock processing business specialist and a forage and grazing systems specialist.

The current state funding commitment was championed by New York State Sen. Michelle Hinchey (D-41st District) and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (D-123rd District).

"I was proud to help secure funding for this effort in the state budget," Hinchey said in a press release, "and thank my colleagues and the governor for their support as well as Cornell CALS for their continued service to all sectors of New York agriculture."

"The creation of a statewide PRO-LIVESTOCK team at Cornell CALS was an important step towards filling current gaps in production guidance and market development that have long limited the livestock industry," Lupardo said. "As we've seen with PRO-DAIRY, dedicated extension specialists provide invaluable expertise and support to grow New York's various agricultural sectors. I was a strong advocate for this funding in the recently passed state budget and thank my colleagues and the governor for their support."

Response to the program has been "incredible," Waltemyer said, with constant communications with farmers, breed and industry associations, and state and extension partners.

Continued on page 23 >>

>> Continued from page 22

With PRO-LIVESTOCK, the opportunities for livestock farmers to collaborate with Cornell are "endless," Sue Olson said. "We've got the personnel on board now, so let's take advantage of it and run with it."

'An agriculture state'

When it comes to raising livestock, New York has one great thing going for it: grass.

"With the cool season forages, the orchard grass, clover and some of these limestone soils in New York – it really sets up for a great, low-cost but high-quality feedstuff," said Murray, who grew up showing beef cattle and hogs and maintains a herd of Angus cattle on his family's farm in Virigina. "There's also more direct-to-consumer marketing in New York than I've seen anywhere in the country."

Beef farms in New York run the gamut in terms of size, with the average herd only 15 to 20 cattle; Murray views his role as helping producers at various levels take advantage of New York's strengths, whether that's through local markets or the broader U.S. beef industry.

"I've had a lot of conversations with producers about knowing your market and matching your production system with your resources and end consumer, then working backwards to select cattle that fit within your production scenario," Murray said. "Long term, I want to focus on where New York fits within the greater cattle industry. With our climate, soil and environment, it really heavily favors cow-calf and weaned-calf production. So, let's optimize that and let folks know that New York's not just a dairy state. It's an agriculture state."

Murray also hopes to bring beef cattle back to campus; the last of Cornell's herd was sold off in 2016. He envisions a short-term, feeder-calf program where smaller producers could send their weaned calves to Cornell while retaining ownership. Cornell specialists would manage the cattle through the pivotal stage following weaning, adding weight and standardizing a vaccination protocol. The combination of increased cattle uniformity and health management, as well as pooling a larger group of calves, would add value for "stockers" or "feeder/finishers" purchasing the cattle for the next stage of the production cycle, leading to higher prices for New York farmers.

In addition to earning producers more money, Murray said, it would strengthen mutually beneficial ties between the New York cattle industry and Cornell. Having beef cattle back at the university would also allow for hands-on teaching experiences for undergraduates and veterinary students, and the potential for applied research opportunities like feeding trials.

"Taking care of a Holstein is not the same as working with a 700-pound yearling, so having that as a teaching aid and having a pool of research cattle would be huge," Murray said. "You talk about the three-pronged approach of a land-grant university, between teaching, research and extension, and this would hit all three."

'Someone you can trust'

Providing consistent veterinary care for New York's small ruminants is also a top priority for Waltemyer. She has spent much of her first 18 months on the job helping producers deal with the barber pole worm, a parasite that evolves quickly to resist anti-parasitic drugs; it causes anemia, weight loss and "ill-thrift," or failure to grow normally, in small ruminants.

When Waltemyer offered a webinar on the topic, more than 450 people from across the country registered.

Adam Murray, Cornell's new beef cattle extension specialist, wants to help beef producers take advantage of New York's strengths and hopes to bring a beef cattle herd back to Cornell's campus. Photo by Sreang Hok/Cornell University

"Part of my position is figuring out how we can get more research and continued education opportunities to our veterinarians for small ruminants," said Waltemyer, who works with students in the College of Veterinary Medicine to provide some of those opportunities on campus.

