



# HARVEST NEW YORK QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS Q2 2020

Harvest New York is an innovative Cornell Cooperative Extension team that focuses on workforce development and business expansion projects that increase profitability and investment in key sectors of New York's agriculture industry.

A detailed 3D rendering of a coronavirus particle, showing its characteristic spherical shape with a textured surface and numerous red, crown-like spikes protruding from it. The particle is set against a dark background with some small orange and yellow dots.

## Swift Response to COVID-19

Harvest NY Assists in Developing New Materials for New York's Food Industry During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Harvest NY has played a critical role in protecting New York's vulnerable food industry during the COVID-19 crisis. We took urgent action, in collaboration with partner organizations and subject matter experts, to address issues the food industry was facing. These actions included developing guidance documents for businesses, providing educational resources for employees, and conversing directly with food industry management.

As we continue to learn more about the virus causes COVID-19, we will develop additional informative guides for the food industry.

Harvest NY thanks New York food producers and manufacturers for working tirelessly to ensure our families are fed with exceptional and safe products.

# Making “Virtual” a Reality

## Dairy and Food Safety Workshops Moved to Online Platforms

Physical distancing has not stopped our dairy processing extension activities. Our team has embraced virtual learning by moving critical workshops to online platforms, and by providing relevant content to the food industry through webinars. Our online workshops have reached 141 individuals from over 50 companies, and our webinars and videos have reached over 1,000 people since their release.

Self-paced online workshops (such as Dairy Science and Sanitation and HACCP food safety) have allowed food industry employees from multiple shifts to learn at a time that is convenient for them. So far, 87 individuals have started or completed our self-paced courses.

We held our first online Preventive Controls for Qualified Individuals (PCQI) workshop from June 16-19. This real-time course had tremendous participant interaction, and each of our 54 participants earned a certificate from the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance, which means they are qualified to oversee a facility’s food safety plan.

Dairy specialists have also seen an increase in interest related to on-farm dairy processing during the pandemic. Harvest NY partnered with New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crop Team to deliver an On-Farm Dairy Processing Webinar. This webinar covered business considerations and regulatory requirements for on-farm dairy processing, and reached over 168 people. Participants were able to ask questions and speak directly with presenters after the webinar. A [recording of the webinar](#) is online.



### SELF-PACED LEARNING

- HACCP Food Safety
- Dairy Science and Sanitation



### LIVE ONLINE WORKSHOPS

- Preventive Controls for Qualified Individuals



### SPECIAL TOPIC PROGRAMMING

- Considerations for On-Farm Dairy Processing



### COVID-19 EDUCATION

- COVID-19 Training for Food Industry Employees
- Background Information on COVID-19
- Consumer Office Hours

*“I was very pleased with the [Preventative Controls for Qualified Individuals] program as we had three of our key people that can now help me with instituting PCQI into our Food Safety Plan.”*

*– Lynette Swendsen, Quality Control Manager, Yancey’s Fancy, Inc., Corfu, NY*



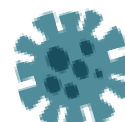


## Training Materials Developed to Help Reduce Virus Transmission in the Food Industry Workplace and Beyond

Harvest NY has assisted in creating guidance documentation for food industry best practices in English and Spanish. Documents such as decision trees, standard operating procedures, and checklists are available on the [Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University](#) website. These documents are capable of being adapted to any facility in the food industry.



Though the virus that causes COVID-19 is not foodborne, food industry employees need training on how to reduce virus transmission in the workplace. Working with partner organizations and subject matter experts, Harvest NY produced educational training videos in English and Spanish emphasizing the steps individuals can take at work and in their personal lives to minimize the spread of the virus. Individuals who watch the video and complete a knowledge-check receive an email of completion that can be used as a company training record. More than 150 people have used these videos since their release as free training material. In addition to the employee training video, Harvest NY also created a bilingual informational video about COVID-19. The video shares factual information about the virus and identifies mitigation strategies to control the spread of the virus. These videos have more than 1,090 views on Cornell Cooperative Extension's YouTube Channel and can be found through the [Institute for Food Safety's COVID-19 Resources](#) web page.



