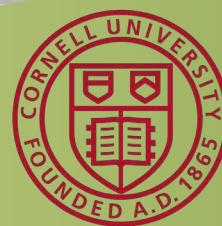


Erie County Ag News



IN THIS ISSUE

- Farm Donations to Food Pantries Credit
- Winter Considerations for Insulating Your Rural Home
- Greenhouse Grower's School Save the Date!
- Mesotunnel Row Covers as a Tool for Pest Exclusion



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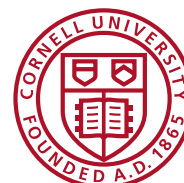


Jolie Hibit jah663@cornell.edu
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Follow CCE Erie on social media to receive up to date news and announcements!



Cover photo Pixabay



UPCOMING AGRICULTURAL EVENTS

2025 Potato Advisory Meeting

December 16, 2025

Canandaigua, NY



Come hear the latest on insect pest control and fertility management in potatoes from Cornell University experts. Potato variety trial updates will be shared too. After lunch will be the Empire State Potato Grower's Meeting. 1.5 DEC credits in 10, 1a, and 23.

More details: <https://cvp.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=2125>

NY Annie's Project: Inspired by Annie's - How to Be a Strong Woman Farm Manager

December 17, 2025

Noon - 1pm

Free via Zoom

Becoming the New Boss

Learn how to effectively manage your first employees; lessons and tips from seasoned veterans. During this webinar we will be hearing from woman led farm businesses on how they started hiring employees, keeping employees and helping them reach their full potential on the farm and the lessons the business owners learned along the way.

More details: <https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fuqi7bggbb.cc.rs6.net%2Ftn>

Ag Labor Roadshow

December 18, 2025

Genesee Community College, Batavia, NY

This year's Roadshow will feature a series of insightful discussions led by top experts in the field addressing critical agricultural issues.

More details: <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/labor-roadshow/>

Growing for Our Region: Northeast Organic Farming Symposium

December 16-17, 2025

9:00am - 4:00pm

Free Online Event

Join us for Growing Our Region: Northeast Organic Farming Symposium, a two-day online event designed to support and strengthen organic agriculture across the Northeast. Supported through the Transition to Organic Partnership Program, this free symposium brings together leading regional organizations to offer a unique series of hour-long webinars focused on intermediate to advanced farming practices.

More details: <https://www.nofamass.org/2025symposium/>

Winter Greenhouse and Growers School

January 21, 2026

Save the date!



Topics that impact your business! Pesticide credits will be available. Morning sessions are in place & have applied for pesticide credits for 3 talks.

More details on page 14

CCE Erie Master Gardener Education Day

March 7, 2026

8:30 am - 3:00 pm

Classics V Banquet Center

2425 Niagara Fls Blvd, Amherst, NY 14228

Topics include:

- Understanding Cultivars, Nativars, and Native Species
- Flowers in Your Landscape
- The Good, Better, Best Approach to Urban Green Space Management

Registration opens early 2026 - visit erie.cce.cornell.edu/events

Farm Donations to Food Pantries Credit

New York Ag and Markets, New York Department of Taxation and Finance

“New York’s farmers are consistently among the nation’s leading donors to food banks, food pantries, and other charitable food organizations, providing fresh, healthy foods to millions of New York families who need assistance.

In these challenging times, we want to remind New York farmers that they are eligible to receive a tax credit for donating food to food banks and other emergency food providers. We encourage all eligible farmers to take advantage of this great program and help keep food on the table for families in need across the state.”

You are entitled to this refundable credit if:

- you are an eligible farmer, and
- you or your business made a qualified donation to an eligible food pantry.

How much is the credit?

The amount of the credit is 25% of the fair market value of the qualified donations made to any eligible food pantry operating in New York during the tax year, not to exceed \$5,000 per tax year.

What are the recordkeeping requirements?

To claim the credit, you or your business must receive and keep a receipt (or other written communication) from the eligible food pantry showing the following:

- the name and EIN of the eligible food pantry,
- the date and location of the qualified donation, and
- a reasonably detailed description of the qualified donation.

The taxpayer must keep the receipt from the eligible food pantry as well as proof of how the donation was valued. Acceptable proof of valuation includes USDA online price reports and local co-op pricing guidelines for the date the donation was made.

