

Farming Alternatives

FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
IN NEW YORK STATE

SARE Project ENE95-12

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Cornell Farming Alternatives Program

Vol. 4, No. 3, Spring 1996

LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Farming For The Future Leadership Workshop

by Judy Green

How can we ensure a vibrant future for agriculture in the Northeast, in a global food system which may not even need our farmers? Nearly a hundred Cooperative Extension agents, USDA field staff, Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board members and other agriculture and community leaders gathered recently to ask that question of each other, and to learn how communities across the region are mobilizing to support local agriculture.

The Farming Alternatives Program organized the two day Farming For The Future Leadership Workshop as part of a two-year, SARE-funded inservice education project. The project aims to train leaders for "community agriculture development," i.e., the creation of economic development opportunities, local marketing systems, farmer and public education, land-use and taxation policy, and other community-based strategies to strengthen local agriculture.

Most workshop participants came in teams of two to six individuals. Teams worked together on a specific project or issue facing agriculture in their community. Projects ranged from addressing local "agricultural illiteracy," to strategic planning for agriculture-based economic development, to working with local institutions to promote local food purchasing. Many of the topics and

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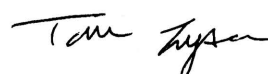
FROM THE DIRECTOR

'Relocalizing' the Food System

Much of this issue of the Farming Alternatives Newsletter is devoted to presenting the activities of the Farming for the Future Leadership Workshop. This workshop is one concrete manifestation of a movement by a diverse group of stakeholders to 'relocalize' and strengthen New York's food and agricultural system. Although the participants in the workshop came from many different backgrounds and brought a wide range of experiences to the table, they shared a common goal of trying to nurture and support community agriculture development.

Building partnerships is the key to reestablishing and sustaining a more locally oriented food and agricultural system. Farmers, consumers, processors, economic development specialists, local government officials, and rural and urban interest groups are forging linkages and beginning to work together in ways that will lead to an economically healthy, environmentally friendly, and social just agriculture and food system.

The Farming for the Future Workshop showed that sustaining and strengthening local food and agricultural systems in a globalizing environment is a challenge that has the potential to nurture local economic development, maintain diversity and quality in the food we eat, and rebuild rural and urban communities. □



Tom Lyson, Director

Effective Farmer Organizations: Farmer to Farmer Learning Groups

by Kathy Barrett

Farmers learn from other farmers. Several research surveys have documented that farmers consider other farmers to be a primary and reliable source of information when making decisions about their farm businesses. Cornell Cooperative Extension in Cayuga County has been actively implementing and facilitating farmer discussion groups for the past 6 years. Other examples of farmer learning groups include pasture user groups and Integrated Pest Management Tag Team groups.

The specifics of how farmer groups meet vary with each group. The common thread among learning groups is that they meet for educational purposes. Learning groups allow farmers to learn about the newest farm practices as well as the tried and true practices. Practical experience and knowledge is given equal time with researched based practices. Experience with nine different farmer learning groups has shown that in addition to the exchange of ideas farmers find it valuable to compare or benchmark their farms with other farms. For example, a farmer getting only fair results using management intensive pasture hears from other farmers in the group that they are getting good results. The discussion that follows can allow the first farmer to consider why there is a difference in their results. This kind of comparing can be done on almost any aspect of production and, as trust develops in a group, economics. A less tangible benefit perhaps is the moral support provided by the learning group. The fore mentioned farmer may have given up on MIG pasture if he had not had the opportunity to talk to other farmers about their experiences and successes.

In forming groups it is very helpful for the group to be focused. In Cayuga County nine different dairy groups have been implemented. The farmers felt it was very useful to meet with dairy farmers who had similar businesses (tiestall or freestall) and were in the same stage of life and position on the farm. Examples of these groups include: Aurora Tiestall Group, Large Herd Group, Herd Managers Group and Junior Partners Group. Part of the success of the pasture users groups are that they are focused on the effective use of pasture. When groups are

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too heterogeneous the discussions tend to get overly broad and watered down. Pretty soon the group falls apart. But getting different groups together on occasion can be an effective and very positive experience.

