

# Farming Alternatives

FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE  
IN NEW YORK STATE

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Cornell Farming Alternatives Program

Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring 1995

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

## "Farming for the Future" Conference

### Panelists Share Diverse Perspectives

*by Duncan Hilchey*

Is there any common ground in the effort to sustain farming in the future in New York State? Based on presentations, conference discussions and post-conference evaluations, we offer a cautious "yes, but..." Yes, there are many common threads that connect the myriad of voices. But, there are still major differences of opinion, and the opening panel at the Farming for the Future conference clearly represented them. By design, recruited speakers spanned a broad spectrum of opinion on the future of New York agriculture.

### Production Agriculture

Leading off was Pennsylvania farmer and President of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Keith Eckel who recently testified before the Senate Agriculture Committee in Washington D.C.. He presented the Farm Bureau's views on the issues of production agriculture and sustainability. Stating from the beginning that he was an "advocate for agriculture, not an apologist" Eckel described an American agricultural industry which is continuing to undergo rapid change, but is otherwise robust and has a solid future. "I have a strong belief in sustainable agriculture—it has been sustained for thousands of years and will continued to be sustained," he said. "High yield agriculture has increased the world standard of living. It is fundamental to future growth and to the environment. Can we increase growth and meet en-

*See Conference, p. 2*

*Adapted from notes taken by Heather Karsten  
and Tom Jacobs, Cornell graduate students.*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

## Strategic Planning for NYS

Strategic planning for New York agriculture is a concept that goes around and comes around every few years. It has been prompted by the realization that New York continues to lose farms and farmland and that the value of agricultural products sold in the state has been declining for the past 30 years. In 1964, New York farmers sold nearly \$5 billion worth of crop and livestock products. By 1992, this figure had slipped to \$2.6 billion.

In the past, strategic planning focused almost entirely on how to make New York agriculture more competitive on the national and world market. The viability of rural communities and maintaining a strong base of family-size farmers received scant, if any, attention in these discussions. Further, the idea of developing and maintaining local and regional markets as outlets for New York products was rarely considered.

Today, for the first time we are seeing a sea change in how strategic planning is conceptualized and implemented. Global competitiveness still ranks high on the agenda, but the table has been broadened to include issues of local agricultural development and rural community viability. Several items in this issue of the Newsletter speak to the issue of planning for the future of New York agriculture. In our lead article, Duncan Hilchey summarizes much of the current debates on this topic in his lead article "Farming for the Future Conference." Jim Barney has been thinking about the future of farming in New York for some time and he shares his thoughts with us in his piece "Is Your Job Sustainable?" (p.13).



Tom Lyson, Director

## Clarification on rBGH Labelling

In our last edition, *Farming Alternatives* reported that dairy producer-handlers stating that their product is rBGH-free are required by the NYS Dept. of Ag and Markets to label their product with a disclaimer saying that there is no known difference between products produced with and without r-BGH. The department has since clarified this position, stating that processors are not mandated to include such a disclaimer on their product, but only encouraged to do so by FDA guidelines. Excerpts of the those guidelines are available upon request from our program office.

## Farming Alternatives

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*From Conference, p. 1*

environmental goals? Yes we can! History says 'yes'." The challenge is to shape change, not resist it, he argued, referring to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). "Soon no nation will be able to isolate itself— competitive advantage will increase quality of life of all people around the world. We must welcome these changes." Eckel also discussed the cost of government regulation, the decline in farm program support of farmers, the importance of technology, and changing political forces which are affecting agricultural policy (including animal rights, food safety, pressure to balance the budget). He concluded by saying "We should look back on the history of American agriculture with pride, and we should look forward with confidence."

In response, participant and organic farmer from Lodi, NY, Lou Johns challenged Eckel: "How can you say we should look back on our agriculture with pride? It was built on the backs of exploited native

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*Most of us are oblivious to how and where our food is produced, packaged, and transported. We only know where it is sold.*

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peoples and immigrants and it has caused tremendous environmental destruction. Look at the Everglades; now the Colorado River is just a trickle when it reaches the Gulf." A short but lively discussion followed.

## Food Systems

Having recently conducted a study of northeastern consumers and their attitudes toward regional foods, the next speaker, Jennifer Wilkins (Senior Extension Associate in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at Cornell) presented a food systems perspective. She argued that by offering 33 new products a day "our supermarkets give the illusion of choice, but they do not allow the consumer to choose stewardship... consumers, however, can have a lot of influence." She discussed the future role of nutritionists in helping consumers make choices which go beyond personal health such as the impact

*See Conference p. 5*

## Farming Alternatives Program Receives Funding Commitment

In the face of an increasingly uncertain state budget, Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences recently made a three-year commitment of funding for the Farming Alternatives Program and the Cornell Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems initiative. Cornell's Office for Research, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the office of Dean David L. Call have combined their support to provide core funding for both programs. "We are grateful to the College for its commitment" says Program Director Tom Lyson, "and, as always, we appreciate the ongoing support of our constituent groups around the state."

## Statewide Small-Scale Food Processing Project Approved

The Farming Alternatives Program and the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG), have been granted funds for a joint research and action project to promote small-scale food processing in New York State. Despite an overall decline in the processing of agricultural products in the state, small-scale food processing is on the rise. Why this is the case is not well understood since no research has been conducted on these kinds of enterprises, and little outreach has been available.