Additional information

- [Frequently asked questions about the farm donations to food pantries credit.](https://tinyurl.com/2uuh584f) <https://tinyurl.com/2uuh584f>
- [Form CT-649](https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/ct/ct649i.pdf), Farm Donations to Food Pantries Credit, and its instructions (for corporations): https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/ct/ct649i.pdf
- [Form IT-649](https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/it/it649i.pdf), Farm Donations to Food Pantries Credit, and its instructions (for all others): https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/it/it649i.pdf
- [TSB-18\(1\)C, \(§\)I](#), Farm Donations to Food Pantries Credit:

To learn about other New York State tax credits available to businesses, see Business incentives: <https://www.tax.ny.gov/bus/business-incentives.htm> ■



Image Canva

National Women in Ag Study Launches

American Farm Bureau Federation

A just-launched national Women in Agriculture Study is a comprehensive effort to capture women's voices from across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The survey remains open through March 31 to gather insights from women working in production agriculture, agribusiness, education and advocacy, as well as from men and others in related fields who can offer perspectives on women's roles in agriculture.

The aim of the study is to better understand the experiences, leadership pathways and future needs of women in agriculture. This study will help identify what's working, where there are gaps, and how to strengthen engagement and support systems across agriculture. Optional follow-up interviews and focus groups will provide deeper exploration of leadership, mentorship, barriers and opportunities.

"More than a million women play vital roles in U.S. agriculture, accounting for 36% of our country's farmers," said American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall. "We want to make sure we're clearing barriers and providing opportunities for them and understanding their perspectives is crucial. I encourage all women in agriculture and related fields to participate in this study, which will deepen understanding of their future needs."

Findings will be shared at the AFBF-hosted International Year of the Woman Farmer ACE Summit in Washington, D.C., in June 2026. Results will inform leadership development, outreach strategies and systems that strengthen support for women in agriculture nationwide.

The survey is open to individuals age 18 and older who are involved in or connected to agriculture, forestry or life sciences, including related industries such as aquaculture, horticulture, beekeeping and more. This study is sponsored by the American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee and is funded by CoBank and JBS.

Take the survey here (available in both English and Spanish:

<https://www.fb.org/program/womens-leadership/national-women-in-agriculture-study> ■

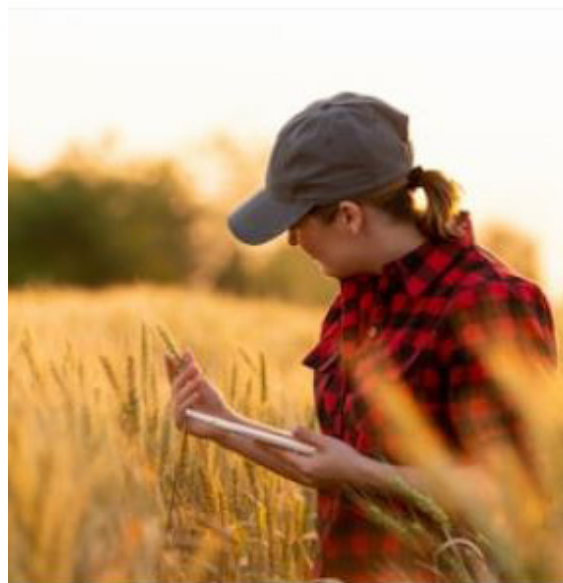


Image Pixabay

Growing for Our Region: Northeast Organic Farming Symposium

Northeast Organic Farming Association, Massachusetts Chapter



Growing Our Region: Northeast Organic Farming Symposium, is a two-day online event designed to support and strengthen organic agriculture across the Northeast. Supported through the Transition to Organic Partnership Program, this free symposium brings together leading regional organizations to offer a unique series of hour-long webinars focused on intermediate to advanced farming practices.

Tailored for a range of organic producers, from seasoned growers to those wanting to expand their knowledge, this event will feature technical content grounded in research, innovative methods, and real-world production challenges relevant to the Northeast.

[Register today](#) and join online December 16 and 17 for two days of learning, connection, and growth. The zoom links will be sent in a follow-up email.