Farmer learning groups need to be self-directed. This insures that the group's needs are being addressed and allows the farmers to truly own the group. This is probably one of the most important aspects of learning groups. If the facilitator of the group becomes over zealous and imposes topics on the group, interest tends to diminish and the group begins to lack commitment

It is important for the farmers to be interested in learning and trying new ideas and practices. If farmers in the group have businesses that are in a steady state where they are not very interested in changing what they are doing the learning group is of limited value. Such groups will meet for a time, maybe a year and then they will feel as if they have run out of things to talk about. □

Kathy Barrett is with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cayuga County.

Mohawk Valley Sustainable Agriculture Network

The Mohawk Valley Sustainable Agriculture Network is a recent effort to promote profitable, sustainable agriculture in the region. Network members have been meeting monthly since Autumn 1993 to discuss problems facing local farmers, to discuss sustainable approaches, and to develop mission, goals, activities and organizational structure for the group.

The mission is to 1) promote sustainable agriculture in the region; 2) encourage ecologically and culturally sound practices; 3) demonstrate the profitability of sustainable agriculture; and 4) provide "Farmer to Farmer" and "Farmer to Consumer" networks of sustainable agricultural information.

Highlights of Accomplishments

In the summer of 1994, an ongoing farm tour program was initiated to offer participants the opportunity to see first hand the utilization of sustainable techniques and practices on local farms. A two part visit to Earl and Carol Spencer's dairy farm, in Montgomery County, focused on nutrient management and the effective use of cultivation to reduce or eliminate the need for herbicides. The visits took place during cultivation in the early summer and at harvest time in the fall.

The tour of Well Spring Farm, in Herkimer County, focused on the alternative agricultural enterprises of the Douglas Bowne family. The farm has organic certification and produces garlic, specialty vegetables, and meat goats. The point of interest here is Doug's use of cover crops to recycle or transfer nutrients and provide a means of weed suppression.

The group continues to market through newspaper articles and setting up displays at major events like the 1995 Spring Pasture Expo in Fultonville and the Central New York Farm Progress Show in Mohawk.

Proposed On-Farm Demonstrations For 1996

Narrow Row Corn - 2 Farms (Herkimer And Montgomery Counties)

Cover Crop Trial - 4 Farms (Herkimer, Montgomery, And Fulton)

Gamma Grass Trial With USDA Support - 3 Farms (Herkimer, Montgomery, and Fulton)

Zone Till Demo - 3 Farms (Herkimer, Montgomery, And Fulton)

Soybean Forage Variety Demonstration With USDA - (Herkimer And Montgomery Counties)

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NY FarmNet

A Decade of Assistance & Referral

NY FarmNet began in 1986. Its purpose is to assist farm families who are facing major financial and transition issues. The program focuses on family owned and operated farm businesses, and builds on the individual strengths of those families. NY FarmNet utilizes a toll-free phone line, 1-800-547-FARM, which is answered at all hours. Since 1986, FarmNet has responded to over 9,500 calls. The confidential phone line serves as an access point to a comprehensive network for the state's agricultural community. NY FarmNet staff, knowledgeable about farming, assess callers' needs and respond to questions and concerns. Follow-up includes referral to appropriate sources of help, mailing of printed resource, and/or on-farm consulting.

In 1995, NY FarmNet adopted its first mission statement* and appointed a Board of Directors. Comprised of agribusiness professionals, farmers, lenders, and farm bureau and media representatives, the board assists with outreach, goal setting, and program assessment. With the Board's guidance, NY FarmNet retains its important position in the infrastructure of support services for New York State farmers, and prepares for the next decade of changes and challenges facing New York State's agricultural community.

* NY FarmNet Mission Statement:

To provide farm families with a network of contacts and support services to help them develop skills for dealing with significant life challenges and transitions through personalized education, confidential consulting and referral.

For more information, contact: NY FarmNet, 415 Warren Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853. Telephone: (607)-255-4121. E-mail: crm3@cornell.edu □

Farming For The Future from p. 1

projects discussed at the February 28-29 workshop are featured in this issue of the Farming Alternatives Newsletter.

The group as a whole was charged with the task of creating a "learning community," to compare experiences on an ongoing basis. For example, various strategies are being used to build partnerships between agricultural and



other interest groups in the community (see page 5.) Strengths and weaknesses of these approaches will be explored over the next two years.

