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Cover photo: Welsh harlequin, Indian runner and Khaki cambell ducks roam free at the Whole Systems Research Farm in Moretown, VT. Photo by Ben Falk.
Grazing Dairy Production Recordbook
If you are a grazing dairy, a new resource is available to help you make daily notes about milk production, grazing rotation, grain and forage feeding, weather and herd health through the entire year. The tool is intended to help highlight which management practices work best on your farm. This can only be done with teamwork, so use the recordbook to provide benchmarks of performance during discussions with your nutritionist, vet, other consultants, partners, family or employees. To order a free copy, send an email to vs7@cornell.edu. The book was developed by the NYS Grazing Lands Conversation Initiative in collaboration with the Cornell Small Dairy Project Team and the South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program.

Sustainable Farm Energy ‘Virtual Tours’ Posted Online!
Many of you weren't able to attend the series of Sustainable Farm Energy Field Days we hosted last fall. Over 120 people gathered on four farms around New York that featured small-scale solar electric, solar thermal, wind, grease-power, and many other energy saving/producing technologies. We all took home ideas about how to become more energy self-sufficient and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. A virtual tour of each farm is now available in the form of a photo essay. Visit www.smallfarms.cornell.edu to see the tour.

How can I get Small Farm Quarterly?
Country Folks subscribers automatically receive SFQ four times a year at no extra cost. Country Folks is delivered weekly for $47 per year. SFQ-only subscribers receive just the 4 issues of Country Folks that contain the SFQ insert for only $5 a year.

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email: subscriptions@leepub.com

How does the expression go?
‘Sometimes an image can say one thousand words?’
What do you think? As always, we love to hear from you. Drop us a line anytime!

Best wishes, Violet
Violet Stone
Winter Reads: Water and Natural Gas

By Jill Swenson

Winter brings us indoors and the weather provides an overdue excuse to sit down and pick up a book. But which one? This column will offer a review of the newest and best books on a particular topic of general interest to the readers of Small Farm Quarterly.

Hydrofracking and the risks to our agricultural watershed provide the subject for this inaugural column. "Thousands have lived without love, not one without water," W.H. Auden, First Things First.

Water matters to farmers. So do oil and mineral rights on agricultural land. Years past, these leases paid the taxes on the land when crops didn't. The Marcellus Shale deposits of natural gas in the Northeast are now being extracted using the force of water and sand mixed with a secret toxic mix of chemicals to fracture the shale and release the gas. Greed, jealousy, betrayal, anger and fear dominate this emotional landscape.

Seamus McGraw, End of Country, offers the first memoir written about hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale region in the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania. McGraw is from Dimock, Pennsylvania, and it's his mother's farmland where now a methane leak continues to leak and contaminate their well and the groundwater. But don't assume McGraw is an opponent of hydrofracking even though he is a journalist. He advised his mother to sign the lease and leans over backwards to provide a balanced account of how this issue doesn't have a right or wrong side, but is a chronicle of the end of a way of life in the countryside.

One of my favorite non-fiction writers, Alexandra Fuller, portrayed the culture and climate of a community in Wyoming where hydrofracking offered the only jobs in town. In The Legend of Cotton Bryant she tells the true story of a young man's life cut short in an industrial accident. Capturing the complexities of social and family conflicts around these companies coming into farm country, Fuller adheres to a larger truth. The jobs and economic development promised by the wildcat life are too little and cost too much.

Those who maximize profits in the water and gas industries take advantage of a dwindling non-renewable supply that cannot meet a growing demand. Pitting citizens against each other, hydrofracking overturns in their community. And in Dimock, Pennsylvania, the accidental groundwater contamination happened without a crash or a bang.

By Alex Prud'homme, First Things First

Last year Bill McKibben's The Future of the Last Fish: The Fate of Freshwater in the 21st Century by Alex Prud'homme, Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food, by Paul Greenberg, Elixir: A History of Water and Humankind by Brian Fagan, and Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power and Civilization by Steven Solomon, are four books published on this matter in the last three months. All these books sound the alarm bells required for hydrofracking natural gas is much greater than that required in biofuel production. Both industrial processes produce toxic wastewater that further destroys freshwater sources.

As we continue in vain to find new sources of fossil fuels to serve an unsustainable economy, we waste water. As agricultural sciences professor David Pimentel of Cornell University reports, it takes seventeen hundred liters of water to produce one liter of ethanol. This includes both the water required to grow the corn and the water required for the industrial, chemical production of ethanol. The water required for hydrofracking natural gas is much greater than that required in biofuel production. Both industrial processes produce toxic wastewater that further destroys freshwater sources.

"Fracking makes water disappear." wrote Steingraber in her way of making the biology clear to those who are not physical scientists. The added chemicals alter water irrevocably into a toxic stew. Steingraber points to the obvious but still inconvenient truth: "Sooner or later, the gas will run out." These things we know for certain. "Sure thing number three: Accidents happen," wrote Steingraber. Those in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, have experienced a tractor trailer carrying an acid used in hydrofracking overturn in their community. And in Dimock, Pennsylvania, the accidental groundwater contamination happened without a crash or a bang.

Cornell University Press just released the most recent book on this topic, Under the Surface, written by Tom Wilber. A reporter for the Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin, Wilber covered business, health, and environmental issues the past 17 years. Wilber interviewed scientists and key stakeholders on all sides of this issue. He offers an intimate view of the controversy between those who see the Marcellus region as a new economic engine to boost the languishing economy and those who foresee environmental disaster, devaluation of land, degradation of water and the ruin of the landscape and rural way of life. His even-handed treatment gives voice to the varied circumstances, including farmers tempted by the prospects of income but worried about the ecological consequences. Under the Surface is the latest, and perhaps best, book to address the issues of hydrofracking and water we now face in our communities.

Next month, the best new memoirs about life on a small farm.

Jill Swenson is the president of Swenson Book Development, LLC, based in Brooktondale, NY. She may be reached at Jill@swensonsbooks.com or 807-539-3278.

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Consider Deep Pack Barns for Cow Comfort and Manure Management

By A. Fay Benson

Small dairy farm operators may soon be confronted by the prohibition of winter spreading of manure. Any farmer looking to update their barns should consider a design that can accommodate a deep bedded pack (DBP) system.

A DBP system incorporates animal feeding and manure storage into one open barn, and can be especially helpful to smaller grazing farms. It generally consists of a foundation of concrete or hard clay. There may be a layer of gravel and then a bedding pack of straw, hay, sawdust or well-chipped wood shavings. Manure and urine mix into the bedding that remains in place for several months and is generally cleaned out once a year. A deep pack system is different than a composting pack that is aerated in the barn daily by tiler or turning. Biologic activity taking place 5-7 inches deep in the pack provides the heat that cows enjoy through the winter months.

Vermont Pack Barns Show Results

Deep bedded pack barns have been used in Vermont since the state prohibited winter spreading of manure in 1995. During a visit to Jack Lazor’s organic Butterworks Farm in Westminster, VT in January, I observed the pack’s effects on cow comfort. The pack at Jack Lazor’s registered a cozy 80 degrees F.

The bedding pack rises over time as more and more bedding is added throughout the winter. If watering systems are used on the pack to accommodate multiple groups, they need to accommodate this rise by placing a coil of water line underneath the waterer. As the pack rises, the waterer is lifted up. If there is only one group of animals or if all animals can get to the feed and waterer at the same time, the pack rises to accommodate multiple groups, they need to accommodate this rise by placing a coil of water line underneath the waterer. As the pack rises, the waterer is lifted up.

This past summer I visited Jack’s farm again. The 350-acre farm was established in 1979 making dooor-to-door deliveries of its own yogurt and cottage cheese. Today the farm includes its own granary, yogurt and cheesemaking with product distribution throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

Pros of a Deep Bedded Pack System

* Comfortable environment reduces lameness and provides for deep and restful sleep that in turn positively impacts milk production.
* Manure storage with less capital investment and less labor requirement than liquid storage
* Pack manure mixed with extra carbon is a better soil nutrient then raw manure from typical manure storage.
* Particularly adapted to grazing dairies since barns are used only 6 months and allow plenty of time to clean
* An option for out-dated dairies looking for build a combined housing-feeding barn with manure storage

Keep in Mind

* As with any type of housing structure, adequate bedding and good milking hygiene help manage the pathogens naturally found in a bedded pack system.
* Side retaining walls need to be strong enough to contain 4-6 feet of the pack and stand up to cleaning. Cow access, animal grouping, and travel-to-the-feed-alley pattern can be managed by electric fences which reduce manure in bedded areas.
* Good ventilation - whether the barn is positioned to take advantage of geography for natural wind ventilation or uses mechanical assistance with fans - helps keep the cows healthy, the pack dry, and odors down.
* Opinions differ on just how much room should be allowed per cow, but it is generally advised to allow for 70-85 to 100 sq. ft. per animal which is higher than freestall style housing. Breed, age, and animal condition impact that decision-making when planning a new barn.