Workshop Schedule

Tuesday, December 16th

9:00AM – 10:15AM Biological Control and IPM in Cropping Systems, Dr. Maryam Nouri-Aiin of University of Vermont

11:00AM – 12:00PM No-Till Cover Cropping for Intensive Small-Scale Farms, Yoko Takemura of Assawaga Farm

1:00PM – 2:00PM Connecting Organic Farmers with Buyers and Markets, Joe Dickson of Lot 49 Advisors and McKenna Hayes of Food Connects

3:00PM – 4:00PM Cover Crops and Living Mulches for a Resilient Farm, Helen Atthowe of Woodleaf Farm

Wednesday, December 17th

9:00AM – 10:00AM Growing Organic Chestnuts as a Commercial Crop, Brian Caldwell of Hemlock Grove Farm and Russell Wallack of Breadtree Farms

11:00AM – 12:00PM Organic Strawberry Production on a Mixed Vegetable Farm, Alby Brandon of Brandon Family Farm

1:00PM – 2:00PM FSMA Produce Safety Rule Requirements and Inspections, Meredith Melendez of Rutgers Cooperative Extension

Register at: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/qajs6aj> ■

2026 Becker Forum



Smart Strategies for a Changing Landscape

Labor is a challenge for everybody! Farm employers from every sector should attend the Becker Forum.

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Jordan Hall, Cornell AgriTech | Geneva, NY
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM



Topics

- H-2A Wage Changes and Best Practices for Producers
- How New York State is Handling the H-2A Changes
- Other Visa Options for Securing Workers
- NY State Refundable Tax Credits for Farmers
- Onboarding Resources for Growers
- NY Farm Labor Union Updates
- Avoiding Fraud and Scams for Employees and Your Business
- New York's New Mandatory Retirement Program

Cost ADVANCED REGISTRATION \$90/person
WALK-INS: \$120/person

EMAIL ADDRESS nysvegetablegrowers@gmail.com

REGISTER NOW



NYSVGA.ORG

Lodging

Holiday Inn Express
530 Hamilton St.
Geneva, NY 14456



\$119 a night

Dates available: January 13-16
Last day to book: January 3

Call (315) 787-0530

Reference NYS Vegetable Growers
Expo when making reservations



Cornell Cooperative Extension

**AGRICULTURAL
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**

Tax Deadline Dates

Timely filing by the dates below (assuming they apply to your business) is your responsibility as an owner, even if hiring a paid preparer. Failure to make timely payments can result in penalties and interest.

The following deadlines generally apply, but there are exceptions, and it is always recommended to consult with your tax professional, the IRS, and/or state tax departments for the most up-to-date information regarding your specific situation. Dates may vary slightly if the 15th or 31st of the deadline month is on a weekend or holiday during a particular year.



Andy Gilbert
Financial Consultant,
NY FarmNet


- **January 15th**- 4th quarter (previous year) estimated payments due
- **January 31st**- Deadline for sending W-2 and certain 1099 forms
- **January 31st**- Federal Unemployment Tax due
- **February 15th**- Deadline to refile W-4 form
- **March 15th**- S corporation, Multi-member LLC, and partnership income tax returns due
- **March 15th**- K-1's for shareholders must be provided
- **April 15th**- Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or Health Savings Account (HSA) deadline for prior year contributions
- **April 15th**- First quarter of current year estimated payments due
- **April 15th**- Personal and C corporation returns due or file for an extension
- **June 15th**- Second quarter estimated payments due
- **September 15th**- Third quarter estimated payments due
- **October 15th**- Filing deadline if you filed for an extension
- **December 31st**- Required Minimum Distributions must be taken (73 and up)



About Labor Roadshow IX


IN PERSON SESSIONS

In person events will run from 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM.

 **GREENWICH**
DECEMBER 9
 Elks Lodge

 **WATERTOWN**
DECEMBER 10
 Hilton Garden Inn


 **GENEVA**
DECEMBER 17
 Cornell AgriTech


 **BATAVIA**
DECEMBER 18
 Genesee Community College

ONLINE SESSIONS

 **DECEMBER 1 & 22 from 12–2 PM**
 Zoom webinar platform – access to both webinars is included with one onsite registration!

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

 **\$75/person**
 Cash, check, and advance online payments will be accepted. Each registration includes onsite programming for one event date, access to two webinars, coffee, refreshments, and lunch provided.