The Farming Alternatives Program will serve as a networking center for participants and for others interested in community agriculture development. During the summer and fall, study tours will be offered to see first-hand the impacts of community agriculture development efforts. A second leadership workshop is planned for February, 1997, to continue the group learning process. □

Ideas For Building Partnerships With Non-Agricultural Interest Groups In Your Community*

Concept

Organize a regular, informal, ongoing **Discussion Forum** for ag-related community issues, recruit participants from outside the traditional ag community. Discussions build communications, trust and a group knowledge-base, leading to specific action projects.

Organize an **Agriculture/Food Systems Project** to develop stronger partnerships among various players in the local or regional food system, including farmers, food processors, marketers, distributors, restaurants, chefs, food service, consumers, hunger groups, food banks...

Organize a regional or community-wide **Search Conference on the Future of Local Agriculture** to bring together many different stakeholders to create a shared vision of the future of agriculture, and begin action planning.

Form an **Agriculture Development Council** empowered by your county government to take a leadership role in the economic development of agriculture. Involve stakeholders from outside the traditional ag community.

Hire an **Agriculture Development Specialist** who's task is to build partnerships and collaborative projects involving agriculture, economic development, education and other sectors of the community.

Conduct an **Agriculture Business Retention and Enhancement** process, to involve a group of community leaders in assessing and responding to the needs of area farms, food marketing businesses and agri-businesses.

Example

Dutchess County's **Information & Dialogue Exchange on Agriculture** (IDEA) meets regularly and has been the initiator of many successful community agriculture development projects. Contact: Judy Schneyer or Les Hulcoop, 914-677-8223

Genesee Fingerlakes Food Systems Project. Contact: Susie Craig, 716-461-1000.

Capital District Regional Farm and Food Project. Contact: Tracy Frisch, 518-426-9331.

Leadership Congress on the Future of Agriculture and the Food System in the Northeastern US. Contact: Judy Green, 255-9832.

The **Chenango County Agriculture Development Council** grew out of more than a year of community-wide discussion and planning. Contact Eric Schimke, 607-334-5841

Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency. Contact: Tracy Ferry, 315-782-5865.

Dutchess County Cooperative Extension - Contact Les Hulcoop, 914-677-8223.

Cornell Local Government Program provides assistance to communities wishing to conduct a BR&E project. Contact Bob Rich, 607-257-1821.

*From the Farming For The Future Leadership Workshop

Land Grant Professionals and Sustainable Ag Stakeholders Meet

The NE SARE Administrative Council and the NE Sustainable Agriculture Working Group sponsored a one-day working session in January, in Ithaca, NY. The session was entitled "Serving the Northeast: A Working Session for Land Grant Professionals and Other Sustainable Agriculture Stakeholders." A group of approximately 60 farmers, faculty, extension agents, university administrators and representatives of other organizations and groups from across the NE states participated in the session by invitation.

The work session's goal was to develop capacity and practical strategies for the NE land grants and the larger community of sustainable agriculture stakeholders to work in effective partnership toward common goals. Bill Lacy gave a keynote presentation, and Dean Lund addressed the group after dinner in the evening. Several faculty, agents, farmers, students and other stakeholders from NY were active participants in the work session. (See article on p.8 by Jim Barber). □

NYSWAG/CORNELL Communications

On February 12, NYSAWG representatives and Members of the Cornell Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems Working Group gathered to discuss collaborations concerning sustainable agriculture. The group agreed that ongoing discussions are valuable and committed to meet at least annually. This group will provide a forum to create linkages on similar work, and to be a part of each other's efforts. □

Northeast Regional Food Guide

The *Northeast Regional Food Guide* is based on the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid. This guide is based on our current understanding of the relationship between food choices and health. What is different about the Northeast Regional Food Guide is that it is specific to the seasonal availability of foods grown in the northeastern region.

The foods consumers choose have an impact on local agriculture, the economy, and the environment. Northeastern consumers have expressed a preference for locally produced foods and a concern about the



region's farmers and farmland, as well as the cost and resources used to transport food from great distances. One way to improve

the northeastern economy is to let everyone know how and where to buy more local food.

The information provided by using the *Northeast Regional Food Guide* will help consumers select a healthful diet from a wide variety of foods, emphasizing those that are produced and processed in the Northeast.

By using the Northeast Regional Food Guide you will improve the nutritional quality of your diet while supporting your neighbors—northeastern agricultural producers and processors.