Our collaboration with the Cornell Institute for Food Safety (IFS) further extends to live Q&A opportunities for producers. IFS has been hosting Industry Office Hours – a platform designed to help resolve concerning questions from the food industry. These office hours have drawn over 2,000 attendees. This method of outreach has not only helped us interact directly with food businesses to provide support, but also informs our team about which resources are most needed.

### COVID-19 Training for Food Processing Facilities

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Harvest New York | Cornell CALS | Dairy Foods Extension | Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University



Anika Gianforte  
Dairy Processing Specialist

*"Thanks! I have 98% of my personnel trained for COVID-19 using the video in English and Spanish."*

– Herminia Pena,  
Production Manager  
Roonybrook Farm Dairy,  
Ancramdale, NY

### Capacitación del COVID-19 para La Industria Alimentaria

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Harvest New York | Cornell CALS | Dairy Foods Extension | Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University



No hay evidencia de que el COVID-19 se transmita a través de los alimentos.



## Berry Extension During a Pandemic

Even before COVID-19 turned everything upside down, Esther Kibbe, Harvest NY's Berry Specialist was planning to spend a significant portion of her time scouting berry fields and sharing that information with growers to help them make timely decisions about pest and disease management. Once the pandemic made it unadvisable to interact with growers and hold live meetings, Kibbe's focus turned even more to solo field visits, writing reports and recommendations for various grower communication outlets.

### Berry Blog

The [berry blog](#), on Cornell's fruit page, was started this year and already has over 70 subscribers. Kibbe has published 14 blog posts...and counting!

### Berry Update in the Lake Ontario Fruit Program Newsletter

The CCE Lake Ontario Fruit Program has a weekly newsletter, sent to over 200 subscribers, where Kibbe has a regular column. To date, Kibbe has contributed 17 posts.

### Berry Update in VegEdge Newsletter

Additionally, the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program has a bi-weekly/weekly newsletter where Kibbe has contributed 9 berry management articles since early Spring. These articles have brought berry content to growers who may focus on vegetable crops but grow berries as a side project.

## New U-Pick Guidelines Developed

With COVID-19 changing how people can gather, shop and recreate, the U-pick farm model became a concern. Kibbe worked with a multi-agency team to create a set of [recommendations for U-pick](#) operations to reduce risk of infection for customers coming to their farms, and to the owners and employees of the farm as well. This document has been widely distributed and many growers have mentioned using the resource as they are planning their harvest seasons.







## Supporting New York's Essential Produce Auctions During COVID-19 Pandemic

Produce Auctions are aggregation and distribution nodes for farmers to participate in the wholesale economy of vegetables, fruit and flowers. Eight NYS produce auctions conduct more than \$8.1 million in business, between an estimated 6,000 growers and buyers. At the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak in New York, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) actively reached out to our contacts in NYSDAM to ensure that the produce auctions were considered an essential business. Once confirmed, a group of CCE educators divided the auctions amongst themselves to serve as primary contacts to ensure compliance with NYSDOH and CDC guidance. By educating auction management, these businesses began their season on the right side of the regulations. CCE educators reached out to law enforcement and local public health agencies to ensure common understanding. Signage, COVID-19 policy, and NY Forward Business safety plans were provided with support to implement compliance. Today all eight auctions are operational, following health guidance and experiencing robust sales. Further, we have worked with the auctions to operate as distribution points for hand sanitizer and face masks for the agricultural community.



## Exploring New Marketing Options Due to COVID-19

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers have seen an increase in the local food movement in their communities. Farmers had CSA shares fill up quickly, saw an increase in farm store traffic, and u-pick operations are still operating. However, farmers have had to find different ways to market their products than in the past. Harvest NY has been working one-on-one with farmers to find ways to market their products and provide information on other markets during COVID-19. Harvest NY has helped farmers with their websites, social media marketing, online stores, and finding alternative methods of operating.





