

Cornell University Cooperative Extension

2011 Annual Report

Columbia County
Education Center

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Extension Supporters,

As it turns out 2011 will be my final year as the Executive Director for Cornell Cooperative Extension in Columbia and Greene Counties. I am preparing to begin a new career at Cornell University working at the statewide administrative level of the organization and will take my experiences here with me as we all work together to ensure that Cooperative Extension continues to be a vital organization working on behalf of New Yorker's from Long Island to Buffalo. I want to thank all of the board members, staff members and program participants who have helped us respond to the needs of our communities over these years. In particular I appreciate the spirit of collaboration and creativity that has developed in recent years as we have explored new ways of doing our work as circumstances and priorities have shifted around us.

2012 is an opportunity to carry all of these efforts to another level as we work together to plan new programs and prioritize our efforts, seek a new leader for the Columbia-Greene Association and embrace new approaches to our work that help address the 21st century challenges facing our families, businesses and communities.

I wish you all the best as you tackle this new world together!

Andrew S. Turner, Executive Director

The following program descriptions provide a snapshot of the depth and breadth of CCE's educational programs.

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



4-H YOUTH GROW IN THE GARDEN

Youth achieve better nutritional impact when they are involved in growing their own food. Over the span of eight weeks, 193 youth in Columbia County participated in our *Let's Eat a Plant* program. This year our summer programs' focus was to introduce youth to expand their taste palate through interactive workshops in our demonstration gardens. The sessions were lead by our six trained Junior Master Gardeners and supervised by 4-H Program Educator, Beth L. Horton.

Participants in the program spent time in the gardens learning different growing techniques and tasting foods directly from the garden. For many it was their first time tasting a blueberry or beet. Youth learned how to tend to the garden, the importance of composting and how to plan a garden. In the afternoon they were taught how to cook with the foods they grew. Recipes incorporated in the program were easy enough for youth to utilize in their own homes with minimal supervision. Workshop sessions ended with physical play time using games from the 4-H *Choose Health* program.

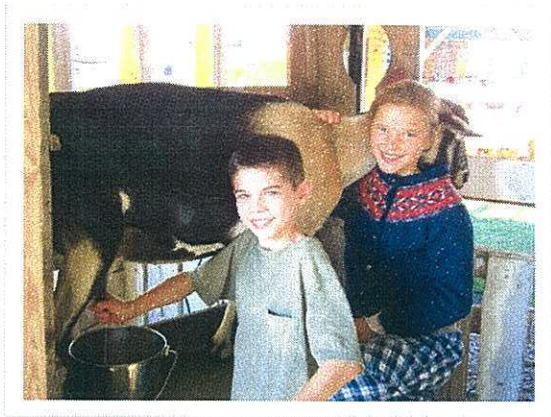
At the time of program completion, all youth stated that they had been introduced to at least three new foods and 40% reported that they would try them again at home.

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS¹ College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

Participants learned that choosing to eat more vegetables in their diets can be fun and tasty.

4-H CLUBS FOSTER SCIENCE LEARNING



As part of the 4-H Science Mission Mandate, 4-H project leaders were trained in new techniques to foster science learning as part of animal projects. Extension Educator, Kelly Ann Radzik led this effort by providing both training in new science-based lesson plans and leadership in redesigning standard activities to meet science goals.

The result was an increased number of youth reporting science learning on their end-of-year animal project records. Nearly half of our 4-H members in Columbia County completed animal science projects this year.

Some of the reported science outcomes were:

"I really like the Vet Science project. I went to the vet's office and saw a C-section on a dog and got to help revive the puppies. It was cool. I help with our dogs when they have puppies. I think I might like to work with a vet for my career."

"My most enjoyable moment was when our first chick hatched and I got to watch. I also liked being able to put a flashlight behind the eggs and seeing the chick grow from a blood vessel to a whole breathing creature."