What we do know is that some of these processors are based on farms and others are owned and operated by local people who are not farmers. Most seem to be very small enterprises involved in a wide range of value-adding activities. Some process raw agricultural commodities, such as milk, meat, and grains. Others prepare high-value specialty items such as condiments, sauces, confections, and fruit preparations.

Understanding more about the opportunities and challenges facing these "microprocessors" is important for the future of New York agriculture.

Farmers' share of the consumer food dollar has declined from 46% in 1913 to 26% in 1992.<sup>1,2</sup> Also, the number of farms in New York has declined by 1,000 each year for the last ten years. These two trends may be linked because decreasing the net value of products going to the farmers who produce them is likely to decrease the economic sustainability of their farms. Farmstead food processing may allow farm households to capture a larger share of the consumer food dollar than they could by selling ordinary agricultural commodities to large processors or brokers. Likewise, non-farm-based, but locally-owned and operated small-scale food processing enterprises can also be valuable to rural areas since they often create new markets for higher value farm products. In both instances, jobs can be created and new income generated in rural areas and for rural people. Increased income and jobs can contribute to improved quality of life for farm families and rural communities. For these reasons, small-scale food

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processing has great potential to become an important part of sustainable agriculture and rural development strategies.

The project, funded by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, is designed to help us learn more about small-scale food processing businesses. For example, what technical, political, and regulatory barriers challenge these entrepreneurs? What can be done to promote small-scale food processors as part of a comprehensive sustainable agriculture and rural development strategy?

Part One of the project will be collecting data by a mail survey of a sample of small-scale food processors in New York and by case studies of four enterprises. In Part Two, the findings will be used for education and public policy recommendations. Activities will include: 1) a statewide conference on technical and public policy issues in small-scale food

*See Food Processing, p. 16*

## Farm Labor and Sustainability

### Workshop Addresses Obstacles

Some of the most critical issues affecting agriculture today relate to the farm workforce. At the 1995 *Farming for the Future: Partners in Stewardship* conference workshop on farm labor, perspectives on these issues were offered by Herbert Engman, Director of the Cornell Migrant Program, Tom Maloney of Cornell's Department of Agricultural, Resource and Managerial Economics, Amy Machamer of Hurd Orchards, David Fellows of Farm Bureau, Aspacio Alcantara of La Cooperativa farmworkers' cooperative, and Velma Smith of Rural Opportunities.

Developing a sustainable agricultural workforce will require farmers and the rest of society to work together to address several challenges. Worker availability will be a continuing challenge. Farm managers, particularly fruit and vegetable growers, are likely to continue to employ both local and immigrant workers. As a multicultural workforce evolves, cultural diversity issues in the workplace will become more important. Owners and managers must understand cultural diversity issues to develop a cohesive, committed team of employees.

And as farms utilize more technology there will be a greater demand for increased worker knowledge and skills. Farm employers will be under greater pressure to provide wages and benefits that are competitive with both farm and nonfarm employers. Employee retention will continue to depend on providing safe, comfortable, working conditions. Increasingly, employees want to be treated with respect, want to be involved in decision making and want to be recognized for their contribution to the business. Farm employers who utilize modern Human Resource Management practices will be in the best position to retain the most productive workers.

Currently, seasonal farmworkers are often described as the poorest of the working poor. Many

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*Adapted from materials prepared by Herbert J. Engman, Director, Cornell Migrant Program and Thomas R. Maloney, Department of Agricultural, Resource, and Managerial Economics, Cornell University.*

live below the federal poverty level despite being ready and able to work. Many experience huge fluctuations in earnings throughout the year. Migrant farmworkers often earn reasonable rates of pay when the harvest season is intense, but estimates of average yearly income range from just \$5,000 to \$8,000. While fringe benefits such as housing are sometimes provided for farmworkers, most do not receive the same level of fringe benefits other American workers take for granted, such as paid vacation, holidays and sick leave. Farmworkers often do not share the same protection under laws and regulations as other workers. For example, exclusions apply to New York State farmworkers in the following areas: collective bargaining, minimum wage, child labor, overtime pay, unemployment insurance, disability insurance, day of rest, drinking water, sanitation, health and safety, and housing.

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*Estimates of average yearly income for migrant farmworkers range from just \$5,000 to \$8,000.*

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One of the major obstacles to addressing farm labor issues is a lack of reliable information on the numbers and status of farmworkers, both nationally and in New York State. Three recent studies have estimated anywhere from 40,000 to 107,000 farmworkers in New York State, with 25,000 to 73,000 of these being seasonal migrant workers. We do know that, as farms have decreased in number over the past two decades, the numbers of hired farmworkers have stabilized and even increased as the remaining farms have grown in size. Of special note is the increasing percentage of migrant farmworkers. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that migrants now compose 59% of the farmworkers in the Northeast states. The Labor Department further states that 88% of migrant farmworkers are now foreign-born (the overwhelming majority in Mexico), 10% are U.S.-born Hispanic, and only 2% are U.S.-born non-Hispanic.

While many of the farmworkers in New York State remain white, non-Hispanic, primarily on



dairy farms and those employed year-round on other farms, New York is rapidly adopting the national trend toward Latino workers. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 greatly accelerated the movement toward more Hispanic labor. As legalized workers made their way to New York State, they displaced many of the southern Blacks who had been the primary source of migrant labor since World War II. The legal workers then told their families and friends about work in New York and thus began the first substantial illegal farm work force in the state.

