

Cornell Cooperative Extension

HARVEST NEW YORK 2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

LINKING CONSUMERS AND AGRICULTURE PRODUCERS

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.





“Harvest NY stands out for its ability to leverage resources for New York farms, processors and citizens with an exponential impact that far exceeds investment.”

Letter from the Team Leader

Dear Reader,

Thanks for taking a look at our Year in Review! Harvest NY showed its strength and agility in 2020 by delivering huge impacts while shifting to virtual programming due to COVID-19. Not only did we have to change our delivery model, our program content also became COVID focused to keep essential food businesses safe and operational. This included supporting compliance with health guidelines at food distribution sites, reaching New York families with New York grown food, supporting processing plants to limit the spread of the virus and importantly, helping New York farms stay open to feed our State. The team posted the following numbers:

- \$2,442,060 in New York foods for school lunch programs served 51,565 students.
- Urban CSA program reached 52 households for 20 weeks; participants report eating 33% more fruit and 58% more dark green vegetables.
- Virtual urban farm conference attracted 258 registrants with 23 diverse presenters from all 5 boroughs of NYC.
“I appreciate the platform you gave. The experience was very inspiring for me.”
- Virtual COVID-19 resources for the Food Processing industry, reaching over 101,000 users.
“Thanks! I have 98% of my personnel trained for COVID-19 using the videos in English and Spanish.”

Harvest NY stands out for its ability to leverage resources for NY farms, processors and citizens with an exponential impact that far exceeds investment. Lamentably, our operating budget became a casualty of budget cuts in 2020. We are seeking restoration to continue to provide results for the New York farm and food industry in 2021. Please reach out to me with any questions.

Judson Reid
Team Leader and Extension Vegetable Specialist

CSA Shares (Re)Directed to Those in Need

In 2018, Harvest NY, in partnership with Field & Fork Network, received a planning grant from the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County to explore opportunities to expand access to community supported agriculture (CSA) shares to low-income consumers in Buffalo. Upon forming a partnership with Independent Health Foundation (IHF), a pilot was set to launch during the 2020 season. The pandemic altered the intended design and execution of the program considerably. The cost of shares went from subsidized to free, pick-up locations were limited to one, farm partners were limited to one, and education was delivered virtually.

Fifty-two households participated in the 20-week program. Individuals who had shown at least one health risk through IHF's Good Food for the Neighborhood (GFTN) health screenings within the past two years were invited to take part. As the majority of GFTN program participants qualify for Medicaid/Medicare, and the median household income in the communities in which the program is hosted is below the poverty line, no income-based qualifier was required for participation.

Porter Farms delivered weekly pre-boxed shares to the West Side Community Center. IHF raised \$26,076, which enabled the shares to be offered free of charge to program participants. Participants were also provided a \$50 kitchen kit, which included items such as a knife set, cutting board, colander, and peeler. Nutrition education was delivered through weekly newsletters, tailored to the content of the weekly share. The newsletter included food demonstrations, recipes, and food preparation tips. In addition, SNAP-Ed delivered the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's Eat Healthy, Be Active curriculum to interested participants. All told, IHF and SNAP-Ed educators administrated 245 hours of nutrition education.

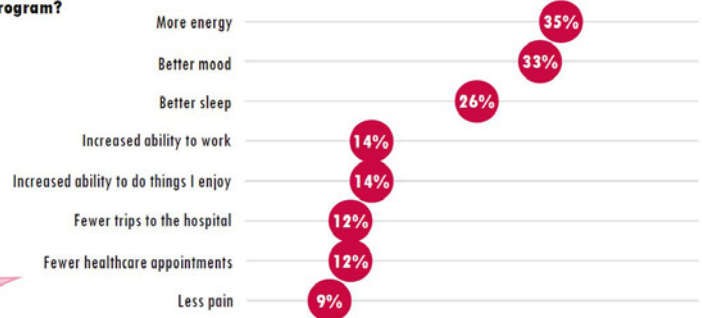
Despite the need to adapt the model considerably, the pilot proved impactful. A full program evaluation is pending, but high-level findings are noted.

- 81% of respondents were "extremely satisfied" with the program and 19% were "somewhat satisfied."
- There was a 31% improvement in the participants who noted they "couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."
- There were notable increases in the volume of fruits and vegetables consumed monthly as a result of program participation, namely 33% more fruit, 33% more salad, 48% more orange/red vegetables, and 58% more dark green vegetables.
- Improvements in quality of life.
- Improvements in cooking skills.

How is your life different now after participating in the CSA program?

"Just an overall better mood because I knew I had healthy meals"

"Lost some weight."