"I have witnessed artificial insemination of a cow, the treating of scours in a calf, the trimming of cow's hoofs, and so much more. With the help of my 4-H leader, I have gained knowledge that will help me if I were to pursue a dairy health career."

In addition, a team of Dairy Cattle project leaders and teens worked to redesign Dairy Olympics. This knowledge contest was updated to focus on science skills like

observing and interpreting digital images and determining fat content in dairy products.

4-H YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN CITIZEN SCIENCE

During the summer, 4-H Extension Educator, Crystil-Lee Skoda, provided regional training to youth on the citizen science project Wasp Watcher. This project uses a docile native wasp called The Smokey Winged Beetle Bandit, *Cerceris fumipennis*, as a biosurveillance tool to monitor the Emerald Ash Borer. Emerald Ash Borer is an invasive beetle which kills Ash trees in as little as three years. Ash trees make up 7% of the trees across New York State.

Local youth from both Columbia and Greene Counties were trained and participated in the project. In Columbia County members of the Wilderness Workers 4-H Club and Crellin Park summer recreational program helped search for the wasp used in the project. Currently there are no known wasp colonies in either county. A map of searched sites was created from these searches to aid citizen scientists with this project in the 2012 Wasp Watcher season.

Special funding to support this project was provided by a Smith-Lever grant from Cornell University.

4-H CLUB MEMBERS ARE LOCAL LEADERS

As the youth development program of New York's land-grant university – Cornell University and the Cooperative Extension System, 4-H fosters an innovative, "learn by doing" approach with proven results. The [4-H Study of Positive Youth Development](#), a longitudinal study conducted by the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, shows youth engaged with 4-H are:

- Nearly two times more likely to get better grades in school;
- Nearly two times more likely to plan to go to college;
- 41 percent less likely to engage in risky behaviors; and
- 25 percent more likely to positively contribute to their families and communities.

2011 found almost 500 youth as members of 35 4-H clubs located throughout most of the towns in Columbia County. These clubs are led by over 350 local volunteers. These adults organize the clubs in their communities, provide project leadership, are guest speakers, evaluate 4-H exhibits at the fair, and more. The caring support of

adult volunteers and mentors inspires these young local leaders in 4-H to work collaboratively (especially as they participate as club officers), take the lead on their own projects and set and achieve goals with confidence.

Virtually every 4-H member, in conjunction with their 4-H club, participates in service activities in their communities. They look to the needs of those in their local community – providing food to the food pantry, holiday boxes to families in need, compassion to the elderly, help for homeless pets, activities for young children and more.

4-H members build their confidence and speaking skills by participating in the public presentation program and sharing their knowledge at the county fair. They build leadership skills that they learn at the State Teen Action Rep Retreat and the Teen Evaluator Training. Plus, they are able to explore career options as participants in programs such as Cornell Career Explorations and Cobleskill Agribusiness Career Trip.

Fueled by research-driven programming, 4-H'ers engage in hands-on learning activities in the areas of science, citizenship and healthy living. Their local 4-H club volunteers provide many hours of guidance as 4-H members explore, build, lead, create, and share.

AGRICULTURE & HORTICULTURE

The year in agriculture was plagued again by an over-wet, under-warm Spring, with many farms reporting very late plantings, and “slow to go” hay making. Then, as many of the crops were doing well in the middle and last of the growing season, Irene, and her cohort Lee dumped a massive amount of rainfall, and washed away, blew down, or silt-inundated many of the crops across the area. Very few farms were spared all problems, but by comparison, Columbia County fared better than several of the surrounding counties. CCE put together a meeting that helped to direct farmers toward disaster relief efforts through Federal, State, and County agencies and their programs and referral systems. An amazing network was formed to service the area, and although everyone could not be included in the programs, a large amount of assistance was rendered to impacted county farms.