Today a significant portion of the work force is illegal immigrants. Latino workers have even begun to be hired on dairy farms and the trend is likely to continue. Still, the farm labor force remains diverse, including African-Americans, Jamaicans, Haitians, St. Lucians, Caucasians, and Latinos such as Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans. The growth of the Hispanic population is also evident among non-farmworkers, as illustrated in *Socioeconomic Trends in New York State: 1950-1990*. In four rural county types, nonwhites and Hispanics increased 55% during the 1980's, although the total is still only about 4% of the population.

Workshop participants discussed a few of the creative approaches some farmers have taken towards labor issues. However, as with so many challenges facing agriculture, farmers are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to labor. As long as farmers continue to lose money or barely break even, the conflict between farm-owner and farm-labor interests over wages, benefits, and regulations will continue. Ultimately, better conditions for farmworkers will be tied to the ability of farmers to make a better return on their own labor and investments. □



*Conference, from p.2*

of those choices on the environment, the economy, and the community. "Typically, nutritionists specialize in creating diets and telling you what's good for you. Nutritionists have overlooked the food supply and the long term sustainability of food resources. As consumers, most of us are oblivious to how and where our food is produced, packaged, and transported. We only know where it is sold. Consumers have a range of concerns and only a limited knowledge of the food system or agriculture." She described the new USDA food pyramid which was designed to promote an increase in consumption of plant foods (e.g., grains, fruits and vegetables), and referred to her own work on designing a related food guide which educates consumers about eating seasonally and regionally, and restructuring their diets to reflect important social and environmental concerns.

### Environment

Greg Watson, Eastern Regional Director of the Nature Conservancy spoke next challenging Keith Eckel's commentary on the impact of agriculture on the environment. "Modern agriculture is clearly productive, but has various problems which have strong historical roots. There is a high price paid for agriculture...high production cannot be equated with

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*"We need to change marketing options:  
farmers' markets, pick-your-own, roadside  
stands....which can lead to greater variety  
and crop diversification,"*

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sustainability," Watson said. "Water quality is as important as quantity. Agriculture serves as the greatest source of non-point contamination in the country (e.g. pesticides, fertilizers). Erosion is another critical issue," he added. Watson argued that we cannot de-couple the environment from social and economic concerns. He believes marketing has to be the key. "We need to change marketing options: farmers' markets, pick-your-own, roadside stands....which can lead to greater variety and crop diversification," he said. Watson agreed with Eckel

*See Conference p. 15*

## Pro-Dairy Program Helps Grazing Go Mainstream

Wherever you turn these days there is discussion about grazing. Management intensive grazing is gaining acceptance. Farmers say it's profitable, and many universities now support this.

For 10 years and more, voices claiming that there's money in pastures have been brushed aside. Turning livestock out to pasture was common, but mostly for exercise and poor quality feed. New fencing systems have changed that. The best quality and least-cost feed may be found on pasture. The new fencing allows the cows to harvest it for themselves.

Small farms have been first to adopt management intensive grazing. In many cases a switch to grazing has prevented an auction and allowed the smaller farm to remain competitive. Larger farms and early adopters of other new technologies hardly noticed. Today the trend is shifting. Some large farms are playing catch-up.

We now see some very large farms in NY using management intensive grazing. Bill Tracy, manager of Sunrise Farm in Auburn, grazes over 1,500 head of stocker cattle. In Lansing, Chuck Benson turns out 650 head, including the 250 in the milking herd. And in Essex County, farms with 100 cows or more are the early adopters of intensive grazing!

New York Dairy Farm Business Summary data suggest that experienced graziers are profiting about \$167 more per cow than similar sized farms using confinement feeding. But it's not just economics. Farmers who have switched to grazing say it's improved the quality of their lives. Chuck Benson reports that he now spends time on his boat every day in the summer. Previously he wouldn't have had the time even if he could afford the boat!

Cornell Cooperative Extension has made available through *Pro-Dairy* the course "Management Intensive Grazing for Dairy Cattle." In many counties a one day program is targeted toward potential or beginning graziers. Subsequent programs are

taught with new and experienced graziers together. Participants learn about setting systems up, growing high quality pasture, balancing pasture rations, economics, and even consider life-style changes.



Many areas are forming pasture support groups which meet on farms to gain field experience. Some groups also work with *Graze-NY* which is a state-wide effort coordinated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly SCS) to supply technical help.

It may be hard to define sustainable agriculture, but graziers feel management intensive grazing would be included. Profitability, lifestyle, and the ease of meeting environmental expectations have all improved. And has anyone noticed which farmers are wearing smiles these days?! For more information on *Pro-Dairy's* grazing programs, contact Nate Leonard at (315)753-5077. □

— by Nate Leonard, Cornell Cooperative Extension Area Specialist.

## Parasitic Wasp as Alternative to Pesticides for Sweet Corn

The use of natural enemies to control insect pests is becoming more and more commonplace on commercial farms and greenhouses. In Europe, already over 90% of vegetable transplants are grown using these biological controls in the greenhouse. Many natural enemies have excellent potential as

alternatives to chemical pesticides here in New York State. But careful research is essential to make sure these alternatives are cost effective for farmers.