 **Questions?**
 About program: cu-agworkforce@cornell.edu
 About registration/payment: office@nedpa.org

Visit our website for registration information:
agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/labor-roadshow/



Program

8:30 AM Event opens

8:50 AM Welcome by Richard Stup, Cornell Ag Workforce Development

9:00 AM Update on NY Farm Unionization, Timothy Connick, Chairperson, NYS Public Employment Relations Board

9:30 AM Preparing for Enforcement Actions from Federal and State Authorities: Learning Theater, Richard Stup and Lucas Smith of Cornell Ag Workforce Development and American Dairy Association Northeast (ADANE) Representatives

10:15 AM Break

10:30 AM Compliance Update from NYSDOL, Mary Slattery, Director, Division of Compliance & Education (DOCE) and NYSDOL DOCE Field Staff

11:30 AM Immigration Enforcement Update and Reminders, Michael Sciotti, Partner, Barclay Damon

12:00 PM Lunch

12:45 PM Employee Engagement and Improving Workplace Culture on Your Farm, Kaitlyn Lutz, Extension Associate, Cornell Ag Workforce Development

1:30 PM How to Talk About Labor Issues with the Public and Elected Representatives, Emma Swarthout, Beth Meyer, and Kelsey O'Shea of ADANE

2:00 PM Break

2:15 PM Producer Panel on Farm Emergency Planning

3:15 PM Employee Housing Lightning Round, Jay Canzonier, Extension Support Specialist, Cornell Ag Workforce Development Susannah Krysko, Community and Urban IPM Specialist, Cornell Integrated Pest Management

4:00 PM Wrap up with Richard Stup

Winter Considerations for Insulating your Rural Home

Josh Randall, Natural Resources Educator CCE Niagara

Winter in Western New York is the most expensive season for energy. As temperatures drop, intense winds hit the sides of homes, and snow accumulates on rooftops, communities will need to be prepared with structural resiliency in their homes. Insulation and air sealing are one component of this, but properly sized and well-maintained heating equipment is the other half of the equation. In both cases, rural homes can require different considerations than urban and suburban homes.

Insulation is available in many forms, designed to cover large surfaces and seal even the smallest gaps. Commercially, materials can be compared using their “R-value,” which represents the resistance of air to pass through, carrying heat with it. This matters in winter for keeping homes warm and in summer for preventing cool air from escaping. In some rural homes, the structure was constructed to rely on airflow to passively cool, a feature that may be less effective if residents use air conditioning and keep the windows shut. More generally, 90% of homes across the US are underinsulated for the conditions they experience, and many of the oldest properties will be worse off. To calculate your home’s R-value and the conductivity of heat, check out this tool created by the University of Vermont’s Extension: <https://ageng.w3.uvm.edu/walls/index.html>.

Rural properties are more difficult to insulate for several reasons. One reason is that the exterior walls were constructed with brick and then sided over, leaving only a very small space to attach rigid foam board or a structural insulation panel rather than using spray foam, cellulose, or rockwool. A second reason is that the rim joists may have been constructed at a length that makes portions of them

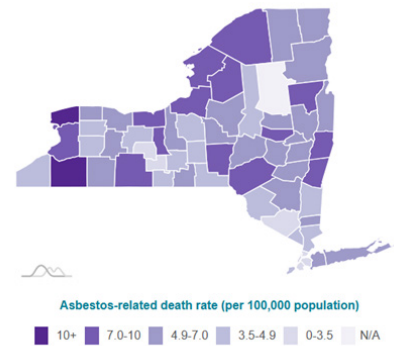


Figure 1: Image from Asbestosnation.org and data from CDC’s Wonder Database

inaccessible, or their distance from the sill plate adds additional difficulty. See DOE’s recommendations for rim joist insulation here: https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-07/12-2_insulate-rim-joist.pdf.

A third reason is the presence of asbestos. Niagara and Cattaraugus Counties have the highest death rates from asbestos in New York State, and many homes, businesses, and other structures still contain asbestos, which can prevent additional insulation installation. (See the map in Figure 1.)

A fourth reason is excessive moisture, especially in crawlspaces or basements, which can damage the foundation or saturate insulation. This situation can quickly become an issue when combined with over-insulation. Moisture trapped inside a home can quickly lead to mold growth and eventually cause permanent damage. These reasons can be present in urban areas, but rural communities have been known to have a higher prevalence of each of these conditions.