The Capital District Vegetable and Small Fruit Program Team were in the front of efforts aimed at helping area farms with the major issues that the growing season and the disaster brought to bear. They once again proved the value of the program, through the timely, relevant, issue-

specific assistance offered to the area’s farmers, and helping to put the disaster relief meeting together in short order.

The year ushered in the new Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program for the five cooperating counties, and it is continuing to expand the program, designed to assist area farmers with unparalleled agricultural and horticultural expertise and relevance. At the local level, collaboration with CCE Greene County will keep Extension Educator Mick Bessire in the role of generalist for both counties. Mick will continue to service local calls as time and expertise will allow, and will be referring more to the regional team as the transition to this new delivery system is being made.

The Columbia County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan is nearing completion, and with guidance and direction by Columbia Land Conservancy and in alliance with the Ag & Farmland Protection Board, Farm Bureau, and CCE, the project is due to be completed early in 2012.

CCE Columbia County, with assistance from CLC, sponsored a county-wide bus tour in October designed to showcase some of the successful farms that are now operating here, utilizing innovative production and marketing methods. The farms included on the tour were: Altobelli Vegetable Farm in Kinderhook, gave the tour participants a “down to earth” look at modern farming technology and local food production and marketing; the Golden Harvest Farm in Valatie, and it’s “spirited” direction for processing and marketing apples and other fruit; The Milk Thistle organic dairy farm, the Trowbridge Cattle Company, and Grazin’ Angus Acres of Ghent gave the “tourists” a look at various types of livestock production aimed at discerning customers. Kinderhook Farm in Kinderhook provided us with a look at a genuine “grass-roots” organization, featuring wide-spectrum, grass-based livestock production and marketing.

CAPITAL AREA AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE PROGRAM

Serving Albany, Columbia, Greene, Schenectady and Washington Counties

The commercial agriculture and horticulture industry in New York’s Capital Region is a thriving, diverse industry that relies on the research of Cornell University and other Land Grant Institutions to maximize profitability and sustainability. During 2010 and 2011 the Cornell

Cooperative Extension Associations of Albany, Columbia, Greene, Schenectady and Washington Counties, with financial assistance and guidance from Cornell Cooperative Extension Administration in Ithaca, were able to design and implement a new regional programming model for the commercial agriculture and horticulture industry.



The initial step in this process was an analysis of the trends in the agriculture and horticulture industry that were observed in changes in the data reported in the USDA Census of Agriculture. These trends included increased number of farms in all of the counties with the majority of the increase in the smallest farms and the larger farm categories. Fruit and vegetable production has increased significantly as has the production of livestock for food and fiber. The dairy and field crop industry has seen major changes in recent years and continues to be of high importance to the overall agricultural industry in the region.

Five existing county-based educators transferred into new regional positions. These regional positions allow for staff to develop specialization and are anticipated to facilitate increased research and demonstration projects in the region and the opportunity for the development of increased external funding for agricultural projects in the region. These five educators remain based in county offices. Their specialties and office locations are as follows:

- Farm Business Management: Sandy Buxton, Washington County
- Agronomy: Aaron Gabriel, Washington County
- New Farmer/Market Development: Steve Hadcock, Columbia County
- Livestock: Tom Gallagher, Albany County
- Horticulture: Chuck Schmitt, Albany County

Accomplishments in the first eight months of this program include the formation of regional advisory committees for each of the program areas. These committees will meet on a bi-annual basis and will provide direction to the research and educational program for which each staff member is responsible. These committees also include representation from Cornell faculty members to help

strengthen the connection between campus, the educators and the producers.