Resources for more Information


NRCS Fact Sheet: Compost Bedded Pack Dairy Barns, June 2007

Video: Milking Time at Dead End Farm, Candor, NY, http://vimeo.com/31955654

January 9, 2012
Slaughter Daughter

By Lindsay Debach

My father is a butcher. He doesn’t have a potbellied or drape strings of sausages from his hands. He doesn’t have a mustache or wear one of those little straw hats, either. He does boast that he could skin a cow at the age of 10, can strip the meat from a carcass down to the bones and can season ham and bacon to perfection. Like his father before him, who started the Leona Meat Plant in 1963, he’s been in the family meat business his whole life. There was no question who would take over the shop once my grandfather retired. My Dad and Uncle became managers of the plant in the early 80’s.

Since I was old enough to remember, I’ve known what the inside of a cow looks like, the way a pig slices as it dies, and that there are exactly 50 cocktail wiensers to a pound. Often we’d watch as people came to drop off animals for the slaughter: cows, pigs, sheep, and on rare occasions, even ostriches would stare blankly from behind the white slats of the holding pens. Whenever friends came over, the visit always included a trip down to the shop, where they’d gawk in amazement at the sides of beef hanging in the cooler, the cow heads in the bone barrel out back, and the puddles of blood that got washed off the kill floor. But the fact is, the blood stains on my Dad’s white apron and coat never deterred me from giving him a hug. I accepted the fact that my Dad cut carcasses all day, that the dog licked his shoes clean some nights when he came home from work and that the knives in our kitchen were always sharp. Being a vegetarian is something that I’d never be able to do with an honest heart. A summer job, a steak on the table, a topic for my college entrance essays: the meat plant served as a backdrop to my youth.

I don’t remember how old I was when the first time my Dad asked me to help out in the shop, but I remember it involved measuring bits of cubed beef into one-pound bags. At first, I was pretty impressed with my new post. The oversized butcher coat and apron that I wore swathed me in white and I felt important. But after ten minutes of grabbing the chilled meat chunks and fumbling them into their plastic receptacles, I was -- to put it gently -- over it. My hands felt like they were going to fall off, and the smell of raw beef gave me a taint of nausea.

Working at the meat plant never did regain its novelty. From 5th grade on, my brother, sister, cousins and I spent our last day of school each year in one of the plant’s coolers doing what we came to refer to as “clamming.” Around the beginning of June the town Vets Club would have their annual clam bake and would order all of their mollusks through the Leona Meat Plant. The gritty clams came to us on a truck in bushel bags of 400 or so, and it was our job to dump them out, wash them, and bag them up by the dozen in little white cheese cloth bags so they could properly bake. While the rest of our class was out enjoying the first hours of summer vacation, the Debach kids were stuck in a meat cooler freezing our fingers trying not to cut ourselves on broken clam shells.

In December, it was ring bologna: we’d have to grab it off the racks where it cooled after coming out of the smoke house, and then cry-o vac every ring. If we needed money, if Dad needed help, if Mom wanted us out of the house, we’d work at the meat plant. There was always something to do, and if you couldn’t find anything then, as Dad used to say, “you can always slice bacon!”

During high school, in order to afford a class trip to England, I made the jump from part-time help to full-time employee when I agreed to work for the entire summer in the retail part of the plant. Somewhere between counting out Hormel Cocktail Smokies and slicing the chopped beef I decided that as soon as I could help it, I wouldn’t ever have anything to do with this place again. I saw butchering as a dirty, smelly, vomit-inducing job. But as Dad used to say, “you can’t find anything then, as Dad used to say, “you can always slice bacon!”

"Is that blood?" my new roommate asked me. I looked up from unpacking and confirmed that yes, it was blood, and that no, it wasn’t human. My Dad was a butcher. Move-out day from the dorm gave me an even harsher reminder of my past. On the afternoon that my parents were to come get me, the family car happened to be having some motor trouble. Even in my relief to be leaving college for the summer, I was mortified when my mother and father arrived outside my dorm in a refrigerated meat truck. The “Leona Meat Plant” insignia and Hereford cow slogan boldly against the minivans and SUVs of the other “normal” families.

I transferred to a college out near Chicago: a good 15-hour drive from home and from the family business. I came home less often, talked to Dad less often, and little by little, managed to conceal my charcuterie roots. Throughout college I tried not to think about the butcher shop and how the only time I could spend with my father was to put a white coat on and work beside him. How in high school, my friends got to work at the plant and the near-fatal incident of getting hit in the head with a swinging meat hook.

The summer after I graduated from college, I moved home. Confused and daunted by the prospect of choosing a career path, I opted to work at the one place where I knew I’d always have a job: Leona Meat Plant. But this time I wasn’t bagging the rows eagerly inspected the beef killed earlier that day. In a small walk-cooler with sterile white sides and a cement floor, they focused their attention on the 6 sides of fresh beef hanging on the rusty steel rail.

“They’re filled out nicely...this one looks really good...nice cover on the shoulder...I bet we could get at least $1200 for him.” It’s a language I’ve heard all of my life, but that I still don’t understand. Or rather, one that I never chose to learn - that of killing, meat and making money. I pulled off my glove and reached out to touch one of the chilling carcasses. The waxy, congealed flesh was lukewarm and sticky under my hand. A hard coating began to form in the cooler’s chill, almost like an orange that’s been peeled and left out. With talent fostered by years of experience, my Dad and Uncle can read these lines of fat and muscle as a map. In humility and earnest, they practice their craft; not to be noticed or capitalize on a growing food trend. But as a living and way of life.

I returned to the city jaded. Not by the meat plant I once resented but to the “scene” around me. In my hip Brooklyin neighborhood, weekly butchering classes were attended by hundreds of eager city dwellers and a white meat apron was the new black. Meat specialty shops sprang up, with a novice meat cutter behind a sturdy butcher block, casually wielding a cleaver and moving slow enough to pose for the photographer in the room. But did these “foodies”, these “rock star butchers” heralded by The New York Times and the food blogs know what it was to shoot a cow? Had they ever loaded boxes of beef until their back muscles gave out?

Now I’m coming to terms with the “slaughter daughter” that I am, with the fact that only because of the long days my Dad spent on the kill floor was I afforded the opportunity to go to college, or the connections in New York; the very places I practiced hiding my identity. My father may not be making the front page of any paper, or the buzz of the butchering blogosphere, but he practices his craft because it is what he knows, and knows it well. He’s not concerned about anyone watching. And I can now honestly say, neither am I.
Winter Homework? Take an Online Class!

By Betsy Lamb

Winter has arrived! What can you do with those long evenings? Learn something new with distance learning!

‘Distance learning’ is the delivery of instruction through electronic means where the instructor and learner are geographically separate. There are a variety of types of distance learning but this article will focus on some of the on-line educational resources available through Cornell University that you can access on your computer. Some are scheduled classes and others are available whenever you have time. Most are available to anyone in the Northeast. Some are even free!

Here’s the geek speak up front - what software, hardware and plugins do you need to get started? An email account is usually essential - you probably already have that. Bandwidth - I’m already getting out of my depth - is how fast you can send and receive information - also indicated by connection speed. If you have a dial up or satellite connection, online instruction isn’t impossible to access, but you will need patience and the audio and video may be spotty. DSL and Cable Modems provide solid connections and allow for smooth use of all the aspects of the courses.

You might also need plugins like Adobe Acrobat Reader to be able to read pdf documents in your web browser and Flash Player to be able to watch videos. Don’t worry. Most distance learning programs will help you download these programs (for free!) if you don’t already have them.

There is a series of Beginning Farmer courses running from October to April each year with topics ranging from Guerilla Marketing or Financial Recordkeeping to the newest information on growing veggies or berries. They run about 6 weeks each, cost $175 and mix real-time on-line webinar meetings with on-your-own-time readings and activities. The annual calendar of courses is available at http://nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/annual-calendars-of-courses/. Where else can you have direct access to experienced growers and Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators and ask them all the questions you want?

The Cornell Horticulture Department offers on-line courses with a hands-on component. Two that might be of interest, are Organic Gardening and Plant Propagation. Check out http://hort.cals.cornell.edu/cals/hort/teaching/distance-learning/index.cfm to see what is offered and when. For each course there are on-line discussions and even virtual field trips!

Now you can even get pesticide credits for on-line courses! The Pesticide Management Education Program (or PMEP) has a series of on-line pest management courses that fulfill the requirements for Department of Environmental Conservation pesticide license recertification credits, both in core credits and in category courses. Topics include Safety Precautions with Pesticides, Personal Protection, Sweet Corn IPM, and Scouting Basics. Each module has a pre-test followed by text, photos, and other educational materials. Once you have studied the information, and spent at least an hour on the materials, you successfully complete a post test and are issued a certificate. Most courses cost $25. There are already 17 modules with new courses being added. For more information go to: http://pmepcourses.coe.cornell.edu/.

Do you have forest lands on your farm? The Department of Natural Resources supports ForestConnect - an internet seminar series with free monthly broadcasts on the web at http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/forestconnect/we b.htm. They even, kindly, include a trouble-shooting page on their website to reduce connection frustration. You can learn about maple syrup production or silvopasturing, the practice of mixing cows and trees! There are archived presentations on those and many more topics. And new live webinars (web seminars!) are listed as they are scheduled so you can actively participate in the discussion by emailing questions!