Basement and crawl space rim joists should be insulated when they define the thermal boundary.



Measure each individual cavity to be insulated and take note of obstacles where insulation needs to be trimmed for a proper fit.



Cut insulation, either rigid foam board or wrapped/faced batts, for each individual cavity.



Ensure space is filled with no gaps or misalignment, and place insulation tight to rim joist.



Ensure insulation is secured in place and will not move over time, then seal all of the edges with one-part foam, caulk, or mastic.



If foam insulation is more than 3.25 inches thick or space is permanently habitable, insulation needs to be covered by a thermal barrier, such as gypsum board. If requirements vary from this practice in your area, consult local code officials for clarification.

Image from DOE's recommendations for rim joist insulation

Being aware of these limitations is important for developing a more specific set of strategies for your home or building. If you own an agricultural operation that could benefit from learning more about these kinds of conditions, consider making use of the Agricultural Energy Audit supported by NYSERDA or speak with the CCE Ag Energy staff <https://agenergyny.org/>.

In addition to insulation, heating systems can be problematic in rural homes. In many areas of Western New York, homes either lack access to natural gas or residents prefer not to switch fuel types. As a result, many homes continue to use delivered fuels, like propane, oil, or wood. (The Fall 2025 issue of Erie Ag News discusses propane use in more detail.) Up to 143,000 New York homes use wood as their primary heating source, and 549,000 have a woodstove. This can be a problem as up to 50% of people are susceptible to the particulates produced during wood burning, and as many as 38% of all wood stoves in NYS

pre-date modern EPA standards for cleaner burning. These concerns become more serious when you consider how heating, insulation, and everyday activities change the air pressure inside homes.

Combustion areas draw in air to supply oxygen for burning and then expel air to remove carbon dioxide and other byproducts. Improper venting of an appliance, as well as extreme differences in pressure because of improper insulation and air sealing, can lead to backdrafting of smoke. Depressurization can be normal in some houses, but it will ultimately depend on the airflow allowed by ventilation and openings in the house. This handy tool can calculate pressure for an individual room: <https://www.stoutenergy.me/pressurisation-calculator>.

If you are concerned for your home, consider applying to one of NYSERDA's insulation-focused programs like Empower+ or Comfort Home. ■

With Near-Mythical Look and Taste, Unicorn Kale Hits the Market

Laura Reiley, Cornell Chronicle

This article originally appeared in [Cornell Chronicle](#), November 17, 2025

Years in the making, it's finally here.

Unicorn kale.

No forehead horn, hardly mythical, and as of November, when it will first appear in a seed catalog, no longer even hard to obtain. But the name stays.

Masterminded by Phillip Griffiths, associate professor in the School of Integrative Plant Science, Horticulture Section at Cornell AgriTech in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said it's about "taking brassica vegetables into a new zone by letting the plants show us the way."

Griffiths' work is driven by consumers' increasing acceptance of new, quirky and aesthetically pleasing foods.

"Who wants a kale salad when you can have a unicorn kale salad?" Griffiths said. "Innovation and creativity come from imagining a different type of future, not from looking in the rearview mirror."

Unicorn kale is full speed ahead: In Johnny's Selected Seed catalog for 2026, to be released mid-November, unicorn kale is listed in three locations in the catalog: as a full-size kale and for premium baby leaf and micro-kale growing.

But the hype is hardly in the name alone. To misquote Shakespeare, "What's in a name? That which we call a kale, by any other name would taste as sweet."

Even when unicorn kale, then known only by an anonymous cultivar number, was grown in trials at High Mowing Organic Seeds in sandy loam soils in Hyde Park, Vermont, it had fans.

Among testers' comments: "Purple stems/veins, green to light green leaves. Flat leaves with big ruffled edges. Easy to bunch. Thick stems and straight mid ribs. Very upright and lovely! We love these. Very consistent. Nice leaves and crop. Beautiful."

But here's the kicker: "Different from anything on the market."

Griffiths said back in about 2014, he and his team dug up 15 very different brassica breeding line types, ranging from red curly kale to lacinato, with a wide range of phenotypes, intercrossing them to develop about 160 hybrid combinations that were selected over several years with plenty of dead ends along the way.

"We could see that some of them looked very different from current market classes. We continued to self-pollinate and select the most interesting types, generating feedback along the way. Unicorn Kale traces back to a golden collard line crossed with a red leaf curly kale line," Griffiths said.