Other accomplishments include:

- Development of a weekly email newsletter that highlights upcoming programs and issues of importance to producers has been initiated. This weekly newsletter has over 700 subscribers from around the region.
- Agriculture Educators from around the region put together several meetings on disaster assistance for farmers in response to the devastation caused by tropical storms Irene and Lee.
- A beef grading clinic was held over the summer. Seventy-two producers attended and 17 earned Beef Quality Assurance Certification. Producers who have BQA Certification agree to follow particular management practices in their operations and take responsibility for the quality of the beef produced on their farms.
- The agronomy educator held several Field Crop Scouting Sessions around the region. At these sessions producers get the opportunity to learn to scout for insects and diseases in their crops and earn recertification credits for their pesticide licenses.
- An open house for farmers was held at a local manufacturing plant that produces natural, biodegradable packaging products. This application is a potential outlet for locally produced field crops and may grow into a new market for local farmers.
- Several "Beginning Farm Business Management" courses were held around the region. This class gives new and established farmers the tools they need to take control of their record keeping and finances and helps to establish a framework of good financial information to help agricultural businesses to meet both family and financial goals.
- A "Beginning a Small Fruit Business Meeting" was held where individuals interested in fruit farming were introduced to business management and production principles involved in fruit production.

- A Christmas Tree IPM Project continues with growers learning new methods for scouting for foliar diseases of evergreen trees.
- An educational program aimed at increasing the skill of landscape architects around plant materials has been developed. Participants have increased their skills around site assessment and plant material selection.

Staff have also been diligent in developing grant proposals. Several proposals are out for consideration including one which would fund the development of a Vegetable Farm Business Summary Program loosely modeled on the Dairy Farm Business Summaries.

Future directions for 2012 include an increase in field research work and increased programming throughout the year to better meet the needs of all producers.

HUDSON VALLEY COMMERCIAL FRUIT TEAM

Serving Columbia, Dutchess, Ulster and Orange Counties



Weather conditions possibly associated with climate change have led to damage of Hudson Valley fruit that was intended for the fresh market.

Recently we have frequently experienced excessive water, hail, freeze, and wind damage that have caused cosmetic or flavor damage to pome, stone, and small fruits. Although this fruit is unsalable as fresh, it can be processed into a number of value-added products that are of great quality.

CCE has worked with five local growers and a Guatemalan producer, Carlos Tec, in a pilot project using a pulping machine that was developed in Guatemala. This machine removes skin, seeds, and stems from fruit, leaving a primary processed product that is suitable for making jam, ice cream, juice, and other products. The machine is easy to operate, and the primary processed product can either be frozen, or hot-packed to be shelf-stable. As one grower said, the lesser-quality fruit that has often been discarded can represent a grower's profit margin. Having an economical way of saving marginal fruit will help to make fruit growing operations more profitable.

CAPITAL DISTRICT VEGETABLE & SMALL FRUIT PROGRAM

Serving Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren and Washington Counties

Over twelve local field trials help to inform growers about plant variety selection. The trials are looking at the viability of varieties of tomatoes and potatoes. Some trials are looking at cover crops, use of high tunnels for greens and reduced tillage for strawberries. Finally, others are evaluating methods of planting sweet potatoes and the effect of various herbicide applications when growing pumpkins and garlic.

The team consistently scouts for specific pests during the growing season so as to provide a quick turn-around of recommendations to local farmers as they deal with the pests before crop damage takes place.

2011 was an especially memorable growing season because of the challenge brought forth by excessive rain at the beginning and end of the season with high temperatures and a lack a rain in the middle. With the season-ending record rains affecting many farmers the team assisted county educators with informational meetings about emergency programs and continues to conduct disaster assessments with farmers.

A number of educational courses, workshops and meetings were held throughout the year. Farmers have been able to participate via on-line courses, internet webinars, face-to-face classroom and field programs.

The team continues to pursue grant-funded projects to help extend the research and educational work it conducts. SARE, SCRI and USDA funded grants find the team as lead or partners in projects to study pests like the brown narnorated stink bug, growing conditions like the reduced till strawberries and marketing such as the farmers market promotion program.

CONSUMER HORTICULTURE MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS HELP MANY

The Master Gardener Program has achieved some major goals this year. First was to improve upon an annual program called Spring Gardening Day held at Columbia Greene Community College. Master Gardeners, Extension Educators and guest speakers gave 90 minute classes on topics ranging from starting your dream farm to vegetable gardening. It was well attended with people from as far

away as Ulster County and Massachusetts and has led to an expansion for the program this year.