For example, the European corn borer, a serious pest of sweet corn, has been the subject of biological control programs since shortly after its discovery in the US in the early 1900's. One potential method of controlling this pest is the release of large numbers of *Trichogramma* wasps which search out and parasitize corn borer eggs. This technique is widely used in Europe and Asia. In 1991, we began working with *Trichogramma ostriniae*, a species used commercially in China against the Asian corn borer, a close relative of the European corn borer. It also proved to be very effective against European corn borer in early tests in Delaware. With support from the New York Science and Technology Foundation and in cooperation with IPM Labs in Locke, NY, we have been studying its biology and developing ways to rear it in quantity.

Laboratory studies have shown that in addition to European corn borer, this species parasitizes several other moth species including eggs of grain moths. The availability of relatively cheap alternate rearing hosts, such as grain moths, means mass production of billions of these wasps should be cost-effective. A concern when rearing *Trichogramma* on non-target host is that they lose their effectiveness. However, even after rearing *T. ostriniae* on grain moth eggs for several generations they were still effective in parasitizing corn borer eggs in fields of sweet corn. We have also learned that the wasps are capable of successfully parasitizing corn borer eggs from when they are first laid to when they are about to hatch. This also is good news because the eggs are susceptible to parasitism for a relatively long time.

These and the results of a variety of other studies indicate that this parasitoid has all the characteristics to make it a valuable tool for control of European corn borer in sweet corn and potentially in other crops. For more information on biological control research at Cornell, contact Mike Hoffmann, (607)255-1327. □

—by Mike Hoffmann, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Entomology

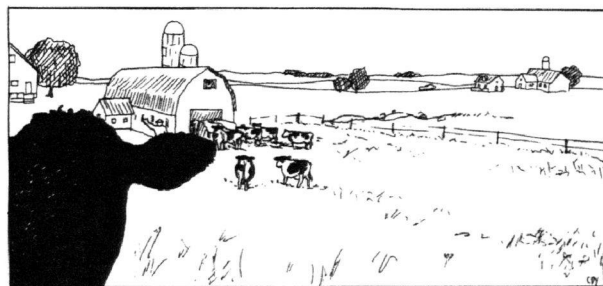
## Cornell's Cooperative Enterprise Program:

### Supporting Agricultural and Rural Development

An estimated 10 million residents in New York and New England are members of cooperatives - agricultural, food, housing, credit union, child care, health care, manufacturing and other cooperative organizations. These cooperatives contribute more than \$37 billion in economic activity. For New York farmers and communities looking for strategies to sustain agriculture economically, the cooperative business model offers time-proven methods for improving competitiveness and stimulating economic growth.

Cornell's Cooperative Enterprise Program, within the Department of Agricultural, Resource and Managerial Economics, provides support to new and existing cooperatives, and other types of business alliances and networks. Training programs are offered for directors, managers, and employees of cooperatives on topics such as Cooperative Principles, Strategic Planning, Board/Management Responsibility, Cooperative Finance and Marketing. Staff provide support and professional guidance to groups considering organizing new cooperatives or business networks. The Program also carries out applied research on methods of organizing, financing, marketing and management which lead to successful performance of cooperatives.

For more information on the Cornell Cooperative Enterprise Program, contact Brian Henehan, Extension Associate, at (607)255-8800. □



continued next page

## Sustainable Agriculture Seminar Series

The Sustainable Agriculture Seminar Series, co-sponsored by the Cornell and Graduate Students Working Groups for Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems, the Farming Alternatives Program, the Center for the Environment, the Departments of Agricultural and Biological Engineering (ABEN) and Soil, Crops and Atmospheric Sciences (SCAS) and funded in part by SAREP funds (whew!), wrapped up a very successful semester early in May. Farmers, academics, activists and extension specialists from the US and Canada presented seminars ranging from community farms, "foodsheds" and state and federal politics, to agroforestry, bio-intensive methods and holistic resource management. These seminars are open to the public: join us next year! □

## Education Department Launches Electronic Exchange Year-long Sustainable Agriculture Conference

A year-long electronic conference on educational methods and issues in sustainable agriculture began in March 1995. The conference brings together educators in extension, non-profits, and colleges and universities who teach sustainable agriculture. Through the conference, educators will share curriculum, and discuss ways to educate for sustainability in agriculture, food systems, and rural land use. The conference defines 'educator' broadly, and would like to include anyone who finds themselves in the position of regularly educating others on sustainability in food and agricultural systems.

An "electronic" conference is different from a face-to-face conference in a city or at an institution. "Electronic" means it happens on the Internet, through computer "e-mail". That's why it can happen all year-long—with you participating as much or as little as you would like. The conference is called "SAEd-Share-L", or, the 'Sustainable Agriculture Education Share List'. It is similar to SANET,

but much more focused on educational issues. SAEd-Share-L will also be a way to post actual worksheets, syllabi, extension articles, and summaries of learning strategies employed in teaching sustainable agriculture to college students at land grants, 1890's and liberal arts colleges; extension staff; farmers and other ag professionals; administrators of agencies and higher education; the non-farming public; or each other.

SAEd-Share is a national project of the Educational Task Force of the Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and is managed by graduate students Nancy Grudens-Schuck and Joshua Slotnick at the Department of Education at Cornell, together with Chuck Francis, Center for Sustainable Agriculture Systems, UNL, and Dave Deshler, Department of Education, Cornell.