With kales, Griffiths said, the more blue-green plants are typically chewier and can be bitter. A golden leaf is generally more tender and crisp, perhaps friendlier to



Unicorn kale, with lineage that traces back to a golden collard line crossed with a red leaf curly kale line, can be grown as full-size kale or micro-kale, shown here. Photo provided by Cornell Chronicle.

the mainstream market. Kale wasn't developed as a raw salad crop, but it started entering new culinary territory about 15 years ago when people realized it had a good mouth feel and complemented more complex and robust flavors (toasted nuts, dried fruit, blue cheese), especially when given a little massage to break down the fibers.

"Kale burst onto the scene and then ran into a wall," Griffiths said, "because it didn't really have any follow-up. People are ready for more new and different types of kale."

This new kale, he said, has the texture people like without much bitterness and with much cooler aesthetics. A golden green color filigreed with a purple vein gives it a festive look. It's not only a versatile ingredient, it's a solid new option for controlled

environment agriculture businesses because it grows well indoors as a premium baby green.

Whether the public grabs this new product by the, um, horn remains to be seen, but Griffiths hopes it will herald more people eating their greens, because "when you make whole foods more fun, that's a strategy to get people to consume more of what is good for you."

He isn't claiming the name as his own handiwork, however.

"Johnny's started using the term because it was so different from what they were expecting kale to be," he said. "They suggested that to me." ■

‘Galaxy’ of Grape Tomatoes Shines With Three New Varieties

Krishna Ramanujan, Cornell Chronicle

This article originally appeared in [Cornell Chronicle](#), November 17, 2025



New Galaxy Suite grape tomato varieties, from left, “Cosmic Pink,” “Green Nebula” and “Stargazer.” Photo provided by Cornell Chronicle.

Salads can get even more colorful with three varieties newly added to the “Galaxy Suite” of grape tomatoes, a snack-sized medley bred by a Cornell horticulturist.

“Green Nebula,” “Stargazer” and “Cosmic Pink” are currently available for preorder through High Mowing Organic Seeds, to be delivered in spring 2026 in time for planting.

“Gardeners always want something new, and the first thing they look for is tomatoes,” said Phillip Griffiths, associate professor in the School of Integrative Plant Science Horticulture Section at Cornell AgriTech in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, who has now bred a total of nine varieties for the Galaxy Suite.

Green Nebula, which turns translucent yellow-green when ripe, is a juicy, pear-shaped grape tomato. Stargazer, a pale bright orange, shaped between a pear and a grape, has a fruity flavor. And Cosmic Pink is a meaty, disease-resistant elongated pink grape tomato with a top-ranked flavor profile.

“One of the big benefits of this group is not only do they each look different, obviously having multiple different colors, but each one has a unique ancestry of multiple different heirloom types,” Griffiths said.

Galaxy Suite tomatoes are resonating with home gardeners, farm-to-market and organic growers, as well as in retail sectors, Griffiths said. Currently, Galaxy grape tomatoes are beginning to draw interest from chain stores such as Wegmans supermarkets, Sprouts Farmers Markets and Ark Foods, a plant-based food company.

Griffiths began breeding the new tomatoes in 2005. While his main research focus is on breeding brassica family vegetables (such as broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage), he became interested in tomatoes to fill in downtime between the peaks of brassica vegetable breeding. Simultaneously, the introduction of smartphones and the ability to take and share photos of foods in the early 2000s helped engage more people in the food system.

“The Galaxy Suite plays into where the engagement of consumers in the food system is going and developing in the technological age,” Griffiths said.

“The intention isn’t just to maximize economic sales and yields,” he said, “it’s to make interesting, fun foods more widely available, and to engage people in the growing and consumption of vegetables, and tomatoes in particular.”



New York Winter Greenhouse & Growers School

January 21, 2026

DEC Credits Available

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Erie County

The 2026 NYS Winter Greenhouse and Growers School will take place on January 21, 2026 with morning virtual and afternoon in-person classes available. Attend half day or full day. This class will allow attendees to earn NYS DEC Pesticide Recertification credits.