A priority for both Murray and Waltemyer is working with the next generation of farmers, from 4-H kids to Cornell students to new producers. And Waltemyer practices what she preaches; with her family, she manages a 220-acre farm with 70 dairy cows, 20 hair sheep, seven dogs and six horses. She said she sees in her own kids the physical, mental and emotional benefits of an agrarian life and wants to extend those benefits to others, while also helping the industry meet and profit from a growing demand in the state for sheep and goat products.

Mary Jeanne Packer, founder and owner of Battenkill Fibers, New York state's largest commercial spinning mill, in Greenwich, New York, has seen her operation grow dramatically since she opened her doors in 2009. The demand for locally sourced yarn has driven the growth,she said. The mill hit nearly $1 million in sales last year and employs 18 people.

Packer said workshops and symposiums organized by Cornell and CCE provide the latest research and serve as vital venues for sheep farmers to come together with each other and with industry. At those events, Packer has connected with farmers, and her industry partners have provided trainings on how to produce wool that meets the standards for processing.

"We have a long history of receiving excellent help and support from Cornell," Packer said. "Universities and especially extensions are still seen as someone you can trust. I can give farmers the facts, but at the end of the day, I'm in the for-profit sector, so I have a vested interest."

Packer said extension doesn't have a horse in the race. "They exist just to take the most current research and share that knowledge and information, and, to their credit, they've managed to stay relevant and have grown with the industry and with their customers – it's a real tribute."

Invasive Pest Confirmed in Erie County

Cornell Integrated Pest Management

Adult spotted lanternflies (SLF) are emerging in communities across New York, but few areas are as vulnerable to the pest as the Lake Erie Region, which boasts more than 17,000 acres of vineyards, according to Cornell Integrated Pest Management Grape IPM Coordinator Kyle Bekelja.

"Spotted lanternfly is a pest of significant importance to New York's agricultural community, particularly its iconic grape industry," Bekelja said. "That's why it is essential that Western New Yorkers know how to recognize and report SLF sightings."

SLF are a significant economic and lifestyle pest for homeowners, businesses, tourism and agriculture. Adult lanternfly often feed in swarms and excrete a sticky substance called honeydew, which results in sooty mold growth and attracts other insects. The pests are particularly attracted and damaging to vineyards, with a study conducted by Cornell IPM Agricultural Economist Allan Pinto estimating potential losses, if spotted lanternfly is not managed, at $1.5 million, $4 million and $8.8 million in the first, second and third years of infestation.

Adult SLF populations have already been confirmed in Erie County, and due to their ability to "hitchhike" on vehicles or other objects from location to location, Bekelja said officials are concerned that populations will settle in Niagara County and other nearby areas in the coming weeks.

Residents are being asked to be on the lookout for adult SLF, which are about 1" long with black-spotted, pinkish-tan wings folded over their backs. In the event of a potential sighting, individuals are encouraged to take a photo of the insect and report the sighting to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets at: agriculture.ny.gov/reportSLF.

For more information and images of SLF, visit https://go.cornell-ipm.org/spotted-lanternfly.

Adult spotted lanternfly. Photo provided by Cornell Integrated Pest Management

What Are Sky Lanterns?

They are paper hot air balloons with an open flame inside. Once released, they float away uncontrolled and can land anywhere.

Why Are They Dangerous?

- Fire Hazards: Can land on houses, barns, fields, or cars.
- Animal Harm: Livestock, pets, and wildlife can ingest lantern parts, causing injury or death.
- Entanglement: Wires and frames can trap animals.

Local Action

Erie County prohibits the sale and use of sky lanterns.

What You Should Do Now

- Residents: Do not buy, sell, or launch sky lanterns.
- Businesses: Remove from shelves, displays, and online listings.
- Event Planners: Use safe alternatives like drones, luminaries, or laser light shows.
- Report Violations: Contact local code enforcement, your fire department, or local law enforcement.