The Northeast Regional Food Guide is available from Cornell University Resource Center, 7 Business & Technology Park, Ithaca, New York 14850. □

Applying the "Business Retention and Enhancement" Approach to Agriculture Development

The Cornell Local Government Program initiated the Business Retention and Expansion Program in 1993 to help New York counties strengthen their ability to retain and grow local jobs. The program organizes a local task force which develops and administers a face-to-face interview with key companies within the area. In addition an economic profile is constructed by the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research which examines the dynamics of the county economy in relationship to its region and the state. From these two major sources of information, the county then develops a strategic plan to enhance the local business environment. During the process, from the many contacts made directly with businesses, specific companies are provided assistance with a variety of economic development needs.

Interest has arisen in different parts of the state in applying this program concept to agriculture. To do so, it may be useful to expand the "Business Retention and Expansion" concept to "Business Retention and Enhancement" to include a variety of farm business strategies including product and market diversification, value-adding, and cooperation in addition to expansion. Agriculture, although a key industry in the state, often goes unrecognized by economic development agencies. Programs which are very helpful to businesses in general are not marketed or made easily accessible by agricultural enterprises. Also, the unique needs of agriculture are not known to agencies and organizations which might be able to provide assistance.

If you are interested in exploring how the BR&E approach might be applied in your community, contact Bob Rich, Cornell Local Government Program, (607) 255-6599. □

Improving the Sustainability of Dairy Farms

A group of twenty-nine Cornell faculty, staff, students, extension agents and farmers is developing a process for integrating the knowledge needed to improve dairy farm sustainability. Keeping our dairy farms sustainable is critical to the state economy, since dairy farm cash sales of milk and meat account for approximately 59% of all New York State agricultural receipts. The Dairy Farm Sustainability Project has studied conditions and practices on various farms associated with environmental issues. Among the many important study findings were 1) between 59 and 85% of nutrients (N,P and K) brought onto the farm are retained on the farm; 2) reformulating rations decreased total N excretion 34%, and the combined effect of decreasing feed costs and increasing milk production increased net farm annual income a total of \$42,000; 3) nutrient management plans decreased the amount of nutrients retained on the farms; and 4) implementing nutrient management plans had a positive effect on farm profitability. Group efforts are now focused on developing a series of decision-aid tools for use in identifying the most profitable animal and plant nutrient management system given specific environmental constraints.

For more information about the Dairy Farm Sustainability Project, contact Danny G. Fox, Animal Science, at dgf@cornell.edu or 607-255-2855. □

Student Sustainable Farm

Land has been approved and committed to the Student Farm project this semester at the Cornell Orchards. Students are planting in the greenhouse, organizing the program, preparing the site, building a tool shed, and installing an irrigation system.

For more information contact Dean Hively, wdh3@cornell.edu, or Greg Sandor, gms8@cornell.edu/255-3033. □

Decline of Farms and Farmers

by Jim Barber

I have been told that a critical mass number of farms is needed to support agriculture within a certain geographic area and that when farm numbers drop below this mystical number, the network of related agricultural services can no longer support itself and a strong farm economy slowly withers. One of the issues we are addressing is the declining number of farms and farmers in the Northeast. If we are looking at a county or group of counties and the feed and equipment dealers therein, then we can see this is not an uncommon occurrence, and that sometimes something steps in to fill the void which agriculture has left. — But, if we change the area size to the whole Northeast region, and the support services are now not just tractor dealerships, (but rather research and Extension,) then the consequences of what happens when there are not enough farms left to sustain that support network take on a much greater importance.

The paradox for Land Grant Universities is that the very goal of their research, which is to increase agricultural productivity, tends to decrease the number of farmers, farms and farm acres needed for production. Unfortunately, just as we are beginning to realize what is happening, we are losing the influence needed to change this course because our numbers have declined so dramatically.

As government research money has disappeared it is replaced by funds from the Ag. Industrial complex such as food companies, chemical companies, and equipment companies, who have little connection to farms or rural communities. Moreover, these companies are getting the research done at marginal costs because they need only fund the project while we, the taxpayers, are maintaining the facilities and infrastructure.