Attendees will be required to sign in prior to instruction beginning. Anyone who arrives late will be encouraged to stay for the instruction but will be informed that DEC Recertification credits will not be awarded. Only those who stay for the entire course will receive a Recertification Course Certificate upon completion of the course. CCE Erie Ag Administrative Assistant will assist Sharon Bachman with distribution of course certificates at the end of the meeting.

Morning Program - 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM VIRTUAL

(View at your location, or at Roycroft Powerhouse, East Aurora, NY)

- Building Better Pest Programs - Targeted Timing and Life Cycles; *Dr. Karen Stever, GGSPRO Technical Specialist*
- Grower Case Studies - Common, Uncommon & Complex; *Dr. George Grant, GGSPRO Technical Specialist*
- NYS Flower Industries Update; *Sue Adams*
- Greenhouse Grower Update on Pests and Diseases; *Michael Dorgan, NYS Ag and Markets*
- Avoid Diseases to Have Fabulous Foliage and Flowers; *Margery Daughtrey, Cornell University*

Lunch 12:30 - 1:15 PM (provided for all in-person registrations)

Afternoon Program - 1:15 - 3:30 PM IN PERSON

(Roycroft Powerhouse, 39 S. Grove Street, East Aurora, NY)

- Efficient Technologies, Processes, and Practices to Optimize Energy Use and Related Costs in Greenhouse Operations; *Gabriel Gurley, Cornell Agriculture Energy Program Manager*
- Why Whiteflies and Aphids Thrive.....and How to Stop Them; *Carol S. Glenister, Entomologist, IPM Laboratories, Inc.*
- Pesticide Applicator Updates with Region 9 NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Staff; *Shawn Conrad, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation*

Cost:

- VIRTUAL (AM) only \$60 *(\$50 for NYSFI Members or CCE Erie Ag Supporter)
- IN-PERSON (PM) only \$15 *(\$10 for NYSFI Members or CCE Erie Ag Supporter)
- BOTH PROGRAMS \$75 *(\$60 for NYSFI Member or CCE Erie Ag Supporter)

*(Ag Supporters only allow one \$5 discount for the workshop to be applied to the full day or an am or pm session)

Register at <https://erie.cce.cornell.edu/events> ■

Mesotunnel Row Covers as a Tool for Pest Exclusion in Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Systems

Kaitlin Diggins, Graduate Student, School of Integrative Plant Science, Plant Pathology and Plant Microbe Biology Section, Cornell AgriTech

Sarah Pethybridge, Associate Professor, School of Integrative Plant Science, Plant Pathology and Plant Microbe Biology Section Cornell, AgriTech

Physical tools like row covers have become staples in organic integrated pest management (IPM). In a 2022 survey of 377 organic specialty crop growers across the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast, over 60% of growers reported using row covers not just for pest control, but also to mitigate extreme weather impacts and reduce reliance on pesticides and other chemical inputs (Cheng et al. 2023).

Not all row covers are created equal, especially given the diversity of crops, rotations, and infrastructure, particularly on organic farms. While many growers are familiar with low and high tunnels, each comes with its own set of benefits and trade-offs. In recent years, a middle-ground option has emerged: mesotunnels. As the name suggests, “meso” means “middle,” and that’s exactly where these tunnels fall in size and structure. Standing approximately 36 to 48 inches tall, mesotunnels are taller than low tunnels but shorter than high tunnels, offering season-long crop protection (See Figure 1). They are built with steel conduit hoops and covered with a fine nylon mesh (such as ExcludeNet or ProtekNet) that allows light, air (including sprays), and rainfall to reach the crop while excluding insect pests (Figure 2). When properly stored, the mesh can be reused for multiple seasons, improving cost efficiency.

Mesotunnels are not a one-size-fits-all solution, but they show promise as a flexible tool for specialty crops production.

At Cornell and partner institutions across the Midwest and southern U.S., research trials are evaluating mesotunnels in cucurbit systems, where insect-vectored diseases are a recurring challenge. Pests such as striped cucumber beetles and squash bugs not only damage crops by feeding but can also transmit bacterial pathogens that can cause plant death, premature flower abortion, or reduced fruit set.