So how about some leadership information? There are free archived webinars on communication strategies at http://www.ecornell.com/archived-webinars/ through eCornell. (Warning: When you sign up you might get some eCornell emails.) eCornell also has courses on Human Resources Management, Financial Management and Marketing (http://www.ecornell.com/individual-course-list) that lead to certificates in these areas. And if you’d like to earn degree credit but can’t get to campus, the School of Continuing Education and Summer Sessions provides a wide range of courses in summer and winter sessions (http://www.sce.cornell.edu/dl/index.php). How about Popular Culture in the United States, 1950 to the Present to liven up those winter nights!

For more information, contact Elizabeth Lamb at 607-254-8800 or eml38@cornell.edu.

Starting a Farm?

Visit our Northeast Beginning Farmers Project online resource center! Enter the ‘New Farmer Hub’ to start drafting your business plan with the help of tutorials and interactive worksheets. Find answers to common questions, browse the Guide to Farming, and check out the latest beginning farmer online courses. You can browse our events calendar, subscribe to our monthly e-news, follow our blog, or visit us on Facebook and Twitter, all from the homepage of the new site: at http://nebeginningfarmers.org

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Turning Sand into Soil

By Anne Lincoln

*This article was one of four winning entries in a writing contest sponsored by the New York State Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). GLCI is led by a Steering Committee of farmers and agricultural professionals to promote the wise use of private grazing lands, and is funded by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.*

It was sand....sand everywhere. It was like beach sand that filled the house when the windows were open on a windy day. I had to wear "goggles" over my contact lenses to keep the grit out when I walked in the yard. Some neighbors said "you can't grow anything on that sand", but this is what my husband, Dave, wanted to use for pasture for beef cows! The neighbors didn't know, though, that this was like setting down a challenge to Dave.

I saw what Dave was capable of long before he decided to raise beef on our 25 tillable acres in Willboro, NY. We had moved there in 1998 after learning we did not enjoy the sounds of close neighbors while living in town. We had both been dairy farmers in previous lives before we met in 1992 and we both still loved growing crops and animals in a quiet country setting. My first surprise occurred when Dave had spent the day leveling off a piece of land near the woods. He said he was going to build a shed for his equipment. Well, I kind of humored him, thinking to myself "that's too big a project, he will never finish it". I found I had a lot to learn about Dave. Not only did he build the shed, but over the next two years, built it bigger and bigger, even adding an enclosed workshop with a cement floor.

I was obviously worried when he started talking about building a fence that "you can see through" around the fields, especially the field in front of the house. Well, that came true too! In 2004, when we had decided it was time to start getting some cattle, we looked around for someone to build a fence for us. The contractors seemed to all be too busy or too expensive, so Dave bought a post-pounder, ordered a tractor-trailer load of fence posts and went to work building a six-strand high tensile fence.

OK, well, now we had a herd and a fence. What about grass? Remember, you can't grow anything on that sand! There was some wispy blue grass that was struggling to grow on the nutrient poor soil, so at least we had something to start with. However, the spark to really get things started was our neighbor, Michael Davis, who worked for Cornell. He introduced Dave to some books about grazing, including Quality Pasture by Allan Nation, Management-intensive Grazing by Jim Gerrish, and Salad Bar Beef by Joel Salatin. Dave ate these books up almost as fast as our steers eat new grass. Dave was now full of ideas on how to grow beef on the sand. Managed grazing would allow us to watch our beef grow on lush green grass instead of what we had growing in the sandy fields.

We started grazing in 2005 with a handful of Herefords, putting them in paddocks separated with temporary fencing, and moving them a few times a day. It was a start, but we had a long way to go to raise good healthy beef on that soil. Dave continued his grass education by attending many pasture walks through the Northeast. He went to seminars about grazing and beef cattle presented by the Cornell Cooperative Extension and other organizations. Dave was especially impressed with Darrell Emmick’s presentation at “Hoof to Rail” about what was termed the “Law of Least Effort Grazing”. Darrell said that it was important to relate the animal behavior to how they graze and react to each other and their surroundings. There seemed to be an emphasis in many presentations and books on observing the pastures and the animals and this has become a key in our cattle grazing philosophy.

One book also mentioned it would take five years to really see an improvement in the pastures and suggested that many people got discouraged and gave up before they got to this five year mark. Well, it did take five years of grazing with about 30 Hereford and Angus cattle, moving them 2-5 times a day through small paddocks. We saw small improvements each year, but it was around year five when we really saw the results of managed grazing.

What were some of our results from managed grazing?

* The soil was able to hold a lot more moisture. Prior to managed grazing, the water ran off the fields in small rivers when it rained. Now the small rivers no longer appear, even after a heavy rain. The grasses help the soil to absorb and retain moisture and keep the soil moister when the weather is warm and dry. The soil has a lot more organic matter and earthworms are plentiful.
* The grass species have become more diverse and there are almost no weeds. We started with a wisp of blue grass that dies out early in the summer. Without doing any seeding, the pastures now have a large variety of grasses, including orchard grass, quack grass and clover. This diversity helps keep the pasture lush and green throughout the grazing season.
* The manure breaks down rapidly. Around the fourth year of grazing, Dave was walking the pasture and kicked a manure patty, something he often does to help the manure to break down faster. This manure patty was only a few days old and all crusty on the top. When he kicked it, the top flew off and there was almost nothing left underneath except a few strands and a lot of dung beetles. The patties get dung beetle holes in them now in hours after they are dropped by the cows. The dung beetles are much more active partly because we do not need to worm the cattle.
* The number of grazings and the thickness of the grass increased dramatically over the five year period. By not allowing the cattle to graze too long, they don't eat the grass down to the dirt or the new shoots, thus allowing the grass to recover and develop new growth much more rapidly. Leaving four to six inches of grass in the pasture also helps to keep the animals from acquiring worm infections.

In 2010, we were able to grow more animals and rotate them through the pastures more times than in any other year. The winter of 2010-2011 was long and snowy, but the pastures last spring were green and growing fast, so we are looking forward to an even better growing season in 2012!

For more information on the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative please contact Karen Hoffman at 607-334-4632 x116 or karen.hoffman2@ny.nrcs.gov. For assistance with planning or starting up a grazing system contact your local USDA-NRCS or county Soil and Water Conservation District.
Erin Forbes of Overland Honey in Portland, Maine has an innovative idea for how northern beekeepers can establish healthy new colonies, regionally adapted, but are in short supply and not available until early-May, too late for spring pollination of many important fruit crops. Erin Forbes’ innovative idea is to requeen packaged colonies with a northern-adapted queen in June. In her SARE demonstration study, Erin evaluated the strength, survivability, and honey production of requeued packaged colonies compared to northern-produced nuclear colonies (aka “nucs”) and southern-produced packaged colonies. Two years of results show that Erin’s strategy of requeening packaged colonies is a promising method establish healthy new colonies for northern beekeepers.

Introduction

The yellow and black honeybee mailbox that marks Erin Forbes’ driveway is the first sign that she is a devoted keeper of bees. Her drive off of an urban Portland street is wooded and feels rural before reaching her pleasant home. Upon arrival at least a dozen hives, warmly painted with bee friendly shades of blue, green and yellow, are immediately visible in a pollenation haven of flowering trees and wildflowers. The entire landscape of the 7-acre property is planted for the bee’s palate and superb honey production: fields of perennial and annual native wildflowers, locust, linden, tupelo and apple trees, beach roses and clover-trellied lawns. Erin Forbes is a master beekeeper with 9 years experience. She tends roughly 70 hives in Cumberland County, Maine and teaches apiculture for the Cumberland County Cooperative Extension.

The vast majority of Northern beekeepers start a honeybee colony by purchasing a “package”. Packages generally come from southern states (i.e. Georgia, Alabama, Texas) or California where the bees tend to be the Italian breed (Apis mellifera ligustica), which is not well adapted to northern climates. Other problems with packages are that the bees arrive stressed and rates of disease, parasite, and varroa mites are relatively high. Many colonies started from packages do not survive the winter.

For the SARE project Erin investigated the colony strength, survivability and honey production among colonies of requeued packaged bees, traditional commercial packaged bees, and northern “nucs”. The SARE project she tested the highest survival rate (10 of 13 or 77%). Disease and parasite loads were higher in the packet hives than the “nucs”, not surprisingly leading to the higher mortality rates in those colonies.

Table 1. Results are reported for 13 hives of each type. The remaining 5 hives of each type are not included because they swarmed and did not successfully requeen.

Table 2. Results are reported for 13 hives of each type. The remaining 5 hives of each type are not included because they swarmed and did not successfully requeen.

Disqualified colonies swarmed and did not successfully requeen. Interestingly the requeued packages seemed to better handle the higher disease and parasite loads than the conventional packages. Greater disease resistance, genetic adaptation to the northern climate, and the management technique of “breaking the brood cycle” through the process of requeening may explain the increased rates of survival and strength of the requeued packages over the conventional ones.