Traditional research, which is largely focused toward highly efficient production of crops, has had the unforeseen effect of lowering the profit margin per acre or per animal. When one producer finds that he can produce goods at a cheaper rate than his competitor, he sells it for a lower price in order to gain a larger share of the market, and profit margins spiral downward. Meanwhile, the more lucrative value-added components of the food system have relocated to urban areas. Basically, farmers have become miners of raw resources and many rural communities have become mining towns.

The companies funding research want low cost production solutions and may not care about the impact on rural communities. If 10 agricultural jobs are lost that is fine with them and if that cannot be done in one area they will move to South America or any where they can achieve the lowest cost of production. These companies may not have any interest in the type of locally controlled solutions we should be seeking here today.

If you will allow me to segue for a moment to look at current production research, I would like to see it refocused away from ever-higher productivity, and put more emphasis towards the health of soils, — and I don't mean just it's fertility. Soil building techniques used by organic growers should try to be adapted to large scale farming. You do not need to look hard to see the role which heavy fertilizer and equipment use has had on the decline of farmland, as marginal soils are used up and abandoned or small farms become inefficient. I have no figures, but I suspect a great deal more farmland and farmers are lost to abandonment rather than development. Decline of the farm base leads to erosion of rural economies and communities.

It has been suggested that agricultural is not as important in rural economies as we would like to believe, but we know that it once was, and we should know what happens when rural areas aggressively seek to replace the farm base

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Statewide Council Launches Ag/Natural Resources Working Group

December 1995 marked the formation of a new statewide group who's task is to address policy and other issues facing New York's agriculture and natural resources communities. Farming Alternatives Program Coordinator Judy Green was appointed acting chair of the Ag/Natural Resources Working Group, which is part of the newly formed New York Rural Development Council.

Challenges....

As part of the process of defining its focus, the Working Group identified the following major challenges facing NY agriculture and natural resources:

Economic/food system problems

- Most farms are suffering low or no profits through participation in mass markets.
- The continuing decline in farmers, farms, and farmland reflects generally dismal economic returns to farmers.
- The aging population of farmers reflects the difficulty of transfer of farm ownership to a younger generation.
- NYS agriculture is not fully capitalizing on market opportunities available within the Northeast region.

Regulatory/policy problems

- Businesses must cope with a maze of state, federal and local regulations which inhibit ag/natural resources development.

- Agriculture and natural resources are usually disconnected from other forms of economic development, lack access to resources for economic development.
- The farming sector subsidizes other sectors of our communities through property taxes, adding significantly to the economic burden on agriculture.

Public and policymaker awareness

- The public and our policymakers lack understanding of agriculture, natural resource and food system issues, impacts, problems, needs and opportunities.

The Working Group sees major opportunities for enhancing agriculture and natural resource businesses in NYS through:

Market development/job development

- Import substitution. Displacing even a small percentage of imports would produce a big impact for NYS farmers and natural resource businesses.
- Development of locally owned, value-adding businesses which increase economic returns to farmers and rural businesses.
- Start-up and improvement of farmers markets as incubators of farm/rural businesses.
- Specialty markets which offer higher returns to producers.

Regulatory/policy reform

- Identification of regulatory barriers which inhibit agricultural and natural resource development.

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Ag/Natural Resources continued from p. 9

- Revisit the concept of formulating a NYS Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy, to promote food production and marketing systems which can sustain New York's farmers, consumers and communities.
- Strengthening the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets and its linkages to the NYS Department of Economic Development.
- More equitable taxation models which provide for local needs without overburdening farmers.

Public education

- Promotion of NYS agriculture and natural resources sectors to increase public and policymaker awareness of Ag/NR importance, benefits to economy, community, environment.
- Advocacy for Ag/NR initiatives and interests.
- Linking Ag/NR with the wider array of rural development interests.

The role of the Ag/Natural Resources Working Group in addressing these problems and opportunities is still evolving, and we welcome your input.

The Working Group has an open membership policy, and encourages the participation of all individuals, organizations and agencies with an interest in the future of agricultural and natural resources in our state.