When

Friday, Sept. 26
8:30am – 5pm

Where

The Rural Outreach Center
730 Olean Road, East
Aurora, NY 14052

Register

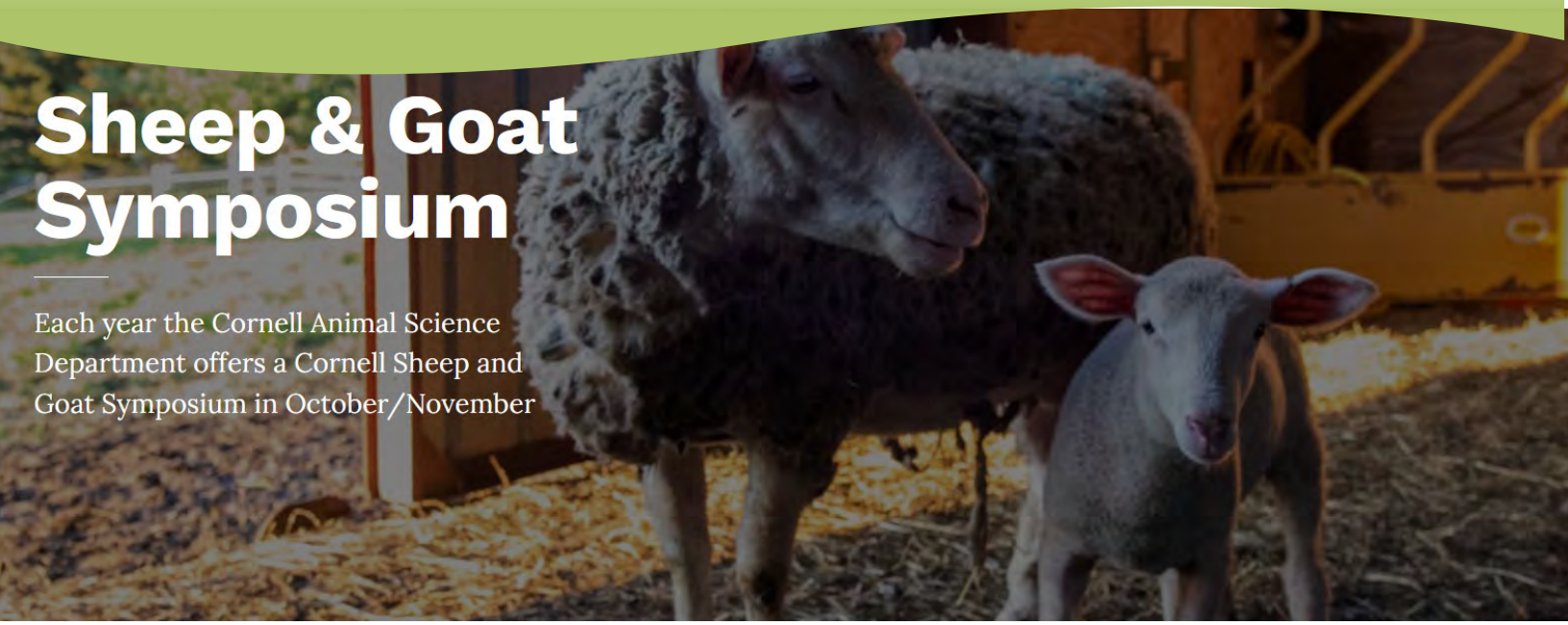
Scan the QR code below or visit
https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cGv5TM1bW7I6T42

or call 1-800-547-3276

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Erie County
21 Grove Street
East Aurora, New York 14052

Erie County Ag News

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County



Sheep & Goat Symposium

Each year the Cornell Animal Science Department offers a Cornell Sheep and Goat Symposium in October/November

The Cornell Sheep and Goat Symposium will be held October 31 through November 1, 2025. Program and Hotel information to come.

For More Information:

Jessica Waltemyer, NYS Small Ruminant Extension Specialist, PRO LIVESTOCK, Animal Science, jrk272@cornell.edu

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work