How confident do you feel with the following skills?



Future plans are currently being deliberated by the project team.



Buffalo Public School Food service worker, Monique Martin, served up free, hot, wholesome lunches featuring local ingredients out of the district's new "Farm to School to You" food truck on October 7 at West Hertel Academy in Buffalo. Photo by R.J. Anderson, Cornell Cooperative Extension



FARM TO INSTITUTION

*Families line up for their first food truck meal!
Photo by R.J. Anderson, Cornell Cooperative Extension*

Farm to Institution Expansion

2020 marked a major expansion of Harvest NY's Farm to Institution program, following the award of a \$433K USDA Local Food Promotion Program grant. The primary purpose of the grant was to hire additional program staff to work alongside Cheryl Thayer and expand capacity for Farm to Institution support. Farm to Institution Coordinator, [Becky O'Connor](#), hit the ground running in March 2020! Facing an unprecedented challenge, plans for Farm to Institution expansion changed considerably with the onset of the pandemic. By March 18, 2020 per Executive Order, all K-12 schools were closed to in-person instruction, which caused a major disruption in the execution of child nutrition programming. School Food Authorities pivoted from serving hot lunch cafeteria-style to hundreds of students at a time to distributing unitized, chilled meals comprised largely of processed, packaged items to families for at-home consumption. Despite the changed school food environment, Thayer and O'Connor's efforts resulted in considerable impact.

FARM TO INSTITUTION 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

INCREASE THE VOLUME AND VARIETY OF LOCAL FOODS PURCHASED BY INSTITUTIONAL MARKETS



- Directly supported the procurement of \$2,442,060 in local foods for use in school lunch programs in service of 51,565 students.
- Supported Buffalo Public School's successful launch of their new Farm to School to You food truck, providing increased opportunities for local procurement through additional child nutrition programs.
- Assisted in developing Buffalo Public Schools' geographic preference bid, which resulted in \$855,485 awarded to local food and farm partners. Of that, \$136,050 was awarded to certified Women-Owned Business Enterprises and \$10,580 to organic farms. Through the bid, five new locally-procured menu items were introduced: summer squash, acorn squash, spaghetti squash, bell peppers, and Mars grapes.

EDUCATE CONSUMERS ON THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM



- Assisted in the development of five new Harvest of the Month campaigns: Summer Squash, Berries, Honey & Maple Syrup, Peppers, and Garlic & Onions.

PROVIDE STATEWIDE SUPPORT VIA RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



- Launched the NY 30% Initiative Product Database, which lists over 350 unique products.
- Developed 30% Initiative guidance documents and webinars to assist school food partners in product verification & traceability.
- Provided 16 hours in farm to school group training to 533 people representing various stakeholder groups.
- Assisted three school food partners in receiving grants, totaling \$284,271 in new farm to school investment. Funds will support the addition of a value-added processing kitchen, a farm to school food truck, culinary arts curriculum development, and the construction of a greenhouse and ancillary STEM education opportunities.

TUFFS

THE URBAN FARMER TO FARMER SUMMIT

A Farmer-to-Farmer Summit for New York City

Farmer-Driven Event Creates Solidarity within the Urban Farm Community

Urban farmers in New York City come from all walks of life and their farms come in many shapes and sizes, but they share many of the same challenges, from issues of scale and profitability to pest and disease pressure to operational difficulties of urban growing spaces. Despite this, people farming across NYC often do not know many other urban farmers and lack opportunities to compare notes and share solutions, resulting in frequent reinventions of the wheel.

Harvest New York Urban Agriculture Specialists Yolanda Gonzalez and Sam Anderson recognized this while working with commercial urban farmers from across NYC. They also recognized that these farmers, from longtime farm managers to high school-aged youth participants, have technical expertise to share, with many having designed their own systems to fit unique urban growing environments. In order to highlight these farmers' work and provide a forum for urban farmers to share challenges and best practices, Anderson and Gonzalez set into motion a citywide farmer-to-farmer event which would become The Urban Farmer-to-Farmer Summit ([TUFFS](#)).

By design, TUFFS was not advertised as a Cornell or CCE event, but rather a grassroots community-led effort—and it was exactly that, with an active steering committee of 11 urban farmers and other stakeholders who took co-ownership of TUFFS. Although COVID-19 forced this first TUFFS to be held virtually on December 5, 2020, it was a resounding success, attracting 258 registrants and with 23 presenters from urban farms in all five boroughs of NYC leading sessions throughout the day. Feedback during and after the event made clear that TUFFS should become an annual event.