The next meeting of the Ag/Natural Resources Working Group is scheduled for May 23-24 in Glens Falls, as part of the meeting of the larger NY Rural Development Council. To be added to the Working Group mailing list, *contact Dick Mansfield, NYRDC Executive Director, at 607-255-3016.* □

The Siembra Project

In the summer and fall of 1995, the SIEMBRA Project organized a group of young people from neighborhoods in Harlem to plant and harvest vegetables on 1 1/2 acres of land in Dutchess County New York. The vegetables grown were then transported to NYC and sold in a green-market in Harlem. Vegetables not sold were donated to local schools for use by home economic departments teaching students about nutritious meals as a pro-active health initiative. Goals of this pilot project were to explore the feasibility of generating income to support the education aspects of SIEMBRA, to give youth hands-on experience in pesticide free organic farming, and to provide Harlem residents with nutritious organically grown produce.

So successful was this pilot, and so well received, that we have embarked upon a three-way partnership between SIEMBRA, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the NYC Mission Society (which provided the land for the farming) to implement a full-scale program. To this end also, SIEMBRA has enjoyed the collaboration of the New School For Social Research, Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy; graduate students from this program have worked with us for the past few months in preparing a five year business development plan for the SIEMBRA Project's farming program.

Finally, we have recently begun negotiation with a major environmental advocacy organization from the region (they learned of our work) to discuss a merger. Our idea is that together we can pull and leverage our collective resources so as to be able to maximize our effectiveness as agents for sustainable community development in which the farming/ food systems initiatives will play an integral role.

Siembra Project from p. 10

In our experience, the key to attracting, retaining and nurturing the farm labor force of the future is in linking farming/food systems initiatives to local community and economic development programs, so that those food systems initiatives serve as vehicles for the sustainable development of the community. For more information, contact Ray Figueroa Jr., Director, (212)369-4496. □

Ag In The Classroom

With less than 2 % of our population living on farms and little about our food and fiber system being taught in schools, it is not surprising that most Americans know very little about agriculture, its social and economic significance, and its links to human health and environmental quality. This lack of knowledge is called "agricultural illiteracy".

The mission of New York Agriculture in the Classroom is to help students develop a better understanding and appreciation for agriculture - the total food and fiber system. By using instructional materials that incorporate accurate information about agriculture, teachers can help students:

- Recognize the connections between their daily consumption of food and fiber products with the source and resources needed to make them.
- Learn to make decisions based on facts, rather than emotion.
- Become aware of the many exciting career opportunities in all areas of the food and fiber system.
- Develop a more accurate picture of today's agriculture industry.
- Appreciate the historical, social, economic, and scientific importance of agriculture in our society.

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New Vegetable Research Fund

During the 1996 New York State Vegetable Conference, held on February 6-8, 1996, at the Syracuse Sheraton Inn & Conference Center at Liverpool, NY, the New York State Vegetable Growers Association officially kicked off its new fresh market vegetable research fund program.

It is anticipated that over \$10,000 will be available to researchers by August of 1996 for 1997 projects. Pledges have been made by the growers for a three-year period.

For more information, contact the NYS Growers Association, P.O. Box 4256, Ithaca, NY 14852-4256, phone (607)539-7648. □

1996 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference Proceedings and Audio Tapes Available

Over 1500 attendees participated in the 12th annual North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference. Participants included farm stand and roadside market operators, farmers' market vendors and managers, orchardists, vegetable producers, pick-your-own operators, educators, consultants, agricultural department staff, as well as, market suppliers and vendors of specialty food products.

The Conference featured 32 educational sessions with multiple speakers on the following themes: consumer connections, business management, agritourism, farmers' markets, and niche markets.

The Conference Proceedings offer excellent ideas and resources for the beginning or experienced farm direct marketer.

For additional information contact Monika Roth at (607)-272-2292. □

Ag In The Classroom from p.11

The New York Agriculture in the Classroom (NY AITC) program is part of a national agriculture literacy program with the mission of educating all youths about the entire food and fiber system. With less than 2% of our population engaged in farming, it is becoming increasingly evident that students do not understand where foods and other products originate, how foods are processed, and how they as consumers and citizens affect the agriculture industry. In addition, they are unaware that this is the leading industry, not only of New York State, but of the United States. Through a network of extension agents, volunteers, and teachers the NY AITC program develops and distributes educational materials that incorporate accurate information about today's agriculture. These materials contain lessons that teachers can easily use to teach concepts and skills related to language arts, math, science, and/or social studies.