To participate electronically, contact Nancy Grudens-Schuck at "ng13@cornell.edu" or (315)364-7837. Organizers are working hard to include those who do not have access to the Internet. Please contact them with suggestions. □

## Organic Wine and Grape Production Proceedings

Proceedings from the *1995 Organic Grape and Wine Production Symposium* are now available. The conference was the result of a five-year SARE project at Taylor Vineyards (now Canandaigua Wines) to study the conversion of conventionally managed vineyards to organic management. In addition to the study results, alternative grape markets were presented and BATF guidelines for "organic wine" were outlined. For a copy of the proceedings send \$10.00 to Beverly Dunham, Bulletin Office, Jordan Hall, NYSAES, Geneva, NY 14456. For more information regarding conversion to organic management and alternative grape markets, contact David Peterson, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Grape Specialist, Finger Lakes Region, 110 Court Street, Penn Yan, NY 14527; (315)536-5134. □



## New Farmers, New Markets Project Update

### Improving Community and Economic Viability

As we reported in *Farming Alternatives*' Fall 1994, Vol.3, No.1, Cornell Cooperative Extension of New York City is expanding the farmers' market system in metropolitan New York and the mid-Hudson regions through its *New Farmers, New Markets* project. Addressing issues of local food security, nutrition, farmland preservation, entrepreneurship and personal empowerment, New Farmers, New Markets has incubated some unique partnerships in and around New York City (see box at right).

By building upon current resources, issues and programs, New Farmers, New Markets is successfully strengthening these programs and creating an atmosphere of cooperation and achievement with otherwise disparate communities and efforts. Last year, New Farmers' New Markets helped establish a new farmers' market at a local Housing Authority development in Far Rockaway. This year, another market is being planned for the Highbridge district of the Bronx (See Orange County, at right). This will bring the total number of New York City farmers' markets to a new high of 26. New Farmers' New Markets is recruiting and educating new farmers to grow and direct market in the region with an emphasis on organic and sustainable production. Additionally, "farmers who come to New York [City] hire local people...to help them unload, display and sell their produce. It's economical and convenient," says John Ameroso, Associate Resource Educator for the project.

The project is supported by land donations, funds and advice from the participants, private benefactors, the American Conservation Association, American Farmland Trust's "Farming on the Edge" program, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell's Farming Alternatives Program. □



## Emerging Partnerships Train New Farmers

**In Dutchess County and Harlem,** Cornell and the New York Mission Society at Camp Minisink in Dover Plains are offering summer campers and Haitian Church Coalition adult participants a program in farm market production and education. Food grown will go to the camp kitchens and nearby markets. Marketing will be linked to Mission Society programs throughout New York City, where companion education programs will be extended throughout the year. Additionally, Les Hulcoop at Dutchess County Cooperative Extension is training new market farmers at the local BOCES (see story p.11) and Dutchess staff will assist with the Mission Society farming site to further promote markets and farmland preservation.

**In Sullivan County and the Far Rockaways, Queens,** Daytop Village's drug and alcohol treatment center at Swan Lake will provide an educational experience for the 250 adults in residence throughout the year. Residents will be trained to grow food for the center's kitchens. In Queens, Cooperative Extension's nutrition program educators will work with the single parents as they return from Swan Lake for reintegration into the community. Also, vacant land is being inventoried for potential market gardening sites in Queens to serve both the Reentry Facility and the farmers' market.

**In Orange County and the Bronx,** the Empowerment Center at Goshen offers a link to the Highbridge Community Life Center in the Bronx and Cooperative Extension's ongoing work in "Take Charge/Be Somebody." During 1995, teens will take turns growing fresh fruits and vegetables for the Center at the Dutchess and Sullivan County sites, and selling their produce at farmers' markets in their Highbridge neighborhood or at other Bronx markets.

For more information, please contact John Nettleton or John Ameroso, Cornell Cooperative Extension of New York City; (212)932-0880. □

## Wayne County Makes Plans for the Future of Farming

The Wayne County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) has begun work on a county plan to promote farming and preserve farmland. The board envisions a two-part plan: 1) Planning and zoning measures, together with a map showing the most valuable farmland in the county, which towns and individuals can enact to protect farmland; and, 2) Economic development projects which will strengthen the farming sector and reduce the number of farms lost. The Wayne County board has already conducted a local farmer survey and held four meetings around the county to find out what farmers think.

Reflecting the diversity of agriculture in Wayne County, 70 farmers from dairy, livestock, cash crop, fruit, fresh market and processed vegetables, large scale and small, conventional and organic operations attended the winter meetings. After low farm gate prices, farmers in the survey singled out high property taxes as their biggest problem. On the eastern end of the county, farmers are concerned that the expansion of the Montezuma Wildlife Refuge is eating away at the tax base, thereby increasing the load on the remaining farms. And on the western end, closer to Rochester, development pressure has raised land values and real estate taxes to a level which threatens the economic life of farms. In some towns, every parcel, whether developed or not, has tacked onto it a "prime site" value of \$20,000. The farmers did not just "bellyache." Several thoughtful suggestions for alternative tax structures were proposed (see box at right).