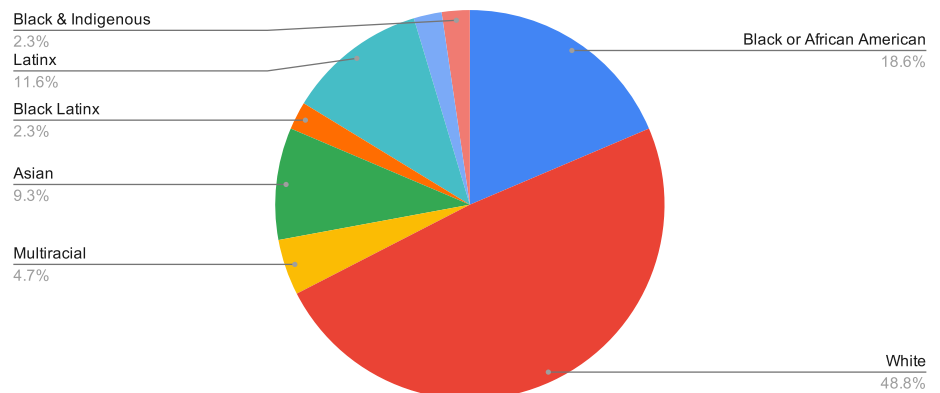
# Adapting to Online Learning Through Interactive Virtual Mushroom Cultivation Instruction

The Community Mushroom Educator (CME) Training, funded by Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under sub-award number ENE19-156-33243, was initially conceived of as a hybrid model with both online and in-person programming. Unfortunately, due to safety concerns of COVID-19, the nature of the CME programming has shifted to online instruction for the remainder of 2020. Spread throughout urban and rural centers of the Northeast, in states like NY, PA, MA, VT, NJ, NH, and MD, over 70 CME participants have tuned into live guest speaker presentations, content-based Zoom meetings on mushroom cultivation, and open Q&A virtual forums for peer-to-peer sharing. CME participants have been able to engage with other participants through Zoom features like breakout groups, live demonstrations, and use of the whiteboard. Through this wide range of virtual engagement, we are working to teach educators to inoculate a shiitake log, grow oysters on straw, and plant wine cap in wood chips in ways that are accessible economically and adaptable to a wide range of farms in both rural and urban settings.



The diverse cohort is composed of a majority of participants who identify as Black or African American, Black & Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Multiracial, are committed to increasing their own educational capacity to teach mushroom cultivation within their communities, emphasizing varieties that require minimal startup costs and easy to find materials.

2020 CME Cohort by Race



*Self-reported demographic racial breakdown of the 2020 Community Mushroom Educator (CME) cohort.*



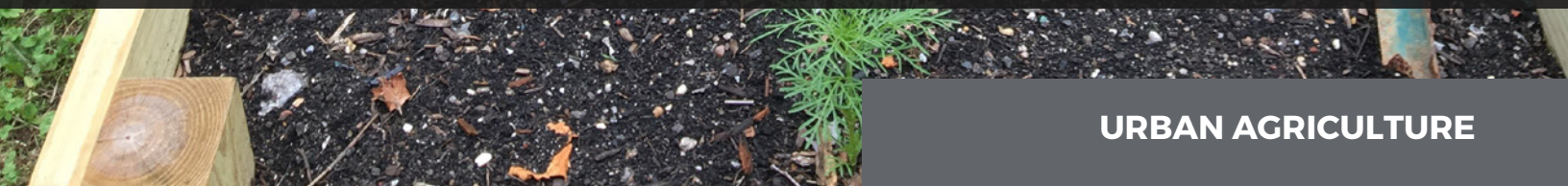


## Technical Assistance for Urban Farms During COVID-19

The onset of COVID-19 in New York City coincided with the beginning of the growing season for many NYC urban farms. In response to the virus' heavy toll in NYC—causing more than 18,000 deaths in April alone—many farms shifted their focus toward growing as much food as they could for people in their communities, many of whom were without work during the shutdown. Several urban farms temporarily closed at some point; in at least two cases because of a staff member testing positive for COVID-19, and in another case because the landowner barred access to the site in response to government shutdown orders. In the latter case, Harvest NY intervened on behalf of the farm to assure the landowner that food-producing farms, whether rural or urban, qualify as “essential,” and soon afterward the landowner allowed the farmers to return.