Erin was pleased with her results and the outcome of the project. However, in an interview, Erin made it clear that “a bigger, more formal study is necessary. This study was small, and didn’t prove much...I can just say that these were my results with 54 colonies over 2 years. Somebody should do a real study on just packages, requeued and not requeued based on my project; that would be worthwhile”. Perhaps that will be the next SARE project Erin focuses on. Erin stresses the importance of increasing the production of northern “nuc” colonies in New England, another potential SARE project for the northeast apiculture community.

Spread the Word

Overall Erin feels that the outreach she has conducted through the SARE project has increased education and awareness for new and seasoned beekeepers throughout Maine and the northeast. Reflecting on the project’s influence on apiculture, Erin said, “This was a demonstration project to get people thinking about where their bee colonies come from and the implications of their purchasing choices on bee health and vitality...regionally and nationally...I got so much good feedback, people loved it.”

The passion, knowledge, care, intuition and foresight that Erin applies to her beekeeping is truly inspiring and informative. When asked what the best part of the SARE project was, Erin responded, “The actual beekeeping. I fell in love with every single colony. Even the package colonies, I had such a crush on them. It was ridiculous. This is why I’m a beekeeper”.

Inside and outside the comb, this SARE project was an important step to solving major problems that restrict the sustainability, economic viability and overall success of northeastern beekeepers. With the continued hard work of Erin and other experienced apiculturists, the health of the bees and the production of their honey can improve every season.

Go here to learn more details about her study and results....http://mysare.sare.org/smySARE/ProjectReport.aspx?do=vieRept &pn=FNE10-6946&ye=2010&st=0

Aaron Englander is a graduate student at the University of Maine. He may be reached at aaron.englander@gmail.com.

SARE offers sustainable agriculture grants, bulletins, informational line events calendar and many other resources. Learn more about the Northeast SARE program by visiting www.nesare.org or by contacting Northeast SARE 655 Spear Street University of Vermont, Burlington VT 05405 Phone (802) 656-0471 Fax (802) 656-0500 E-mail: nesare@uvm.edu
Traveling with 4-H through Horticulture Contest

by Heather Tweedie, 4-H Horticulture Club, St. Lawrence County

I just got back from San Diego, California. Now, let me tell you how I got there. I live on an organic dairy farm with my family in a small town in Northern New York. I have been in the 4-H horticulture program for 8 years now. The first year I did the horticulture ID contest at our County Fair and I really enjoyed it. The next year I did the contest again at the County Fair and was put on the New York State Fair team for St. Lawrence County. I continued doing this for a few years. I also am in a 4-H Horticulture Club. Bill McKenty, my leader, takes us on walks through his nursery and shows us all of his plants. We hold monthly meetings at his nursery where he talks to us about plants.

When I was 15, I qualified to go to the national horticulture ID contest at the convention for the National Junior Horticulture Association. The first year I went to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The next year I went to Cleveland, Ohio. This year I went all the way to San Diego, California. I had never been to California. My family and I traveled by train. I had a really great time and saw many new things. I was able to go to the San Diego Zoo, the biggest zoo in the country. I also went to Sea World!

I have a small business selling plants which I have started in our greenhouse from seedlings that I have purchased. I would like to expand the business next year. Without being in 4-H, I would not have been able to go to all these places and do all these things. Thank you 4-H for giving me these experiences!

For more information on how to join 4-H visit: http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/aboutus/JoinUs.aspx

4-H and Farming

by Heather Tweedie, 4-H Horticulture Club, St. Lawrence County

Being born and raised on a farm has taught me many things. One of the most important is probably my work ethic. I hate to leave things unfinished, or not do my best at whatever I’m doing. I take my work ethic with me to school. My schedule is full and my classes give a lot of homework, but I try to never let my teachers down. I get my work done to the best of my abilities and because of that I get good grades. This is all a result of my learned work ethic. I also involve myself in a lot of extra activities such as sports and clubs. One club that has given me a lot is 4-H.

I have been in 4-H for seven years and it has taught me a lot. I show cows every year. I have participated in public speaking competitions which have helped me be more open to giving presentations and speaking to groups. Just recently I spoke at a youth food summit about farming. I’ve shown pigs and rabbits, as well as participated in other 4-H functions outside of the fair. 4-H helps me be a better leader. I am the president of the Kon Kraze 4-H club and I have helped at different events in leadership positions. 4-H is helping to prepare me for the outside world and helping me be a better, more well rounded person. I don’t know where I would be today if it weren’t for 4-H and the farm.

For more information on the 4-H Dairy Project visit: http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/dairycattle

Dairy Farming and 4-H

by Mia Brown, St. Lawrence County

Growing up on a dairy farm and being in 4-H has given me some great opportunities. Doing chores on the farm has taught me about hard work. Through 4-H, I have been involved in the Dairy Bowl competition, representing my county at the regional contest for three years and last year at the State level at Cornell. I learned how to judge dairy cattle and compete at the local competitions at the St. Lawrence County and Hammond Fairs.

Best of all, I have been able to show 6 different Holstein calves over my years in 4-H (I owned 3 of them). I have steadily improved my placing in dairy showmanship.

I now have goals for myself through the farm and 4-H. I have become interested in the Brown Swiss breed and look forward to getting my own Brown Swiss calf in November. I want to continue to improve in dairy cattle judging and dairy showmanship. I want to be on the St. Lawrence Senior Dairy Bowl Team in 2012 and would like to qualify for the State competition again. And my biggest goal is to be a large animal vet or run my own organic Holstein and Brown Swiss herd. All this has happened because of 4-H and living on a farm!

For more information on the 4-H Vet Science Project visit: https://www.ansci.cornell.edu/4h/vetsci

The Youth Pages are written by and for young people. Many thanks to the 4-H Teens from St. Lawrence County who contributed to this issue. We believe there’s a bright future for young farmers in the Northeast. Whether you live on a farm or only wish you did, we’d love to hear from you!

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More information about the Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development program can be found at: http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu
January 9, 2012

Speeches, Service, and Sheep

by Maeghan Pierce, Jolly Ranchers 4-H club, St. Lawrence County

I have been in 4-H for 4 years. I enjoy making and showing my projects. In 4-H, you get to try different activities like public presentations and community service. In public presentations, you pick a topic, create a speech about it, and present it to an audience. In community service, you do voluntary service for the benefit of the community. I enjoy 4-H very much. Everything about it is fun. But I think one of the most fun things about 4-H is showing sheep.

My family owns a Suffolk sheep farm and I have grown up among the animals there. My 2-year-old sheep’s name is Florence, and I’ve been showing her at county fairs. We raise meat sheep, but also raise chickens and a calf each year. Life on a farm is hard work, but it is also fun. I have chores to do every day, and I have to have patience around the animals. There is also time for fun, like jumping in the haymow, and playing with the baby lambs. A farm is a great place to be a 4-H-er.

For more information on the 4-H Sheep project visit http://www.anr.cornell.edu/4H/sheep

What It Means To Me

by Garman Kenney, Just Equestrian 4-H Club, St. Lawrence County

Being on a small farm and in 4-H can mean a lot of things for a person. There are so many different programs and projects that a person is bound to find something that they like. For me, it means that I can spend a lot of time expanding my knowledge of different animals and their way of life. In my 4-H Club, “Just Equestrian”, we are working on getting back to the basics of horses, like what they eat and how to care for them. It’s great for me to learn those things because I’d like to attend Cornell University to become a large animal veterinarian.

4-H has furthered my knowledge of farming life too. I live on a small farm with my family, and being in 4-H gave me new suggestions and information that I use at my own home. Last year I attended a 4-H event which taught me about making maple syrup. I came home from that event and gave some great suggestions to my parents who applied them to our own maple syrup production. I liked that event so much that I even made my 4-H public presentation on the subject.

Another reason why I love being in 4-H is the people I get to see, meet and become friends with. If I ever have any questions I know that I can always ask someone, whether it is a 4-H educator or a leader to get helpful answers or advice. I have also made so many great friends! I love attending 4-H events because I get to be with my good friends, make some new friends, and learn new information about things that I may never have heard of before.

4-H means that I will be better prepared for my future. 4-H introduces me to new subjects that I really enjoy and want to further my knowledge in. 4-H means that I have lifelong friends who will stand beside me. Living on a small farm along with 4-H has led me to the job that I want to do, in the field of large animal veterinary care. 4-H means so many things to me that it would be almost impossible to name them all.

For more information on the 4-H equestrian project visit http://www.anr.cornell.edu/4H/horses

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plants has in the past led to over harvest. Plants like the Lady Slipper Orchid, Wild Leeks (Allium trioccum), American Ginseng, and yes, the Unicorn too, have all been put in danger of extinction due to over-harvesting and habitat destruction. If you would like to learn more about forest farming, visit ‘The How When and Why” Forest Farming Resource Center at http://hwwff.cce.cornell.edu/ The Resource Center has a list of self-guided tutorials that include text and images, video clips, power point presentations, and links to other on-line information sources.