The other primary goal was to work to expand the current Master Gardener Volunteer base for both Columbia and Greene Counties. Working closely, Columbia and Greene staff were able to bring together a great group of Extension Educators and program leaders who provided the curriculum required by Cornell in order for the new trainees to achieve the Master Gardener Volunteer status. The 16 registrants went through a 14 week course on subjects from Basic Botany through Invasive Species. We covered all topics that these trained volunteers will use to impart valuable Cornell based information to our communities. This new group of volunteers has integrated with the current group and will become an important resource for Cornell Cooperative Extension.

All of the Master Gardener Volunteers give at least 75 hours of volunteer time yearly providing services like: researching subject matter, answering phone calls at the horticulture desk, giving talks on horticulture related topics to garden clubs and schools, manning booths at plant swaps and fairs and writing articles for *The News* and our web site.

FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

NYSERDA PARTNERSHIP HELPS CONSUMERS

Seventy-four Columbia and Greene County residents participated in "Save Energy, Save Dollars" and "Making Ends Meet" EmPower New York workshops during 2011. Sponsored by New York Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension in conjunction with NYSERDA, these free two-hour workshops are designed to help both homeowners and renters save energy and maximize their financial resources.

"Making Ends Meet" centers on the process of developing and using a household spending or budget plan to help build upon personal or family financial security. "Save Energy, Save Dollars" helps attendees identify no-cost and low-cost measures that can be employed to conserve energy and reduce utility bills while making one's home more comfortable and efficient. In both workshops, attendees receive information about local, state and national resources and programs that can assist them in attaining these goals. The City of Hudson Office of the Treasurer co-sponsored two "Making Ends Meet"

workshops in late 2011, offering special tax repayment plans for city residents that attended the program.

Feedback to these programs has been very positive. As a result of attending these workshops, participants said they would install programmable thermostats, caulk & weatherstrip, switch to CFLs, set & stick to goals, track expenses, and increase savings. One individual stated that they would "continue to work on making (their) home more energy efficient" by getting an energy assessment (audit) and by being "more proactive."

EAT SMART NEW YORK (ESNY)

Nutrition education at the individual and household level is a critical part of supporting the overall health and well-being of our county's residents. The goal of ESNY is to improve dietary choices, food handling and preparation practices, food budget management, and levels of physical activity among limited-resource adults and their families with the long-term goals of increasing food security and reducing the incidence of chronic disease. Individuals who enroll in ESNY receive, at no charge, a minimum of six nutrition lessons, which are delivered on an individual basis (typically in the participant's home) or in a group setting. Lessons are derived from one or more approved curricula and delivered using a research-based and thoroughly tested method of instruction. 2011 was a particularly difficult year for the ESNY program, as the program was furloughed at the end of April due to funding issues. However, even with the shortened year, Nutrition Program Educators Karen Mort and Bruce Robertson managed to deliver education to 115 individuals, with 62 individuals completing six or more lessons. We are also excited to report that ESNY has returned for the 2012 program year, with three educators, Eileen West, Karyn Novakowski and Charity Lanthier, covering both Greene and Columbia Counties.



NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

TIMBER AND THE LANDOWNER



Forests in Columbia County account for approximately 60 percent of the land cover. These forests provide critical ecosystem services including clean water and air, forest products, fish and wildlife habitat, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, carbon sequestration, open