As the season picks up in spring, Harvest NY Urban Agriculture Specialist Sam Anderson works one-on-one with urban vegetable farmers, conducting visits to help identify issues related to pests, diseases, soil management, and to discuss plans for the year. During April and most of May, many NYC farms were not ready to accept visitors; yet, with nearly every farm finding themselves short-staffed while also trying to grow more food, Anderson has received more technical assistance inquiries this quarter than ever before. Through phone calls, texts, emails, and remote video calls—and then gradually resuming in-person visits, while observing strict safety guidelines—Anderson worked directly with 45 urban farmers between April and June. The usual pests, diseases, and other challenges of growing food in an urban environment are unbothered by human pandemics, even while urban farms rise to the occasion and demonstrate their importance as centers of healthy food production and distribution, safe spaces for young people, and hubs for community activism and resilience.

*Urban farmers at Pink Houses Farm in Brooklyn, ready to plant one of the over 50 beds of vegetables that will all be given away for free to nearby residents in a neighborhood where 1 in 390 people have died of COVID-19. Photo by Sam Anderson, CCE Harvest NY*





# Farm to School Continues Through School Closings

## Lunches Changed to Unitized, Pre-Portioned Meals Compromised Largely of Pre-Processed and Pre-Packaged Items

By March 18, per Executive Order, all K-12 schools were closed due to COVID-19, causing a major disruption in the execution of child nutrition programming. School Food Authorities pivoted from (largely) hot lunch, served cafeteria-style to hundreds of children at a time, to unitized, pre-portioned meals comprised largely of pre-processed and pre-packaged items. This change in service style and meal content were functions of the crisis. Safe food handling, distribution, food cost, product availability, and labor all factored in. Incorporating local foods into child nutrition programs efficiently and affordably is a signature challenge of Farm to School (F2S) during normal times, only to be amplified during a crisis of this magnitude. Many of us that support F2S efforts were left unsure of how to be helpful in a changed school food environment and what that meant for continued F2S programming. It should not have come as a surprise that our dedicated School Food Directors from across New York still planned on going for the 30% Purchasing Initiative, even though many lost ~3.5 months of eligible purchasing time.

The NYS Department of Education (State Ed), being responsible stewards of public money, require rigorous documentation to attest that a product purchased by a School Food Authority (SFA) is in fact, a “NYS Food Product”<sup>1</sup>. SFAs overwhelmingly struggled during the 2018-19 school year to provide accurate attestation, costing many their increased State reimbursement. Recognizing that and knowing that diminishing school food budgets would greatly benefit from the increased reimbursement, the Harvest NY F2S team, with the support of State Ed, drafted 30% guidance documents. As part of this, we verified frequently purchased NY 30% eligible items, ensuring proper paperwork was on file. It came as a huge surprise when all but one NY eligible product had insufficient paper trails behind them, which at worst, would have cost an SFA their 2019-20 reimbursement, or at best, significantly increased the work required of SFAs to verify product eligibility. In addition to correcting documentation, we created [a suite of 30% guidance resources](#) to assist SFAs in accurately determining a product’s eligibility and ensuring they have proper attestation. All guidance materials can be accessed on Harvest NY’s website.

Part and parcel to the guidance resources, we are thrilled to announce the official release of the [NY 30% Initiative Product Eligibility Database](#), which lists all known 30% eligible items, sans seasonally available, minimally processed produce. While we elected to leave these items off for now, we do intend to add them in the near future, so stay tuned. A public link to the database and companion training resources can be found on Harvest NY’s website.