Because few city or town dwellers understand what it takes to put food on their tables, farmers identified the need for better non-farmer education on the realities of farming, as well as the need to enlist community support for local farms. They recognized obstacles to selling food to local institutions. For example, schools receive commodity shipments which may contain apples from Washington, and few farms have facilities to process food to the degree required by food services.

The Board presented a draft County Right to Farm Bill at the meetings. The bill affirms the importance of farming to the county and recommends that realtors inform all would-be county landowners that farms, while they make fine landscapes, may also sometimes be noisy, dusty or smelly. With strong farmer support, the AFPB is introducing the bill to the Wayne County Board of Supervisors. Farmers suggested that standing together behind this Right to Farm Bill might be the first step towards working together more effectively for farming in the future.

Although the 1992 Right to Farm Bill in New York State established an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) in every county which has

an agricultural district, and gave these boards the option to develop a farmland protection plan for their county, only a handful of these boards have submitted applications to the Dept. of Ag and Markets for financial support.

### Alternative Tax Structures Proposed

Change the agricultural assessment to reflect the cost of services a farm property requires, instead of the potential crop production.

Charge a flat, low tax rate on farmland and shift the support for the school system to the tax on residences.

Initiate a program of purchase of development rights in NYS.

Grant set term conservation easements on farmland and in exchange lower the tax assessment by 50%.

Shift the tax assessment from land to income.

The Wayne County AFPB will be working with other western NY boards to set up either a conference or a training program to help boards become more active. For more information or for a copy of a report on the four meetings, contact Elizabeth Henderson at (315)587-9787, or David Reville at (315)331-8415. □

— by Elizabeth Henderson

## Sowing Seeds For New Market Gardeners

Dutchess County agriculture is diversifying! Especially through an increase in direct marketing of fruits and vegetables, six farmers' markets have been established in the County, four within the last two years. The down-sizing of a major corporation in the region has helped to renew interest in entrepreneurship.

As questions increased about growing fruit, vegetables, and cut flowers for sale, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County recognized the need for an organized educational program on market gardening. Explaining the many facets of direct marketing and growing techniques in a one-hour visit at the Extension Office was not fair to the potential marketers.

Teaming up with the local B.O.C.E.S. Adult Education Program, Cooperative Extension offered a six-week market gardening course last fall and winter. The response to the classes was overwhelming. The class size swelled to twenty-six people with more on a waiting list. The course was different from a generic course on how to start a small business. Naturally, the "why" and "how" of starting a small business was discussed, but market gardening and good horticultural practices were emphasized. All examples from the business world were framed in agricultural terms. Classes also featured presentations by successful local agricultural marketers. Each farmer offered valuable tips for successful direct marketing.

The mix of class participants was very good. Four class members were already direct marketing. One person was a retired dairy farmer. The remaining were either avid gardeners or part-time vegetable gardeners. Discussions of marketing issues and horticultural practices were always lively and informative.

In surveying the class on the final session, there was much interest in taking the next step: establishing a market garden business. Eleven people indicated that they were seriously considering the busi-

ness. Four were "on the fence" about starting a business. Also, all the established marketers rated the class with high marks.

A market gardening class will be offered again this Fall at the Dutchess County B.O.C.E.S. If you would like to receive a course outline, please contact Les Hulcoop, Cornell Cooperative Extension, PO Box 259, Millbrook, NY 12545; (914)677-8223, ext.130; E-mail: [leslie\\_hulcoop@cce.cornell.edu](mailto:leslie_hulcoop@cce.cornell.edu) □

— by Les Hulcoop Ed. Note: Good Job, Les!

## Dutchess County CCE Receives Tourism Award

Early this Spring, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County was awarded one of three Dutchess County Executive Tourism Awards for its work in Agritourism. CCE's Dutchess County's Association Director, Betty White, sees this a significant recognition of Extension's work promoting and supporting agriculture in the county, and its importance to both local economic development and the agriculture industry. The County Executive, William Steinhaus, commented on the outstanding leadership of the associations' volunteers. Congratulations! □

## Mohawk Valley Farmers Form Sustainable Agriculture Network

A group of Mohawk Valley farmers, meeting since 1993, has adopted a set of bylaws this winter and become *The Mohawk Valley Sustainable Agriculture Network*. The Network's mission is to promote sustainable agriculture in the region by encouraging ecologically and culturally sound agricultural practices, demonstrating their profitability and providing information for "farmer to farmer" and "farmer to consumer" networks. Originally organized by staff of the NY Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NYCAP), the group now receives technical and

*continued next page*

secretarial support from the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Early on, the Network discussed the definition of sustainable agriculture and decided it must include intimate knowledge of the land; culturally based management decisions (agri-culture vs. agri-business); practices that allow the operation to be self-perpetuating (transferable to the next generation); an agriculturally sound nutrient cycle, transferring nutrients from soil to plants to animals and back to the soil without significant off-farm additions. The group identified the following obstacles to achieving this vision: decreasing admissions to agriculture college programs; inaccurate farm images in news reports; poor quality of life for farm families; inadequate farm transfer structure; poor educational awareness of agricultural practices and farming.

This spring, the group sponsored the "Transitions to Profitable Farming Conference" in Canajoharie, NY. And coming up this season, they are planning multi-county demonstrations and trials on narrow row corn, cover crops, gamma grass (with USDA support), ridge tilling, biological insect control and a forage sampling comparison.