Since 1985, the New York Ag in the Classroom (NY AITC) program has provided in-service training and instructional materials for over 2,100 teachers who have educated more than 300,000 students about the food and fiber system. During the 1994-95 school year, thanks to NY AITC, an estimated 60,000 more elementary students learned about the connections between them, their food, and the largest industry in our state. Thousands more learned about agricultural vocations at agriculture career fairs sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension and local volunteers in many New York counties. In addition, many 4-H in school programs across the state utilized the instructional materials developed by NY AITC. Support at the local level for NY AITC is stronger than ever. Many volunteers from organizations such as Farm Bureau are working closely with their county extension agents to reach teachers and students in more school districts and to raise funds to purchase more instructional materials.

For more information, contact Andy Fagan, NY AITC, 607-255-8122. □

Developing Livestock Markets:

South-Central New York RC&D

by Nancy Morey

South Central New York Resource Conservation and Development Project has been involved in assisting livestock producers since 1982. Our livestock program has included a partnership with Heifer Project International which provides starter flocks of sheep and herds of goats to qualified individuals. Part of the program has included hands-on instruction in management, tours of producers farms, marketing information, establishment of a regional graded lamb, goat and sheep pool, and educational seminars for producers of all types.

In 1993, recognizing the opportunity presented by the increasing consumption of goat meat (chevon), SoCNY RC&D, HPI and the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE) started a Meat Goat Initiative. The partnership with CADE resulted in funding in 1994 through the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for a Meat Goat Marketing grant. Through this grant CADE researched market demand and market volatility for goat meat, and produced a handbook for producers and others who are interested in finding outlets for their products.

In 1994, SoCNY RC&D and CADE partnered for the Southern Tier Meat Goat and Sheep Production and Marketing Program. This program consisted of specific tasks: provided detailed marketing information to regional producers; assisted in the development of, and provide training to producers for a consistent grading of animals; provided technical assistance to producers; provided breeding stock to low income and women producers through partnership with

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Small Communities

The Office of Regional and Community Affairs of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Rural Opportunities, Inc., Federal Home Loan Bank of New York, New York State Bankers Association with participation by the New York Rural Development Council, New York State Rural Housing Coalition, and The State of New York Banking Department will present:

**Small Communities:
A Conference on Delivering Capital
Resources for Economic Development in
Non-Urban Communities
June 6, 1996
8:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m.**

Topics will include:

- Regional lending consortia
- Credit scoring for small business
- Alternative financing sources
- How to leverage public funds with private dollars
- The new CRA: planning for community investment

For more information contact Elizabeth Correa at (212)720-5152. □

NOFA Summer Conference

The 22nd Annual Summer Conference sponsored by The Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) will be held August 9-22, at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA.

For registration information contact: Julie Rawson at (508) 355-2853. □

National Small Farm Conference

****Moving Into the 21st Century****

September 10-13, 1996

Nashville, Tennessee

The Tennessee State University, Nashville; The University of Tennessee, Knoxville; and the USDA-Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, Washington, DC, will be hosting the **National Small Farm Conference**.

Target audiences are providers of programs and services, however, others are welcome. □

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Ag/Natural Resources Working Group

The next meeting of the Ag/Natural Resources Working Group is scheduled for May 23-24 in Glens Falls.

For further information contact: Dick Mansfield, NYRDC Executive Director, at (607) 255-3016. □

Farming Alternatives' Publications

Cultivating Farm, Neighbor and Community Relations.

This bulletin describes the kinds of farm-related land-use conflicts which may be found in rural New York, the Northeast and other urbanizing areas. It suggests ways of maintaining good relations and outlines alternative approaches for dealing with conflict.

Farmers' Markets and Rural Economic Development: Entrepreneurship, Small Business Incubation and Job Creation in the Rural Northeast.

A must for farmers' markets sponsors, extension staff and economic development officials, this bulletin reports on a study of how farmers' markets contribute to local economic development.

Community Agriculture Development: Profiles of 32 Initiatives in New York State.

Thirty-two profiles call attention to the nature and range of organizations involved in community agriculture development in New York

Practical, Profitable and Sustainable: Innovative Management Strategies on Four NYS Dairy Farms.

In-depth case studies discuss the changes 4 dairy farmers made to make their farms more sustainable using IPM, rotational grazing, manure storage and diversification.