space, and energy independence. Forest related programs were hosted for the residents of Columbia County such as Game of Logging, on October 22, which is a safe chain use and directional tree felling training for private landowners. This workshop was supported through funds from the Robert H. Wentorf Foundation. Our partnership with the Columbia Land Conservancy and other organizations such as the Hudson Mohawk Resource Conservation and Development Council goes back many years. We have supported landowners' conferences and workshops such as small scale timber harvesting with all-terrain vehicles, which brought speakers from Cornell University and other agencies and organizations such as the Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York Forest Owners Association. There has been consistent participation by Columbia County residents in Agroforestry Resource Center workshops and resources and we have been expanding delivery to Columbia County locations. Currently we have scheduled multiple workshops for 2012 including a Municipal Officials program, where we will be covering the multiple values of forests, an Invasive Species series, and continuing education programs relating to forest stewardship through the Columbia Greene Community College. We will also be coordinating the Master Forest Owners program in Columbia County. Master Forest Owners are volunteers who provide peer-to-peer contact with other forest landowners in order to provide them with advice relating to managing their forests wisely.

HELPING KEEP OUR WATER CLEAN

Programs that promote the protection of clean water are essential to the well-being of people in our communities. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia County has been active in water quality protection through assisting lake owners associations to address issues that impact these water bodies. CCE Columbia has also committed staff to serve on the Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance, which is a project of Hudson Basin River Watch, a non-profit water protection organization.

Watershed protection is an issue that requires the collaboration of many stakeholder groups. Accessing adequate funding for watershed protection often requires joint efforts, and has provided opportunities for Greene and Columbia counties to join forces in past years. In 2008, CCE began a collaborative arrangement with Hudson Basin River Watch to fund the Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance in Columbia County. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County was awarded an \$80,000 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program. These funds were awarded in support of the Catskill Creek Watershed Awareness Project, the Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance and the Rondout Creek Watershed Council in Ulster County. CCE provided administration and oversight of these funds, which supported all three watershed protection efforts from 2008 through early 2011.

As we look forward to the future, we anticipate greater collaborative efforts between our two counties to assure the protection of the water that flows to the great Hudson River Estuary, which connects our communities and is an asset to us all.

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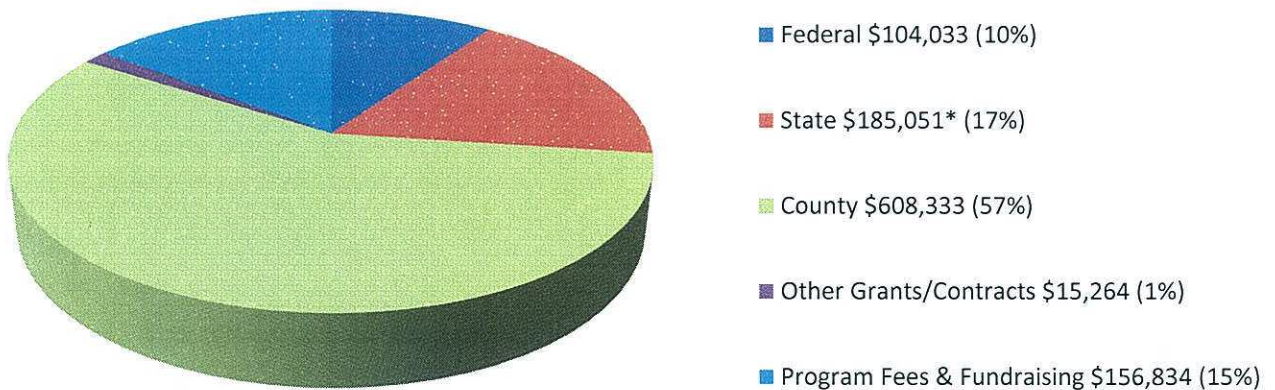
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Capital Area Agriculture & Horticulture Program:
 Sandy Buxton, Aaron Gabriel, Steve Hadcock,
 Tom Gallagher, Chuck Schmitt.

Capital District Vegetable & Small Fruit Program:
 Chuck Bornt, Laura McDermott, Crystal Stewart.

Hudson Valley Commercial Fruit Program:
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2011 FINANCIAL SUPPORT



**Includes employee benefits.
 Figures for Federal, State and County
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