We’re not sure what the fall of 2020 will mean for F2S programs but we’re optimistic that between our dedicated SFAs, our responsive food and farm community, the F2S village at large, and these newly released resources, that F2S will continue in some capacity, though it’ll likely look a bit different than in recent years past.

<sup>1</sup> New York State Food Product” is defined as: (1) a food item that is grown, harvested, or produced in New York State (NYS); or (2) a food item processed inside or outside NYS comprising over 51% agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in NYS, by weight or volume.

Product	Category	Sub-Category	Manufacturer	Distributor Code	Manufacturer Code	Item Description	Pack Size
▼ CATEGORY Produce	Count 26			▼ Unique 23.08%			
240 Concord Grape Juice	Produce	Juice	NY Juice Co	Sysco SUPC: 7089850   USF...		4 oz.	96/cs
241 Concord Grape Juice (with Apple Juice)	Produce	Juice	Welch's/Cool Tropics	USF: 6787894	17001	4 oz.	96/cs
242 Concord Grape Slush	Produce	Juice	Welch's/Cool Tropics	USF: 2533611	14501	4 oz.	60/cs
243 Apple Slices	Produce	Fresh Fruit	Peterson Farms			2 oz.	100/cs
244 Apple Slices, Bulk	Produce	Fresh Fruit	Foodlink Food Hub		N/A	3 lb. bulk bag	8/cs
245 Apple Slices, Portion Controlled	Produce	Fresh Fruit	Foodlink Food Hub		N/A	2 oz.	100/cs
246 Apple Slices, Commodity	Produce	Fresh Fruit	Zee Zee's Sliced Apples			2 oz.	100/cs
247 Bakeable Straight Cut French Fry	Produce	Frozen Vegetables	McCains	Sysco SUPC: 2545937   USF...		6 lb. bag	6/cs
248 Lettuce, Hydroponic: Baby Romaine, Butterhead, Green Incised, ...	Produce	Fresh Vegetables	Wheatfield Gardens			Head	30 heads/cs (butterhead); 5-6 heads ...
249 Lettuce, Hydroponic: Romaine, Butterhead, Trio Mix	Produce	Fresh Vegetables	Kenneth Henry and Son's			Head	12 heads/cs



# Power in Networks

Local food systems work requires us to interact with a diverse set of stakeholders. This diversity in partners enables us to build relationships across a wide spectrum of the food system, something that proved particularly helpful when COVID-19 hit and New York went on pause. A perfect storm of food-related events began to unfold. Food supply chains were severely disrupted, causing among other things, shortages at the grocery store. Wholesale food manufacturers lost a considerable share of their markets due to the closing of institutions. Meanwhile, consumers were in desperate need of increased food access, due to either income loss and/or empty shelves at the grocery store. In response, Harvest NY began to seek opportunities to improve food access while supporting our food and farm partners. As with any type of networking, we may never know the true impact realized from our efforts. But two stories stand out, validating to us the value of being a supply chain connector, as we often refer to ourselves as.

Slate Foods, a NY Grown & Certified, Minority Women Owned Business Enterprise, is an agri-producer of New York beef products originally developed for the K-12 school food market. Although K-12 schools closed in mid-March, school food was and is still being served. However, orders all but ceased for locally raised beef products as school food authorities were operating in emergency feeding mode, which favors pre-cooked commodity beef products. At the same time, grocery store shelves were devoid of meat. An opportunity presented itself when Produce Peddlers, a Buffalo-based food distribution company with whom we work, pivoted from wholesale to direct-to-consumer delivery. Harvest NY began connecting dots and making introductions. Within a month, Slate Food's beef products were available on Produce Peddler's online marketplace, the first animal-based protein to become available! Within another month, the highly adaptive Slate Foods had repurposed their institutionally packaged beef product into retail-friendly packaging. A strong business-to-business relationship between two great food businesses will hopefully endure beyond the pandemic.