Last year, the Network sponsored a day-long retreat on organizing farmer networks for sustainable agriculture and their first farm tour program. Featured speakers included Tom Frantzen of the Practical Farmers of Iowa, and Chuck Blood, a dairy farmer from Madison County, representing the Twilight Committee and the Central New York Crop Management Association. On the Farm Tours, participants saw sustainable farming techniques in practice locally at Earl and Carol Spencer's dairy farm in Montgomery County, and Well Spring Farm in Herkimer County. Subjects included nutrient management and the effective use of cultivation to reduce or eliminate the need for herbicides; the use of cover crops to recycle nutrients and provide a means of weed suppression; and, alternative agricultural enterprises such as organically certified garlic, specialty vegetables, and meat goats.

*For more information contact: Earl Spencer, (518)673-5360, Montgomery Co. SWCD 4001 St. Hwy. 5S Fultonville, NY 12072-1721. □*

## NOFA Summer Conference

The 21st Annual Summer Conference and Celebration of Rural Life sponsored by The Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) will be held on **August 11-13, 1994** at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. This 3-day weekend of workshops, exhibits and festivities will be of interest to farmers, gardeners, consumers, environmentalists, activists and teachers. Over 100 workshops range from basic organic gardening to large scale organic agriculture to political action and environmentalism and exhibits of farm animal demonstrations, appropriate technology, books and information related to organic growing. Other features include: keynote address by Lynn Miller, farmer, publisher of the Small Farmer's Journal; discussion of the tradeoffs between eating locally produced vs. organic products, organic wine tasting, contra-dancing, a coffeehouse, story telling, a county fair, and an exciting children's conference.

*For registration information contact: Julie Rawson, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005, (508)355-2853. □*

## New York State Meat Goat Initiative Complete

The Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship, Inc. (CADE, Inc.) announces the completion of its work on the New York State Meat Goat Initiative. This program was sponsored by the USDA Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program, the New York State Dept. of Agriculture and Markets and CADE, Inc. In early May, CADE held a one day seminar for producers to discuss the results of the project. Included in the day's events were presentations on the project's market study; the revised New York State Sheep, Lamb and Goat Buyer's Directory, the significance of ethnic markets for goats, a goat record keeping system developed by CADE, and opportunities for success in the meat goat industry in the Northeast. Chefs and students from the Culinary Institute of America and the Otsego Area Occupational Center prepared a noon buffet luncheon featuring goat meat entrees.

*For more information contact Betsey Hale, Marty Broccoli or Kim Handy at (607)334-4715 or (607)436-2180. □*



## Is Your Job Sustainable?

### A Question for Farmers and Extension

by Jim Barney

In the future, will others be willing and able to pay you for what you can do? Will the assets you invested in for your retirement have value? I started dairy farming 30 years ago by investing in the skills and assets of dairying. Those assets have changed a great deal in 30 years, but now seems that the rate of change necessary to stay competitive is increasing rapidly. Those of us who have invested in the current food and agricultural system have a stake in its future; we have a deep interest in its sustainability because our security is tied to it.

To me, there are two dimensions to sustainability: external and internal. The external dimension is our customers' needs and expectations of price and quality. In addition, our local communities have needs and expectations that we will protect the environment and strengthen their institutions. The internal dimension is our individual and collective capacity to satisfy those needs and expectations.

The nature of our markets is also changing. The mass markets of the past are being replaced with niche markets. This transition is being driven by our customers expectations of having ever greater choice. As the value added to agricultural products by processors and marketers increases, the value added by farming decreases. This trend is neither unique nor new to agriculture.

In my mind, the central issue of the sustainable agriculture debate is one of organization. Will farmers continue to allow the supplier and market sectors of the food and agriculture system to gain in their share of the food dollar while the farmers' share decreases? Will suppliers and/or marketers continue to vertically integrate farming into their operations?

Isn't it about time farmers began to consider horizontal integration? For such a system, farmers would collaborate with each other and other rural community based businesses and institutions for such purposes as marketing, technology development and supplier sourcing. Farmers would stop

allowing themselves to be divided by such things as commodity groupings, cropping practices, sources of technology, the "sustainability" of different farming practices, market niches and the ideologies that support the divisions.

Instead, farmers would be the organizing force and reap the benefits of creating and controlling the organization. Farmers and rural communities would add more value through information. Working together and using concepts like strategic planning, Total Quality Management and marketing, all common in larger organizations, farmers could begin to reverse the trend toward poorer rural communities.

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*[T]he central issue...is one of organization. Will farmers continue to allow the supplier and market sectors...to gain in their share of the food dollar while the farmers' share decreases?*

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Such sweeping changes can only happen in rural communities that are based on a few key values which focus that community's vision. The idea that people will see the opportunity to grow and the expectation that people *will* grow must be widely held. Next, diversity must be respected. Even more, diversity must be *valued* as an essential element in the community's ability to develop niche markets and creative approaches to the use of technology. People must have pride in their local community.

While information, ideas and influence can exist in the cyberspace of the global community, we must all go home to some *place* to raise our children. Healthy communities with strong local institutions are fundamental. It is every citizen's responsibility to support his or her community with both word and deed. These are the powerful values upon which our great nation was built. Periods of rapid and sweeping change cause people to search their most basic values for guidance. Strength and courage can be drawn from those values if they are relevant to the challenges ahead. We are truly blessed. We need not create them. We need only to apply them once again. □

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*Jim Barney is a dairy farmer in Sherman, New York and recently spoke as an opening panelist for the "Farming for the Future" Conference. Contact Jim at (716)761-6611.*

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**NEW! Farmers' Markets and Local 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.