Or visit MacDaniels Nut Grove during a field day or workshop! Our website is: http://www.hort.cornell.edu/immg/index.html

Bryan Sobel is a Graduate Student at Cornell University, specializing in Forest Farming and Food Quality. He would like to promote a transition to a sustainable agriculture society with roots in cultural heritage. He can be reached at bds229@cornell.edu

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Winter versus Spring Lambing

By Ulf Kintzel

In past decades it was common wisdom to lamb in the barn during the winter months in January and February. It was heavily promoted as the right thing to do. The wisdom was that farmers had time to give their flock the attention they needed during winter months, before the busy spring planting season arrived. However, in areas that experience winter with temperatures below freezing and snow, one needs to have a barn, winter feed, and the equipment to feed the sheep. It is labor intensive and costs money. In the last decade or so there has been a strong shift towards spring lambing on pasture. Lambing on pasture is assumed to be both less expensive and less labor intensive. Furthermore, a hands-off approach is now being promoted, where sheep lambing on pasture is unsanitized and unsupervised. Of course, that is an extreme that I don’t recommend and for discussion sake this extreme will not be part of this article.

I seem to have ignored the common wisdom, twice! When I farmed in New Jersey, I used to lamb on pasture in the spring when everyone had already lambed in the barn. For the past five years I have been in upstate New York and started to do more and more lambing during the winter months in the barn. Who is right and who is wrong? Truth be told, it all depends on your farming operation, specifically your market. There is no right or wrong answer that applies to everyone.

There are various markets for lambs, differing greatly when it comes to lamb size, required availability, means of raising them, and costs. It is labor intensive and costs money. In the last decade or so there has been a strong shift towards spring lambing on pasture. Lambing on pasture is assumed to be both less expensive and less labor intensive. Furthermore, a hands-off approach is now being promoted, where sheep lambing on pasture is unsanitized and unsupervised. Of course, that is an extreme that I don’t recommend and for discussion sake this extreme will not be part of this article.

Let me go through two examples at my own farm to illustrate how to determine your lambing cycle. When I farmed in New Jersey, my primary outlet was a local livestock auction in Hackettstown about one and a half hour driving distance from New York City. At this auction, there were numerous bidders from “the city” (referring to New York City) that ran butcher shops or supplied ethnic groups. The prices at the auction varied greatly. Summer prices were the lowest, winter prices and early spring prices the highest. While there was always a huge demand for lambs at Easter and Greek Easter, the supply was also very high. The price spiked for a very, very brief period. Then it declined steeply and rapidly. On the other hand, the Christmas market and winter market for heavier lambs was equally strong but supply lacked behind demand, which led to reliably high prices from December through February for heavy lambs. Considering these conditions, I lambed in my later years in New Jersey during the month of April when the weather was favorable enough to lamb on pasture with very little requirement and cost for barn and equipment. I extended my grazing season a year when others sold out because they ran out of pasture. This allowed me to fetch premium prices in early winter and especially around Christmas when supply was low and demand was high.

Now I am in my sixth year in upstate New York and face a completely different scenario. My customer base is very diverse. Two large customers are distributors supplying high end restaurants and stores with my grass-fed lamb, which need a steady supply for as long as they can, with very high demand during the vacation months of July and August and well into September. Demand slackens off as Thanksgiving draws near. This customer base almost dictated that I had to change my lambing cycle. I now have a lambing season in January, a second lambing season in March and a third lambing season in late April and early May during which my replacement ewes lamb. This staggered lambing season allows me to provide finished lambs from June through November. The more I can spread it out, the more lambs each individual distributor will buy. In fact, the buyers prefer a year-round supply but grass-fed lamb is a seasonal business in my view. Since these lambs are raised entirely on pasture they fetch a premium price, my competition is limited, and sales are as certain as anything in a free market system can be. Therefore, it was a necessary step to change from spring to winter lambing. Since at my new site, I have a barn and adjacent pasture instead of limited and rented barn space, as I did in New Jersey, this change came with little additional cost.
FACES OF OUR FOOD SYSTEM: FARMIEMARKET

***Get to know a local food distributor in our new 2012 interview series***

By Becca Jablonski

Over the past decade, direct marketing has become very popular, and for good reason. Selling directly to the customer brings back a higher return and the satisfaction of a personal relationship, among many other advantages. But the time and talent to show up in person, peddling your products one by one, isn’t always the most efficient way to make sales. Meanwhile, as the local food system continues to explode, many distributors or ‘middlemen’, are sprouting up to help get the small producer’s products to market. Selling wholesale to the right distributor can save on the costs of direct marketing and move a larger quantity of product in an efficient manner.

Who are these distributors? They are a diverse crowd using new models and reviving old ones. We’d like to get to know a different one each issue, so that you can familiarize yourself with the methods and motivations of “middle” entrepreneurs who are using to move local foods to markets and decide if selling to a distributor is right for you!

For our first profile, Becca Jablonski spoke to Sarah Avery Gordon, the founder and owner of FarmieMarket.com.

FarmieMarket.com is an online farmers’ market that allows customers to place orders and have local food delivered to their door. FarmieMarket.com started in Albany County, NY and has now spread to Schenectady, Rensselaer and Saratoga Counties. The goal of FarmieMarket.com is to keep small farms in business by limiting their costs associated with marketing.

Q: Why did you start FarmieMarket.com?

A: I started marketing products for my family’s farm online. My family’s farm was struggling after my mother, the farm’s business manager, passed away, and I didn’t want my dad to have to take an off the farm job. So, I set up a website and a facebook group. In the first month our sales doubled. More of our farming friends were interested in my help marketing their farms, so I set up a central marketplace-Heldebergmarket.com. We started with 6 producers-mostly friends I knew in the area/people that made really quality products.

When I started talking to more small farmers, I found that many experience the same barriers marketing their products through weekend farmers’ markets. Many small farms are really mom and pop operations, and for them to have to sacrifice one or two members of the farm to go to farmers’ markets (which may be all of the farm labor), it is just too much. Farmers’ markets in the capital district often have really high fees - like up to $600 - which can also be a barrier for some people. Plus, the more successful farmers’ markets in our region take place in the summer, when people like my dad are too busy bailing hay. My dad would love to go to winter markets, but many don’t have enough foot traffic. By grouping small farms together and marketing our products through a central website we can gain some synergy and overcome many of these barriers.

Q: The original FarmieMarket was the Heldeberg Market. Why did you decide to expand?

A: Because I had people calling me from all over the Capital Region, but I didn’t have the ability to work all of them into my Heldeberg Market schedule. In wanting to serve more farmers and more customers, I made the decision to divide and conquer. Now I have three FarmieMarkets, and serve each territory on a different day.

Q: What has the response from customers been?

A: Awesome! I have been getting a lot of word of mouth referrals. I have picked up a lot of customers that are very steady - they order every week or every other week.

Q: Q: Do you have any plans for further expansion?

A: I do actually. I have received requests from all over the country. A few national farming blogs have picked up on the market - The Greenhorns (http://www.thegreenhorns.net/) and Seedstock (http://seedstock.com/) have both run articles on the market. The FarmieMarket concept is really gaining traction, so I am actually going to organize an educational series this winter to give entrepreneurs the skills they need to set up FarmMekarts in their area. My plan is to keep everything under the FarmieMarket umbrella, but each individual market will have its own local flavor - in Rensselaer County, for example, the market is called Uncle Sam’s Farmer Stand since it is the birth place of Uncle Sam, but it is still a FarmieMarket.

Q: What types of products do you sell through FarmieMarket.com?

A: We have a full range of grass fed beef, grain finished beef (as long as the grain is grown on the farm), pastured pork, lamb, eggs. I am really trying to focus on value added products. We have lots of seasonal vegetables. I work with a few farmers who have greenhouses and high tunnels so we can offer products year-round. We are also diversifying into prepared foods. I am working with a local chef on this. Dairy is coming this spring.

Q: Are there products that you have been unable to find?

A: Yes, there are. That is one thing that is cool about the market - I have all of this information about what we have available/how much farmers produce, and I have done a bunch of research about what could be grown in the area and isn’t. I had a meeting for my farmers last winter and we quickly realized that collectively we were growing too much zucchini. There are lots of products I would like to try to get - more beans for example. I recommended growing beans to a farmer I work with; he planted kidney, black and yellow beans this summer, and has already sold out.

Q: Are there any other stores or organizations you would like to feature in the future?

A: Yes, there are. That is one thing that is cool about the market - I have all of this information about what we have available/how much farmers produce, and I have done a bunch of research about what could be grown in the area and isn’t. I had a meeting for my farmers last winter and we quickly realized that collectively we were growing too much zucchini. There are lots of products I would like to try to get - more beans for example. I recommended growing beans to a farmer I work with; he planted kidney, black and yellow beans this summer, and has already sold out.

Becca Jablonski is a PhD student at Cornell University conducting food systems research. She may be contacted at rt223@cornell.edu. Thanks to the following funders for their support of local food distribution research: the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future, NESARE, and the Cornell Small Farms Program.