Agritourism in New York: Opportunities and Challenges in Farm-Based Recreation and Hospitality. Four in-depth case studies with discussion of management concerns and NY tourism trends. Includes economic analysis.

Farming Alternatives: A Guide to Evaluating the Feasibility of New Farm-Based Enterprises.

Our award-winning step-by-step workbook to help plan and evaluate a new enterprise. Includes chapters on setting goals, assessing markets, production feasibility and financial feasibility.

Sustainable Farming: A Compendium of Resources.*

A four-volume set of materials on sustainable farming practices includes overviews of sustainable agriculture, managing the whole farm, soils, field crops and livestock. **Available for loan only through Mann Library at Cornell University. Contact your local public library for interlibrary loan procedures.*

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Decline of Farm and Farmers from p. 8

with another industry which is less permanent in nature and not as intimately tied to the community. If residential housing comes in, then further pressure is put upon the remaining tax base and farming is driven out more quickly.

For these reasons I believe Land Grant Universities must shift their focus from more productive farming to more profitable farming. This, of course, requires a great deal of work on the market side of the food system but not necessarily supermarket or export marketing, since these are highly competitive and will land us back in the same downward spiral. We need a community oriented food system where no matter what the size of the community, there will exist a "conscious connection" between all of the stakeholders. I believe the partnership approach we are addressing is worth trying and it will require involvement from all the stakeholders, between primary producers and the ultimate consumer.

Land Grant Universities must also look at the current set of problems facing farmers and whether the programs, put in place decades ago, are meeting the needs of the system they were established to support. As a test of the current focus of program I would ask; "How many research or Extension projects which are currently underway directly address the issue of decreasing farm numbers and declining relatives farm income?"

I do not intend to belittle the work being done by Land Grant Universities for it really has been quite extraordinary as they press the boundaries of science. But our needs now are for work of a more social nature. Land Grants, with their extension network, are really the last best hope for conducting community focused research and projects, but they will need our vigorous support to access the funds needed to carry it out.

What are the 3 key issues which I believe need to be addressed?

continued p. 15

AG DEVELOPMENT PROFILE (CONT.)

Decline of Farm and Farmers from p. 14

FIRST – Community interaction to explain the benefits of agriculture to consumers, residents, and policy makers.

SECOND – Community support for research aimed at keeping farming in the area where the consumers can take advantage of it's environmental and economic benefits.

THIRD – We need widely adaptable, low cost methods of building soil health for the long haul.

What we can hope to achieve from this is to regain control of the rudder for negotiating the future course of agriculture, and to make it a profitable lifestyle for all sizes and types of

farms. It is a poignant reflection of our country's priorities when the people who are providing the most basic of human needs, cannot get the same rate of return on investment that is allowed to public utilities as set by government commissions, who judge it to be fair and necessary profit. □

Jim Barber is a dairy and vegetable farmer from Schoharie, NY.



✂ Please cut or copy both sides —————

ATTENTION! Use This Coupon to Subscribe or Renew

The *Farming Alternatives* newsletter is a vital information source and networking tool for organizations, farmers and others concerned with sustaining farms and farmland in New York State. It covers issues, events, and research related to sustainable agriculture including farm diversification and innovative marketing; features profiles of farmers; highlights local organizations involved in agriculture development and includes announcements of happenings around the state. A quarterly publication of the Farming Alternatives Program.

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Developing Livestock Markets from p.12

HPI; identified and developed a comprehensive database of slaughterhouses and transportation firms and provided technical support for the implementation of a marketing and production tracking system (record-keeping).

We continue to respond to the requests of producers by seeking new grants. Currently, several grants are awaiting funding. These grants are exploring new agricultural enterprises, such as ratite production (emus and ostriches), pastured poultry, red veal, and exploring alternative marketing possibilities. □

Mohawk Valley from p.3

Join Us!

All interested farmers and others are invited to join monthly meetings held the second Wednesday of the month and at all special events. To date meeting discussions have included the sustainable activities of dairy, beef, vegetable, field crop, meat goats and small animal enterprises. Participation from these and any other agricultural enterprise is encouraged!

For more information call Nelson Crouse at 315-858-3414, or write to: Mohawk Valley Sustainable Ag Network, 4001 St Hwy 5S, Fultonville, New York 12072-1721 (Fax 518-853-3294). □

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Farming Alternatives

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