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**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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**Systematic, Socioeconomic Comparison of Sustainable and Conventional Farming!** *Planting the Future: Developing an Agriculture that Sustains Land and Community* is the final report of a multi-state cooperative research effort sponsored by the Northwest Area Foundation. This book reports on research suggesting that with appropriate changes in public policy, a shift to more sustainable agricultural practices could simultaneously foster environmental protection, farm-based economic opportunity and vital rural communities. Several chapters offer a strategy for change in public research and extension, federal farm programs, and rural policy. *Planting the Future* offers a rare blend of scientific findings, reflection on the research experience, and analysis of policy implications. Available from Iowa State University Press for \$14.95; ISU Press, 2121 S. State Avenue, Ames, IA 50014-8300, (800)862-6657. □

**New York Vegetable Conference Proceedings Available** Proceedings (206 pages!) from the 1995 New York State Vegetable Conference are now available. Included are discussions on weed, insect and disease control, production topics, new varieties, post-harvest handling and the storage, marketing and labor-related issues for many area crops. Also included is information on greenhouse vegetable production, potato late blight disease and new cultivation equipment and techniques for weed control management alternatives. Copies are \$14.00 each from the New York State Vegetable Growers Association, P.O. Box 4256, Ithaca, NY 14852-4256; (607)539-7648. □

**New Publication On Rotational Grazing—** *The Grass IS Greener: Dairy Graziers Tell Their Story* features sixteen dairy farmers from Wisconsin and Minnesota who tell what motivated them to take a chance on grazing and their strategies and challenges for converting conventional dairy systems to pasture-based ones. They reveal the positive impacts of pasturing on their land, their cows, and their family and personal lives. And, they openly tell about the mistakes they made so that other farmers can avoid them. Copies are \$5.00 + 2.50 S/H from Wisconsin Rural Development Center, Inc., 125 Brookwood Drive, Mount Horeb, WI, 53572; (608)437-5971. □

*Conference, from p. 5*

that the agriculture agenda is shifting, but that this is for the good. "Farmers aren't and should not be the only ones defining the agricultural agenda. We need coalitions to find common ground between environmental and production goals," he concluded.

Participant Jim Barber, a dairy and vegetable farmer challenged Watson's criticism of agriculture. "Agriculture is the only thing touched by man that is beneficial to the environment—the benefits far outweigh problems." Watson agreed, in part, and described how agriculture often enhances natural resources.

## Rural Communities

The final panelist, Jim Barney, owns a 1200 acre farm in Sherman, NY. Barney spoke about agriculture and rural communities, beginning with his grandfather's commitment to the community and his involvement in the Underground Railroad. Barney has observed that as farming has become industrial-

ized, rural communities have become poorer. "Rural America is rapidly becoming a place where no self-respecting farmer would want to live!" But, rural America isn't monolithic; it can't produce all the food we need in the suburbs (e.g. on rural/urban fringe) where conditions are better. "More," Barney

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*"We need to respect local diversity and build local capacity. If that doesn't work, non-local farmers prevail,"*

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said (referring to Eckel's earlier comments), "doesn't necessarily translate into improved income in rural America. This promotes migration to cities."

"Farmers and local communities have to start building their capacity to stand up to the demands of a global economy," said Barney. However, change in the system must come from the people who live in rural communities. Non-local special interest groups as well as federal laws can "screw things up," he ar-

*See Conference, next page*

✂ 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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*Conference, from p. 15*

gued. "We need to respect local diversity and build local capacity. If that doesn't work, non-local farmers prevail," he added. Barney described how total quality management (TQM) training can be a tool for community development. It has worked in his community where farmers, the school superintendent and local businesses got together for TQM training, and developing inter-institutional connections. "We all need to start functioning as *agents* of our own local communities," he concluded. "We need to leverage resources and specialists to serve our communities' interests, not those of non-local special interest groups."

Conference participants were given ample opportunity to react to presenters and share their own views of the future of New York agriculture. Later sessions focused on identifying areas of agreement and disagreement among participants. We will report on these, and other conference discussions, in future issues. The availability of conference proceedings will be announced this summer. □

*Food Processing, from p. 3*

processing; 2) a set of public policy recommendations, and 3) a statewide or Northeast regional small-scale food processing association.

Other project collaborators include Cornell's Division of Nutritional Sciences and Dairy Pilot Plant, the Food Venture Center of the Geneva Experiment Station, and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. For more information contact Gil Gillespie (607/255-1675), Duncan Hilchey (607/255-4413), or Alison Clark (716/271-4007). □

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce. 1975. *Historical Statistics of the U.S., Colonial Times to 1970*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. House Doc. NO. 93-78 (Part I). "Farm to Retail Price Spreads of Farm Food Products. Market Basket of Farm Food Products," p. 489.

<sup>2</sup> USDA. 1993. *Agricultural Statistics*. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. 1993. Table: "Price Components for A Market Basket of Farm-Oriented Food Products by Food Group, U.S. Market Basket of Farm Food Products 1983-1992," p. 366.

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