Sarah Avery Gordon Making a Snowy Delivery
Howland Dairy Benefits from Whole Farm Analysis Project

By Lisa Fields

The Whole Farm Nutrient Analysis Program (WFA) came along at the right time for Rob Howland of Candor, NY. Howland’s 74 cow dairy is one of eleven farms in the WFA project, an initiative of Cornell’s Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP). The WFA identifies opportunities for change in nutrient inputs or allocations that could benefit the environment and the farm’s bottom line. The nutrient efficiency of a farm’s component areas are measured and analyzed with an integrated approach.

Howland described his reaction when approached by his Extension Field Crops Specialist, Janice Degni to participate in the project. “I immediately said that I would. I was aware of the concerns in society about the environment, and as a dairy farmer, business economics are always a personal concern. This farm has a fairly large land base, and I was questioning where in the crop system I would get the best return from my time and dollars.”

There are several stand-alone tools used to evaluate a farm’s nutrient status that tend to analyze a particular sector of the farm. An objective of the WFA project is to combine those tools and extract the data that are most essential for assessing nutrient status and providing valuable information to the farmer.

Patty Ristow, Extension Associate with the NMSP, explained the WFA process. “The first step is to compile accurate and relevant information to analyze the farm’s nutrient status. On the field side this consists of three key tools: a Whole Farm Nutrient Mass Balance (NMB), soil fertility analysis of all the fields, and nitrogen measures termed adaptive N management in corn fields.”

The NMB provides a mechanism for tracking nutrient use efficiency across the whole farm year after year. The analysis covers four farm production sectors: milk, animals, crops and feed. The NMB diagnostic reports quantify the net major nutrients that remain after subtracting nutrients exported from those imported to the farm.

The year-end data summary requires routine record-keeping for each production sector. That can make it challenging to com-plete, but Ristow noted that its role is crucial. “The NMB diagnostics have helped illustrate to farm management teams and environmental regulators that our farms’ management changes are greatly reducing the amount of nutrients that could affect water resources. By tracking changes over time a powerful message is delivered from the whole farm perspective.”

Howland commented further, “At first I didn’t find the NMB to be effective. Getting the data together was tough, because it didn’t fit with my record keeping system. After about two years I made some adjustments in tracking forage inventory, and that helped both the NMB data needs and my feed system. I started tracking my baleage more specifically as to time of cutting and the field it came from. As yields have increased from the same number of acres, sales of baleage are taking nutrients off the farm as well as providing income. I now view hay quality as a nutrient efficiency issue as well as an economic one. The NMB also shows that I buy the same amount of feed as before the project, but I make more milk now from 74 cows than I did several years ago with eighty.” A complete stall renovation at Howland’s barn also contributed to increased milk production from fewer cows. The integration of forage quality with crop exports and increased milk sales has led to a reduction in nutrient remaining on the farm.

Ristow commented on the diagnostic impact of the program’s approach to soil nutrient analysis. “WFA summarizes and displays the results across an entire farm. This shows a clear picture of where approximately 70% of nutrients brought onto the farm as feed ultimately end up in the form of manure. Uneven distribution of nutrients on cropland indicates an opportunity to change manure spreading and fertilizer application practices.”

During team meetings farm data were reviewed to identify nutrient status of the farm and potential opportunities to improve.

Howland noted that the soil fertility information from the WFA was immediately useful. “I knew those fields close to the barn would have high nutrient levels, but the project showed me those levels over time. I have a much clearer idea of how much manure should or should not go on the various fields. Some of our hill fields are nutrient hungry, and now we prioritize spreading there whenever the weather allows.”

Ristow commented on the impact of Howland’s participation on the project’s development. “Rob’s input has been a tremendous help in creating report formats that are useful management tools. His feedback was vital, because the information must make eco-

nomic sense to him and clearly benefit his business. If farmers can’t readily draw conclusions from the information we provide, it’s unlikely to be applied to management decisions.”

The project takes nutrient management a step farther by utilizing two adaptive management tools for nitrogen in corn fields. The Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test (ISNT) can be taken prior to crop planting and predicts the soil’s ability to supply N to the crop by determining the amount of available mobilize from the pool of organic N. The Corn Stalk Nitrate Test (CSNT) is a nitrate analysis of the bottom portion of the corn stalks at harvest time. It tells the story of how the prediction of N supply and use of fertilizer and/or manure played out in reality. These two tools together allow for fine-tuning of N applications over time and on a field by field basis.

Looking to the future, the project hopes to integrate economic measures from Cornell’s Dairy Farm Business Summary into the WFA diagnostics, identifying factors of profitability that correlate with nutrient efficiency. This could provide financial documentation to the benefits seen by WFA participants. Ristow commented: “The changes made as a result of tracking the NMB and fine-tuning nutrient distribution and nitrogen use on corn often result in reduced purchases and alleviate excessive nutrient levels that may affect water resources. It’s a win-win scenario for the farm’s economics and the environment.”

Howland summarized his opinion of the WFA project: “Participating in this type of project raises your level of consciousness as it puts the farm’s nutrient use facts in front of you. If something looks high, you have the tools to consider how to change that.” Noting the fit between the WFA project and his business philosophy, he added, “It’s important to know what the issues are that can affect your business. You can’t farm in a vacuum.”

Lisa Fields is an independent consultant in Agronomy and Farm Management and resides in Worcester, NY. She may be reached at lafields@hughes.net.

About the Nutrient Management Spear Program

The Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP) is an applied research, teaching and extension program for field crop fertilizer and manure management on corn and living dairy farms. It is a collaboration among faculty, staff and students in the Department of Animal Science, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and PRO-DAIRY. Our vision is to assess current knowledge, identify research and educational needs, facilitate new research, technology and knowledge transfer, and aid in the on-farm implementation of strategies for field crop nutrient management including timely application of organic and inorganic nutrient sources to improve farm profitability while protecting the environment. An integrated network approach is used to address research, extension and teaching priorities in nutrient management in New York State. For more information on NMSP projects and extension/teaching activities, visit the program website (http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu) or contact Quirine Ketterings at qmk2@cornell.edu or (607) 255-3061.
I care for open and short bred dairy heifers for a friend of ours. He may own them but they are "mine" while they are here. I consider myself an environmentalist and value prescribed grazing for the good environmental benefits. I know how much healthier cattle are that graze in a carefully managed system. But the real reason I am so enthusiastic about being a grazing farmer is because it is so good for me. I love dairy cattle, but my days of milking them are all over. By boarding heifers I have to take walks up and down hills; be out in the fresh air and sunshine (or rain, freezing rain, snow, whatever) Otherwise, it would be too easy just to hang about my porch and gardens and lose touch with the wonderful place that I live in.

If dairy farming continues to be part of the agricultural base in Upstate New York it will be because prescribed grazing has been adopted by many farmers. It makes economic sense to have cows harvest as much of their forage as possible, especially with today's high energy costs. But you need to be a top manager to get top tier results. That is why it is so important to have help available.

In 2011, we had a cool, damp spring that was good for lush grass growth. One of the biggest problems in intensively managed rotational grazing is understocking. My usual carrying capacity is about 22 - 25 open heifers on my hilly, thin-soiled 25 acres of pasture. My numbers around mid-spring were well below that. I had to be careful not to let the grass get ahead of me and wind up with hay - very poor grazing!

I hate cutting hay on my pastures, but with so few heifers it is my only way of preventing the ungrazed grass from getting too mature. Most of our pastures are too steep to be mechanically harvested efficiently and safely, so we tend to harvest the same one or two every time we get in this bind. When I give over an area for harvest it means fewer passes through with my heifers, therefore not enough animal impact, not enough manure deposited. Whining isn't my usual way, but I hate to see good pasture go to waste.

Our water system is above ground with miles of black plastic pipe hugging the stone walls, taking water from a spring on the top of the farm (over 2000') to the many paddocks below. It is so steep we have a couple of tanks that serve as reserves, but whose real purpose is to break the pressure so they don't like - they'll keep chewing on the good stuff and really hurt its potential for regrowth. I've learned: if they won't eat it, mow it and leave it. Better stuff is encouraged to grow through the mulch that you will have left behind.

I'm getting old enough (Social Security is only a year or so away) that I can choose how I spend my time. I blend grazing heifers with watching my grandkids' softball games, babysitting as needed, volunteering for the organizations that really matter to me, lots of flower gardening, other farm chores and of course, spending time with my hubby of 40 years. I'm a happy person, living on a farm surrounded by green pastures, sparkling streams, and clean young dairy animals. A bit of heaven in the Catskills.

For more information on the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative please contact Karen Hoffman at 607-334-4632 x116 or karen.hoffman2@ny.nrcs.gov. For assistance with planning or starting up a grazing system contact your local USDA-NRCS or county Soil and Water Conservation District.

By Sally Fairbairn

This article was one of four winning entries in a writing contest sponsored by the New York State Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). GLCI is led by a Steering Committee of farmers and agricultural professionals to promote the wise use of private grazing lands, and is funded by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.
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When planning to profit from an agricultural
Puna Organics is
In addition to growing and marketing mature
rhizomes are easy to grow, cultivate and mar-
ger its spicy and medicinal qualities. Aside from
curcumins) as having cancer-fighting proper-
many teas, drinks and confections that we
Ginger is truly beautiful in paradise but it can
grow well anywhere in the United States.
Hugh and Dan are growing edible ginger. It is
used as a spice, a medicinal herb, and flavors
many teas, drinks and confections that we
consumption covers other types of raw milk
transactions which may not look like the narrowly
defined retail model. The law more broadly
regulates the simple transfer of raw milk between dif-
ferent parties, regardless of how the money
moves back and forth between the buyer and the
dairy. Under this regulation, even the gift of
raw milk may be a prohibited transaction.