A key question surrounding exclusion netting is how to balance pollination with the benefits of insect exclusion. Trials in New York, Iowa, and Kentucky tested several approaches. One method involved opening and clipping the tunnel ends during flowering, allowing pollinators to access the crop and achieve fruit set (Figure 3). Flower bloom was monitored weekly, and once peak anthesis passed, the netting was closed again and secured with sandbags. In contrast, completely removing the tunnels during flowering led to a surge in pest populations, as both pests and pollinators could freely navigate the open plots. When the netting was reapplied, many insect pests remained inside for the



A fully constructed mesotunnel system in the field, featuring steel conduit hoops, sandbag anchors, and nylon mesh netting. Muskmelon plants are visible inside, protected from insect pests while still receiving light, air, and rainfall. Photo credit to Sean Murphy.

remainder of the season, negating the protective benefits of the system. The clipped-end approach provided a more balanced solution, supporting pollination while maintaining pest exclusion.

Pollinating insects, including honeybees and native squash bees, successfully entered through the open ends, while pest insects were far less successful. After the ends were closed, observed pest populations remained low compared to plots where the tunnels were fully removed or never installed.

Mesotunnels are not a silver bullet, but they are a valuable addition to the organic IPM toolbox. Like any system, they work best when integrated with complementary practices such as pest scouting, crop rotation, and other cultural controls. Our initial trials began with acorn squash, but growers noted that for the labor required for the initial installation, mesotunnels were best justified by higher-value crops. As a result, we shifted our focus to

muskmelon, where season-long protection provided a stronger economic return. To further maximize the investment, we optimized the materials by transferring the same mesotunnel structures onto fall cole crop such as cabbage, to extend their utility beyond a single specialty crop each year. While the setup can be labor-intensive at the start, once in place, mesotunnels allow for a relatively hands-off approach to pest and disease protection throughout the growing season.

We are also exploring complementary practices that may improve outcomes under mesotunnels, including cultivar selection, cover cropping, and weed management strategies that could influence yield, disease, insect populations, soil health, and microclimate. Though mesotunnels may not suit large-scale conventional operations, they hold significant promise for small to mid-sized farms, especially those facing increasing pest populations and seeking to reduce both chemical and plastic inputs. ■



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Calling All Food, Beverage, and Animal Feed Manufacturers in New York State!

Todd Schmit, Luca Rigotti, Melike Celenk, and Cheryl Bilinski
Cornell University - Dyson Extension Briefs

The new 2025 NYS Food, Beverage, and Animal Feed Manufacturer Survey is now live!

Faculty from the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management and Cornell Cooperative Extension announce the release of the survey that will provide New York state manufacturers with a current assessment of the industry, to help inform private and public investments and opportunities and support firm growth and improved profitability.

New York state has a diverse food and beverage manufacturing industry, by food type as well as by size. With strong backward linkages to agricultural production sectors in the state, manufacturers support farms, distributors, other food industry firms, and consumers. The survey invites all food, beverage, food ingredient, and animal feed manufacturers in the state to participate and share their unique industry insights. More responses improve the quality of the data and provide a clearer picture of industry barriers and opportunities in New York state.

The survey will help to:

- (1) Identify opportunities for business retention and growth that improve firm competitiveness,
- (2) Enumerate solutions to feasibly expand New York state food products in institutional markets,
- (3) Assess the economic impacts of public funds that support capital investments in food, beverage, and animal feed manufacturing, and
- (4) Offer policy makers and business managers

information that will enhance the future success of the industry.

Importantly, ownership of processing facilities is NOT required for participation. If you contract with a co-packer/co-manufacturer/shared-use-kitchen, please complete the survey. If you are a co-packer/co-manufacturer for other firms' products, please complete the survey. If you own your own processing facilities, please complete the survey. It is crucial that the survey response is representative of the distribution of firms in the state, in both what they make and the size of the firm.

All individual firm data and information will be kept confidential and reported only in aggregate form. All analysis and output from this survey will be posted online and available to the public. If firms provide their contact details in the survey, they will receive notice when the results are available. We will also present the results to industry and public policy officials.

If you have any questions about the research or the survey, don't hesitate to reach out to Todd Schmit, Professor of Agribusiness and Rural Development, at TMS1@CORNELL.EDU or 607- 255-3015. For us to move forward in a timely manner, completed surveys should be submitted by December 19, 2025. Thanks in advance for your valuable time and input; your participation and assistance are essential to the success of this effort.

SURVEY LINK: <https://dyson.cornell.edu/fbm-survey2025> ■

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Erie County Ag News

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County

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