"When the pandemic hit, Slate Foods was in a precarious place with an abundance of wholesale items once destined to institutions for the Spring. When Harvest NY introduced us to Produce Peddlers we entered a new market that we'd never before entertained. Produce Peddlers welcomed our products and, thanks to some great collaboration and creative marketing, they worked to help us distribute large amounts of our beef to consumers - launching our new retail efforts. We continue to work with them and they are amazing partners. We are very grateful for Harvest NY's role in facilitating this new collaboration."

– Julia Van Loon, President  
Slate Foods

Another networking success was realized through the USDA Farm to Family Food Box program. James Desiderio Inc., a 3rd generation regional produce distributor, was awarded a contract in the Western NY region for produce boxes. Harvest NY had loosely collaborated on various efforts with Desiderio's in the past and we knew them to be responsive food system partners. Similarly, we have strong roots in both the community-based food system and with school food partners. Upon seeing the award, we immediately reached out to Desiderio's and asked if they were looking for more non-profit partners, to which they immediately responded, "YES! We want to take care of those in our region." We quickly reached out to our network, gauged interest, aggregated demand, and made introductions. The numbers speak for themselves. During the first base period (May-June), Desiderio's has delivered over 90,872 produce boxes, equating to \$1.86M lbs. of produce to 110+ non-profit partners. Non-profit partners include schools (accounting for 36% of their boxes), food pantries, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and CCE offices (Niagara and Orleans). Box orders range from 15 per non-profit partner to over 1,600. They have credited Harvest NY with connecting them to 50% of their current distribution partners and being a critical partner in achieving the success they have to date. Desiderio's has been an astounding partner to work with. No partner we introduced them to was too small or too large. Their response was, and continues to be, we'll do whatever we can do to help our community.

These stories remind us of two things. First, the importance of building strong and diverse networks that are rooted in trust and accountability. Second, the astounding resiliency and adaptive nature of our local food and farm community.



## Tim Terry Moves to PRO-DAIRY

Tim, our Farm Strategic Planning Specialist, has made invaluable contributions to Harvest NY over the last 6 years, helping farms improve their efficiency through site layout and modifications. This work increased profitability while respecting environmental regulations. It can be safely said that Tim's work was essential for keeping farms in business. On our team, Tim brought valuable insights on effective project and database management. He was also our go-to for technology questions!

We wish Tim well as he joins PRO-DAIRY, an educational program that enables farm families and agricultural professionals to achieve their professional and personal goals. Tim will work with statewide PRO-DAIRY specialists, regional and local Cornell Cooperative Extension educators, and agribusiness professionals, to enhance farm-level economically and environmentally sustainable growth through increased cow numbers or production per cow.

Join us in thanking Tim for his contributions to Harvest NY, and well wishes for PRO-DAIRY. If you need to speak with Tim about your own on-farm ideas, his contact info remains the same.



*Tim Terry can still be reached at 585-689-9163 or email [txt2@cornell.edu](mailto:txt2@cornell.edu)*

Harvest NY, as a team and as part of the larger Cornell Cooperative Extension system, wants to make clear our opposition to brutality and inequality. We are fortunate that our system position is also clear, as evidenced by the below public statements from our leaders.

Cornell University President Martha Pollack: "We are ashamed of the injustices that are perpetrated in our country, every day, against people of color."

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Ronald P. Lynch Dean Kathryn Boor: "We must model ways to address forms of bias and treatment based on color."

Cornell Cooperative Extension Director Christopher Watkins: "I want each of us to pledge to do all we can to foster a culture of inclusivity where all are safe and welcome."

**Diversity, justice and inclusion are key values for us, and we continue our commitment to put these values into practice in our daily work.**

**Cornell Cooperative Extension | Harvest New York**



[HARVESTNY.CCE.CORNELL.EDU](https://harvestny.cce.cornell.edu)

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