Within New York state, the on-farm sale of raw
milk is legal. Permits are available from the
Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets which
allow the permit-holder to sell raw milk provided
that a number of conditions are met. Sales must
be made directly to a consumer, and must also
be made on the farm where the raw milk is pro-
duced. Further, a sign must be conspicuously
placed near the point of sale which reads:
"NOTICE: Raw milk sold here. Raw milk does not
provide the protection of pasteurization."

The on-farm sale requirement severely limits the
market reach of a raw milk operation. New York
dairies may be tempted to circumvent these
restrictions using a variety of novel legal and
organizational arrangements. These methods are
colloquially known as "moo-n-shine" strategies and
have recently received significant press cov-
erage on National Public Radio and various
other media outlets. An example of such a strate-
gy is the use of a "cow share" program in which
consumers pay a fee to own a share of a cow or
cow herd that is sold to the consumer as raw milk.

The media coverage of these methods has been
degraded by the media. This can be a problem for
a New York based dairy operation because the coverage often oversimplifies the very
complex and thorough web of regulations which
concern the sale of milk in this state. It would thus
be unwise for any New York based dairy opera-
tion to adopt one of these arrangements without
very careful consideration. The laws regulating
the sale of milk products in the state of New York
are written quite comprehensively and prohibit
these types of "moo-n-shine" arrangements.

The dairy laws are written broadly so that the
New York State Department of Agriculture and
Markets may regulate every transfer of raw milk,
regardless of the underlying economic trans-
section and title to the dairy. The laws require
that the New York State Department of
Agreement, the commissioner shall have full access to any
farm, factory, business or facility suspected of
violating the raw milk laws or any other Department
regulation. (Agriculture & Markets Law § 702-
ficiently defined retail model. The law more broadly
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ucts to its membership. The court determined
that distributing milk via a cow sharing scheme
fell within the meaning of the phrase "otherwise
makes available" for consumption.

Courts have yet to review whether pet food label-
ing schemes can effectively mask the sale of raw
milk for human consumption. Given the compre-
hensive drafting of the statute, it is prudent to
assume this statagem will fail because of the
"otherwise make available" language in the regu-
lation. Mislabeling laws pose a further concern for
"pet food" method of distribution. Food is mis-
abeled or misbranded if its labeling is false or
misleading (Agriculture and Markets Law §
2011(1)), subjecting dairies to further regulatory
liability.

Violating the raw milk laws can have quick,
rainous financial consequences for a suspected
dairy. The Department of Agriculture and Markets
has a vast array of regulatory authority to
interfere with the operation of dairies which do
not comply with the raw milk laws. Under Section
20 of the Agriculture and Markets Law, agents of
the commissioner "shall have full access to any
farm, factory, business or facility suspected of
violating the raw milk laws or any other Department
regulation. (Agriculture & Markets Law § 20).
The Challenges and Rewards of On-farm Poultry Processing

By Sam Anderson

When’s the last time you saw “locally grown” stamped on a chicken at the grocery store? How many restaurants do you know that tell you who raised the duck on their menu? The market is out there - pasture-raised broilers can fetch over $30 per pound. However, marketing a local food item is very different than keeping up. So what’s the holdup?

If you’ve ever tried to raise and sell poultry for meat, you already know the culprits: processing. USDA allows raising fewer than 20,000 chickens or 5,000 turkeys per year to process them on your farm. It’s up to you to decide how much to regulate beyond that. Some states, like New Hampshire and New York, are relatively lax, others, like Massachusetts and Connecticut, ask more of producers before allowing them to process and sell poultry on their own farm.

Until recently, most small poultry farmers in Massachusetts have chosen between two options: pay up to build and license their own on-farm slaughter facility, or operate under the radar. It was only two years ago that a reasonably close USDA facility came online, but even that one is in Vermont. The other option is to rent a mobile poultry processing unit, or MPPU, essentially a “chicken slaughterhouse on wheels” that travels to farms with the blessing of the state Department of Public Health, allowing farmers an avenue to legally process and sell their own birds.

Several MPPUs are in various stages of operation around the Northeast. In Massachusetts there are two state-approved “mainland” units managed by New Entry Sustainable Farming Project and New England Small Farm Institute, and another operated by Island Grown Institute on Martha’s Vineyard.

While on-farm processing is available to producers who may not have any other (legal) way to bring their birds to the table, the logistical hassle of arranging a mobile poultry processing unit, or MPPU, have all been featured in a news story, from the local paper to NPR.

For more information about the Massachusetts MPPUs or small-poultry-scale poultry processing in general, please visit http://medelpnutrition.tufts.edu/resources/mobilepoultry.html, email sanderson@comteam.org, or call 978-654-6745.

Sam Anderson is the Livestock and Outreach Coordinator at New Entry Sustainable Farming Project in Lowell, Massachusetts.

New Farmers

Second Life Farming

By Mason Donovan

The age old question of, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” is typically directed towards children, but has been coopted by a much older population these days. There are many factors influencing the decision to pick up all that you have known and choose a second career. Corporate loyalty gave way to massive layoffs breathing the unwritten crate of lifetime employment, and the contract. Industries disappeared as others materialized; forcing one to rethink their path to retirement.

For Joe Pustizzi, owner of Pustizzi Farm in Boscawen, NH, it was just time to get out of the rat race. He started farming at age 12. Joe started a textile manufacturing business in Lawrence, MA. Over a period of 17 years, he acquired a successful business with global distribution, registered patents and trademarks, and all of the headaches associated with the continual 24-hour operation. “You just get tired.” Joe said with a long sigh.

When it was time to consider a second career, there was no doubt in Joe’s mind he “wanted to be or do something outside.” This urge familiar with many of us wanting to be closer to the land led to the purchase of a 227 acre plot of land, of which only 7 acres was immediately farmland. The rest was either wooded or not properly drained. “My grandfather was in the produce business and my grandmother and mother always had a garden for the household table. However, that was the extent of my farming knowledge or experience.”

When asked why he picked New Hampshire, Joe simply stated, “I was close to family and that was important to me.” With his work cut out for him, he knew a close support network would be needed as well. The most difficult task he anticipated were land clearing and soil management. Turning 7 acres into 13 productive acres of fruit and vegetables with an additional 10 plus acres into hay crop took approximately 6 years.

He adopted online marketing awareness trends by building the farm website, http://www.pustizziufarm.com, and creating a Facebook presence locating a few of his neighbors who had hit an unanticipated challenge. “People have a lot of choices ranging from their own gardens to local farms. I needed a way to make the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment you should feel afterwards. Sure, on-farm processing might lower your costs and help you market your birds, and it has to make sense for you financially; but don’t be surprised if you feel especially proud of the end product as you hand it off to your customers.

For more information about the Massachusetts MPPUs or small-poultry-scale poultry processing in general, please visit http://medelpnutrition.tufts.edu/resources/mobilepoultry.html, email sanderson@comteam.org, or call 978-654-6745.

Sam Anderson is the Livestock and Outreach Coordinator at New Entry Sustainable Farming Project in Lowell, Massachusetts.
Audubon Vermont is working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on two exciting programs, called the Forest Bird Initiative (FBI) and Champlain Valley Bird Initiative (CVBI). Both programs engage landowners in managing their land to protect a number of priority bird species in the region. Through these programs, forest, shrubland, and grassland owners are given the tools they need to make decisions about land management that benefit both the land and nesting birds.

Recommending a Habitat Assessment
Audubon Vermont conservation biologist Steve Hagenbuch completed a habitat assessment for the property in 2008. One of the recommendations included in the report was to apply for a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) contract to assist in the development of early-succesional habitat (young forests) for bird species such as Chestnut-sided Warbler and White-throated Sparrow. This habitat condition was deemed to be lacking on the property and the surrounding landscape. Fred’s application was approved, and through a site visit that included Mary Beth Adler and Ryan Smith from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, conservation forester Paul Harwood, and Steve Hagenbuch, two areas totaling approximately 4 acres were identified for conversion to early-succesional habitat. In the years following implementation Audubon Vermont hopes to be able to monitor the bird response to this management practice.

According to Fred, “I feel fortunate to have Audubon Vermont involved with bird habitat on my land. In addition to the detailed report I received, providing me with customized, documented information about what birds dwell on my land, I’ve been able to continue my relationship with Audubon, which has been very helpful when new questions arise. The report has been useful in working with NRCS and the local river partnership in seeking funds to help support bird habitat on my land.”