Justin, a first-year farmer at Red Hook Farms, was exactly the kind of farmer that Anderson and Gonzalez wanted to uplift when creating TUFFS. Featured presenters on urban agriculture are often drawn from a small pool of established names; and at many farming events, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) farmers are called upon to speak only on the experience of being a BIPOC farmer—rarely as technical experts on the work they do every day. For TUFFS, we invited Justin and another first-year farmer to share their experience with a tomato trellising system that did not exist anywhere else, because the Red Hook farmers had designed it themselves; they were truly the experts on the topic. Afterward, Justin said, **“I was so happy to be a part of this! I appreciate the platform you gave. The experience was very inspiring for me.”**

From the high turnout of participants, it is clear that TUFFS served an important role in creating solidarity within the NYC Urban Farm community by sharing valuable resources and best practices, reflecting on our misadventures and strengthening our connections. Most importantly, during this current health crisis, which has exacerbated racial inequities, this farmer-driven event highlights new opportunities to rise to the challenges of our times.



2020 URBAN AG COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



65
WORKSHOPS



594
PARTICIPANTS



19,741
CONTACT HOURS

Helping to Preserve the Food Industry Supply Chain During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dairy processing specialists have played a critical role in supporting the food processing industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic. We took urgent action in collaboration with partner organizations and subject matter experts to address issues facing the food industry. Despite the fact that there is no evidence SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted through food, the food industry showed vulnerability throughout the pandemic. Outbreaks in food facilities caused the entire industry to look closely at their individual production facilities to ensure they were protecting their employees for the sake of public health while continuing to produce food for the country. Industry guidance and collaboration was needed to define best practices for food businesses.



COVID-19 EDUCATION

With these industry issues clearly outlined, our team, along with the Institute for Food Safety (IFS) began creating resources for the food industry to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Our collective group created a curated webpage that offers a wealth of science-based information and resources to assist the food industry. Since the webpage's inception in March, there have been over 101,000 users and 126,000 web sessions. This page also houses Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the food industry and consumers, recent food industry guidance documents related to COVID-19 at the state and national levels, templates for standard operating procedures and checklists, and training videos for food industry workers. Many of these resources (including training videos) are also available in Spanish and additional translations are available upon request.



SPECIAL TRAINING VIDEOS

Our educational and training videos have reached over 2,500 views online, and facilities have also used these videos as part of their employee training for COVID-19. We have also received direct positive feedback about these bilingual training videos from facilities such as Ronnybrook Farms in Ancramdale, NY with a bilingual workforce. Quality Manager Herminia Pena stated, "Thanks, I have 98% of my personnel trained for COVID-19 using the videos in English and Spanish."

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

*– Herminia Pena,
Quality Manager,
Ronnybrook Farms*



LIVE ONLINE OFFICE HOURS

Our live, virtual office hour sessions have proven to be very valuable. We have held 38 office hour sessions that have drawn 2,639 participants. These sessions have allowed industry stakeholders to directly ask experts for information or advice on best practices, and have allowed us to determine what the food industry's most important needs are for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sum of these efforts have allowed us to share information and guidance to a broad audience, while also utilizing our extensive relationships with companies and stakeholders to directly interact with food industry management. This combination has led to a significant impact on how food companies chose to handle the pandemic and implement mitigation strategies that will continue to develop. These efforts also help to preserve the food industry supply chain, keeping product flowing from farm, to processor, to consumer.

Successful Opening of Unique Ice Cream Business Allows Community to Experience a Hispanic-Style Treat

Hispanic products are becoming more popular throughout the New York metropolitan area. South American tropical flavors and authentic recipes for desserts are attracting more consumers to look for this product. There is an opportunity to explore the markets and help entrepreneurs open businesses while complying with regulations.

Harvest NY Dairy Specialist Karen Ospina has played an important role in supporting small processors like Carolina McDowell, owner of Carolina's Ice cream in Buchanan, NY. Ospina helped her in developing essential documentation for obtaining a New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets License, such as Good Manufacturing Practices and Standard Operating documentation. She also provided essential support to allow Carolina to pursue her dream of expanding her ice cream business and produce a safe and unique product.

Ospina worked with Carolina by visiting her facility to understand what the building layout and important construction features were. Ospina was able to work with New York State Agriculture and Markets and Carolina to explain which construction changes were necessary and practical to legally operate her ice cream facility. In addition to this, Ospina utilized her Spanish skills to assist Carolina in reaching her goals. In many cases, help was given virtually to create and develop critical documents including Good Manufacturing Practices and Standard Operating Procedures. While these requirements are essential to legally open a dairy business, they are also important for making high quality, safe dairy products.