Early Successional Shrublands
Curt Alpeiter qualified for a WHIP contract to manage for early succesional habitat and to remove invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn on his 42 acre property in Charlotte, Vermont. Danny Peet from NRCS invited Audubon biologist Mark LaBarr to visit the site and assist in developing a conservation plan that would include work that would benefit priority shrubland bird species. Dave Adams from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department also joined the efforts. In addition to this visit, Mark conducted bird surveys on the property and located priority species such as Golden-winged Warbler. Mark provided Curt and NRCS with a written assessment and then worked with Adams to fine tune areas delineated for NRCS practices. Thickets of native shrubs were marked to be saved and areas of heavy invasive infestation were marked for removal. In addition, shrubland habitat that was reverting back to forest was identified and slated for manual clearing and brushhoggimg. Mark has since conducted post treatment bird surveys to assess the effectiveness of the work done and determine how the birds have responded. Curt has subsequently re-enrolled in WHIP to create additional early succesional habitat on his property.

Grasslands
Audubon biologists Mark LaBarr and Margaret Fowle have been working with NRCS to help promote the EQIP Grassland Bird Management practice. This practice has paid landowners up to $135 per acre for 3 years for performing an early hay cutting (before May 31) and waiting 65 days before the next cut. The payment is intended to compensate landowners for loss in quality of the hay from the delayed second cut. Qualifying fields must be high quality habitat for grassland birds so they are rectangular or square in shape, at least 20 acres in size, and have less than 10% reed canary grass. The 65-day waiting period has been proven to be enough time to allow any nesting grassland bird species such as Bobolinks or Eastern Meadowlarks to renest before the next cutting. This is significant in that agriculture is maintained on the field (up to 3 cuts of hay per season) while providing breeding success to grassland birds nearly equal to fields not cut during the breeding season.

Margaret Fowle completed a habitat assessment for a former dairy farmer in Shelburne, Vermont in 2010. The farmer’s hayfields appeared to meet the criteria for the EQIP Grassland Bird Management practice. Fowle and Danny Peet from NRCS met the landowner in the fall of 2010 to assess whether or not one or both fields would qualify. In the end, one 24-acre field qualified and was contracted in EQIP and the Grassland Bird Management practice is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2012. The other field did not meet the required qualifications due to the wetness of the soils and a large hedgerow that was growing in a portion of the field’s center. Audubon Vermont hopes to be able to monitor the success of the prescribed cutting schedule with the landowner this coming spring.

Unfortunately, due to a national initiative for payment consistency, the EQIP Grassland Bird Management practice has been discontinued in Vermont and elsewhere for 2012, so no new early/late cut contracts will be signed. Audubon Vermont is working closely with NRCS staff to reinstate this practice for 2013 and beyond. NRCS in Vermont still offers the traditional and quite successful grassland bird conservation practices for delayed mowing which involves no cutting until August 1.

More information on these projects can be found at http://vt.audubon.org/ under Science and Conservation. If you would like to visit personally with Fred Pond about his experiences with fostering bird habitat you can contact him by mail at PO Box 64, Tunbridge, VT 05077 or email pondfc@yahoo.com.

To locate your local Audubon service center, see http://www.audubon.org/locations/type/304. More information on NRCS programs and contact information for your local service center can be found at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov

Margaret Fowle is a conservation biologist at Audubon Vermont in Huntington, VT. She can be reached at mfowle@audubon.org or (802) 434-3806.
New Farmers Sprouted through Conservancy Lease Program

By Michael Chameides

In 2010, the US imported 164.4 million pounds of “fresh garlic” and garlic imports continue to rise. However, in 2012 there will be a hundred or so people in the Hudson Valley who will be getting fresh local garlic from Great Song Farm in Milan, NY. This fall, Great Song is completing its first growing season and is planting a plot of garlic to be harvested next year.

The farmers at Great Song don’t own the land where they are planting their garlic and their other vegetables. They obtained the use of the property through Columbia Land Conservancy’s (CLC) Farmer Landowner Match Program. The program matches farmers seeking land with landowners who want their land farmed. CLC helps the farmer and landowner create a lease agreement that is mutually beneficial. Farmers may provide services, money, or crops in exchange for access to quality farmland. Everybody wins, including area residents who have increased access to local, healthy food.

Like many of today’s young farmers, the three farmers at Great Song didn’t grow up farming. Jen Carson was a social worker, Anthony Mecca studied computer science and literature, and Lisa Miskelly (who just joined the farm) studied computer science and literature. Like many of today’s young farmers, the three farmers at Great Song didn’t grow up farming. Jen Carson was a social worker, Anthony Mecca studied computer science and literature, and Lisa Miskelly (who just joined the farming team at Great Song) didn’t work on a farm until after college. As beginning farmers, they each worked at a variety of farms around the US and Canada. Jen and Lisa overlapped at Hawthorne Valley Farm in Harlemville, NY before going on to work at separate farms.

After years of farming, both Jen and Anthony decided they wanted to run their own farm and partnered on a new venture. The cost of purchasing land, however, was a barrier to them. This is a problem for many young farmers.

"Many of the young people who work with me on my farm hope to run their own farms one day, and most see acquiring land as the biggest obstacle," says Benjamin Shute, co-owner and manager of Hearty Roots Farm in Red Hook, NY and co-founder of the National Young Farmer’s Coalition. “That’s how I felt too, before I was able to rent some land from a farmer to get my vegetable operation started. Now we are trying to buy our own land, but it has been very challenging due to the very high land prices in the Hudson Valley.”

CLC developed the Farmer Landowner Match Program to help address the challenges farmers are facing regarding access to land. At the heart of the program is a database that contains profiles of farms that may be available for lease and profiles of farmers looking for land and their specific needs. When a possible match is identified, CLC staff work with the interested parties to help them establish productive and long-term relationships. CLC also runs workshops that help people learn how to navigate the farmer landowner arrangements, including leases, insurance, and the Agricultural Property Tax Assessments.

“CLC’s match program allowed us to connect with landowners and CLC guides Dick and Dutchess County,” says Jen. “Without CLC’s Farmer Landowner Match Program, we would most likely not have met Larry and Bettie Steel, from whom we are leasing the 80 acres of vegetable field, pasture, and woodland.”

This past year, Great Song Farm had 80 members in its CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture, where members pre-purchase a share in the harvest and fill up a heaping basket of vegetables every week at the farm. Jen and Anthony particularly value the community aspect of providing food. Anthony remarked how pleasurable it was to hang out during the food pick-ups and chat with the members. He explains, “Farming allows the human being to connect deeply to the surrounding world, to form an intimate relationship with soil, plants, animals, and fellow human beings that is mutually supportive.”

Their approach to farming appeals to the landowners. “Like most successful marriages, the key ingredients are shared values and visions for the future,” remarks Larry Steel. “There has to be mutual respect for each other and for the land and property. My wife and I have found these things with Jen Carson and Anthony Mecca. In addition, their farming practices reflect their vision for a sustainable future.”

Great Song uses organic farming practices and reduces its carbon footprint and reliance on fossil fuels by employing animal power. Rather than using a tractor, they use Kate and Sunny - Suffolk Punch Draft Horses - who are responsible for most of the tilling and heavy lifting on the farm.

Jen recently started training their oxen to do some of this work as well. Jen guides Dick and Jane, the oxen, through training exercises where she teaches them to follow her body language and to refrain from grazing while they are working. They are generally very calm and obedient. However, Jen says that when they are pulling things that they get really into it and it’s a challenge to get them to slow down. They also show their personality with their active interactions with humans. Dick is vocal and often calls out when people walk by; and Jane is likely to kick anybody who gets within licking range, which is about 6 inches.

Great Song Farm plans to provide food for more people next year. In addition to their weekly pick-ups at their farm in Milan, they are teaming up with Lineage Farm - in Philmont, NY to provide 30 to 60 member shares in Poughkeepsie, NY. Compared to Northern Dutchess and Columbia County, the Poughkeepsie area has more people and less farms, so it’s a natural fit that local farms will provide food to their neighbors to the south.

As the demand for local food continues to increase, there are 47 farms in CLC’s database looking for land in the area. To date, Farmer Landowner Match Program has led to 18 successful new and expanded farm ventures.

“If you are a landowner, you should really consider leasing to a farmer,” says DeWayne Powell who leases 46 acres to Threshold Farms in Philmont. “Aside from the tax benefits, it’s a terrific sense of accomplishment that you are doing something to preserve good farmland.”

Landowners entering into a lease agreement with a farmer can lead to significant reductions in the expense of owning and maintaining land. The partnership with the farmer may include cash, crop sharing, and/or assistance with upkeep of their land. Many landowners with working farms are eligible for reduction in property taxes.

The Farmer Landowner Match Program is just part of a larger mission to ensure that farming remains a central part of the local economy and landscape. CLC holds conservation easements on 21,300 acres which permanently protects the natural characteristics of the land, including soil resources. Approximately 1/3 of this land is working farmland. CLC is currently working with Columbia County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board to craft a plan to support and promote local agriculture. For more information on CLC’s Working Farms program, contact Marissa Codey at 518.392.5252, ext. 211 or marissa@clctrust.org, or visit http://clctrust.org/working-farms/.

Michael Chameides is an Outreach Associate with the Columbia Land Conservancy. He can be reached via phone at 518.392.5252, ext 204 or email at michael@clctrust.org.