Our response offered Carolina an expert in her native language to help Carolina achieve her goals and bring a new, culturally significant product to the community. Thus far, Carolina has expanded her business and has hired more than 5 new employees. This response also allowed Carolina to sell product to wholesale markets such as restaurants and supermarkets. This is a very big leap for companies entering the ice cream business. Carolina's Ice cream is now very popular in Peruvian restaurants through New York's metropolitan area.



"Our taste and quality make the difference. We achieve this with a perfect balance between tradition and technology, coupled with strict hygiene and health standards in order to protect your family's health."

– Carolina McDowell, Owner, Carolina's Ice Cream



Berry Extension During a Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the state in the spring, many growers who use a pick-your-own model to market their produce were very concerned about whether they would be allowed to open, and how to operate safely. While farms and farmers markets were deemed essential, and allowed to open, operating practices needed to be modified to protect employees and the public. Harvest NY's Esther Kibbe worked with a multi-disciplinary team to evaluate the risks and develop a document recommending best practices for pick-your-own farms. This document has been widely distributed and referenced. Many growers also attended a virtual meeting where these best practices were presented. Anecdotally, many farms across the state adopted aspects of the recommendations in their retail operations, and growers reported that having the guide was helpful in their planning process. While they faced increased operating costs, pick-your-own farms reported higher customer interest and sales in this year when many recreational activities were canceled and food security was on people's minds. Picking fruits and vegetables is a fun family activity that could be done safely outside with a few adjustments for safety. Growers hope that this exposure will encourage families to make farm visits an annual tradition, even after life returns to normal.

Even before COVID-19 turned everything upside down, Kibbe 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 more to solo field visits and writing reports for various grower communication outlets.

Berry Blog

The [berry blog](#), hosted on Cornell's fruit page, was started this year and already has over 80 subscribers. Kibbe has published 30 blog posts on a variety of topics. In 2020, the blog had over 900 visitors who spent an average of 9 minutes reading the articles.

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, with 20 articles published in 2020.

Berry Update in VegEdge Newsletter

Additionally, the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program produces VegEdge, a weekly newsletter where Kibbe has contributed 9 berry management articles. These articles have brought berry content to growers who may focus on vegetable crops but grow berries as a side project. Besides providing timely recommendations to growers, it has connected more growers to Kibbe as a resource, when they might otherwise not know about the WNY Berry Specialist position. Kibbe frequently receives calls from growers who saw an article and want further information.

Farm Visits and Crop Consultations

Although many grower meetings and normal extension programming were interrupted by the pandemic, Kibbe was still able to visit over 60 farms through 2020, with many additional consultations by phone or email.

New York's Produce Auctions Adapt and Experience Record Sales in 2020

Produce Auctions are aggregation and distribution nodes for farmers to participate in the wholesale economy of vegetables, fruit, and flowers. The eight New York produce auctions conduct more than \$8.1 million in business with approximately 6,000 growers and buyers involved from across the state. Harvest NY has long supported these auctions, and that support played an important role in 2020.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) has provided support to the NYS produce auctions. As New York State Agriculture and Markets confirmed that produce auctions were essential businesses, eight CCE educators were tasked with supporting these auction sites to ensure compliance with New York State Department of Health and Center for Disease Control guidance. The CCE educators provided key support to the produce auctions by collaborating with local law enforcement and public health agencies to ensure necessary protocols were put in place for the auctions to remain open and active. These practices included proper signage, written COVID-19 policies, and NY Forward Business safety plans. Further, CCE worked with the auctions to operate as distribution points for hand sanitizer and face masks for the agricultural community.

All eight auctions were able to stay in operation throughout the 2020 season with support from CCE and Harvest NY. These auctions saw an increase in sales, increase in product prices, and an increase in buyers. There were many reasons for the increases, but the main reason was consumers looking to source local food from local farmers. Auctions saw both past and new buyers looking to supplement product.

The newest of the eight produce auctions is the St. Lawrence Valley Produce Auction, which opened in May 2018. Harvest NY has been supporting the auction through farm visits, sales tracking, and marketing throughout previous years and throughout the pandemic. This year, the auction saw a 31% increase in sales from 2019. The figure below shows the percentage growth over the last three years for the St. Lawrence Valley Produce Auction.



Supporting New York's Agriculture and Food Economy

Harvest NY Specialists Remain Available for Remote Guidance

Due to social distancing guidelines associated with the coronavirus, we have suspended in-person workshops but are still available for consultation. Questions or thoughts? Please reach out!

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