Cornell Cooperative Extension
Harvest New York

An innovative Cornell Cooperative Extension team that focuses on development projects in the Farm and Food Industries of rural and urban New York.

Quarterly Highlights Q2 2025

Community Garden Leadership Cohort 1 at Blueprint Geneva's Community Garden. Gardeners from across the state gathered at two spring conferences and connected while they toured urban farms and community gardens. See page 3 for details.

- **New York State Cut Flower Support**
- **Gardeners Connect at Spring Conference in NYC and the Resilient Gardens Conference in Geneva**
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New York State Cut Flower Support

In New York, cut flower production has expanded recently. As of the 2022 census, New York has over 700 cut flower growers across the state with a total sale of cut flowers over $10.5 million. New York flower farmers are looking for ways to grow organically and produce flowers year-round.

New York Cut Flower Webinar Series

In January 2025, Lindsey Pashow, CCE Harvest NY, and Elizabeth Lamb, Cornell Integrated Pest Management Program, and CCE Cut Flower Program Work Team began hosting a monthly webinar series for cut flowers farmers to learn about specific topics for cut flower production. The webinar series focuses on various topics in production, business, and marketing. The webinars are recorded and available on the CCE Cut Flower YouTube channel. Since January, there have been 472 participants in the webinar series.

January 15, 2025: **Marketing: Identifying Your Audience and Finding Your Market**
February 19, 2025: **Business Structures and Importance of Insurance**
March 19, 2025: **Spring Preparation from Pest Management Point of View**
April 16, 2025: **Peony Production**
May 21, 2025: **Selling at Farmer's Markets**
June 18, 2025: **What pest do I have in my cut flower operation?**
July 16, 2025: **Seed Saving**
August 20, 2025: **Dahlia Production**
September 17, 2025: **Preparing Your Soil for the Next Season**
October 15, 2025: **Planning Your Cut Flower Operation for Next Season**
November 19, 2025: **Starting Cut Flowers**
December 17, 2025: **Cut Flower Workshops and Events (Fresh and Dried)**

At the beginning of 2025, the new CCE Cut Flower Website was launched. On the website, is information on upcoming events, resources, and a link to join the list-serv.

Gardeners Connect at Spring Conference in NYC and the Resilient Gardens Conference in Geneva

While community gardening efforts are often focused on hyper-local goals and neighborhood-level impact, gardeners across the country face many of the same challenges. To support knowledge exchange, foster leadership development, and connect gardeners with valuable resources, Harvest NY Specialists helped organize and gave presentation at two events this spring: the 2025 National GrowTogether Conference and the second annual Resilient Gardens Conference.

2025 National GrowTogether Conference: Planting Seeds of Resilience

The annual GrowTogether Conference is the largest community gardening conference in the country. This year, it was co-sponsored by the American Community Gardening Association, Denver Urban Gardens, and NYC GreenThumb, drawing gardeners from across the nation to New York City. Held from June 5–9, the four-day event featured over 100 educational sessions and networking events, 26 tours of urban agriculture and community gardens throughout NYC, and welcomed 1,027 attendees. As a member of the planning committee, Makela Elvy, Community Garden Leadership Specialist for Harvest NY, led a community garden leadership breakout session focused on brainstorming solutions to common garden challenges. She also coordinated a panel discussion featuring CCE Harvest NY's Urban Agriculture Specialist Yolanda Gonzalez and Ag Climate Resiliency Specialist Savanna Shelnutt, which addressed climate concerns related to rising air temperatures. The conference provided a vital opportunity for gardeners to connect, exchange knowledge, and access resources–bridging local efforts with national networks of support.

Resilient Gardens Conference

The second annual Resilient Gardens Conference was held on June 20–21 at Cornell AgriTech in Geneva, NY. Made possible through a partnership between the New York State Seed to Supper and Harvest NY programs, this two-day event featured 9 educational sessions, 2 full-group discussions, and a bus tour of 3 community gardens in Rochester, NY. 96 attendees–including community gardeners, urban farmers, educators, Seed to Supper participants, and Master Gardener volunteers–came from various counties across the state. Attendees chose sessions ranging from youth and community engagement and storytelling in the garden to IPM techniques to small-space gardening tips. Mallory Hohl, Urban Community Gardens Specialist with Harvest NY, arranged for the keynote address from Rebekah Williams of Food for the Spirit and gave a presentation about urban soils and soil testing with Hannah Shayler of Cornell. Makela Elvy led a session on statewide resources for community gardens and coordinated a tour of Blueprint Geneva's community garden and gathering space for the current Community Garden Leadership Program cohort.

Hohl coordinated the Rochester garden tour on Saturday which highlighted a variety of locations including the South Lawn Farm at CCE Monroe, a community farm at Foodlink, and a network of gardens with St. Marks/St. Johns. Many networking and in-person connections were made between growers across the state.

Gardeners participating in a seed giveaway at the Resilient Gardens Conference.


Tour of CCE Monroe South Lawn Project Farm.

Cultivating Community: Bilingual Mushroom Programming for Urban Growers

Many community gardens throughout New York City function independently, often without strong connections to broader networks. This isolation, combined with language barriers and a shortage of regular volunteers or growers, can limit access to resources, particularly for non-English-speaking participants. With constrained funding and limited staff support, these gardens frequently struggle to offer the educational programming they aspire to, highlighting the importance of building strong partnerships and collaborative efforts. To help address these challenges, Harvest NY Specialists Karen Guzman and Yolanda Gonzalez have continued their efforts to create bilingual workshop opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to diverse growers.

The most recent initiative involved expanding mushroom cultivation into community gardens by introducing the concept of intercropping vegetables and berries with mushrooms within limited growing spaces. Karen and Yolanda led this bilingual mushroom cultivation workshop with over 25 participants at Morning Glory Community Garden in the Bronx, a neighborhood with a large Spanish-speaking population. The workshop covered three mushroom varieties, wine cap, almond agaricus, and oyster mushrooms, offering participants flexible options based on their available space and access to substrates. The workshop was designed not only to be educational, but also to foster a sense of community. It featured a cooking demonstration led by a local chef and garden member, who prepared three mushroom-based dishes. This interactive component helped connect the cultivation of mushrooms to their practical, nutritional, and culinary uses.

The overarching goal of these workshops is to make agricultural education more available to all communities and to expand Harvest NY's presence. To build on this momentum, the bilingual workshop series will continue through partnerships with NYC GreenThumb and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Specialists. Upcoming sessions will focus on integrated pest management, beneficial insects, and crop diversity, further empowering community gardeners with practical knowledge and tools in both English and Spanish.

Yolanda Gonzalez and Karen Guzman demonstrating how to interplant wine cap mushrooms with raspberries.

Local Chef and Garden Member prepares a mushroom-based dish for workshop attendees.

New Review on Sex Chromosome Evolution in *Cannabis sativa*

Dr. Daniela Vergara, Hemp Specialist for Harvest NY, published a new open access review paper along with Dr. Yousoon Baek, Lecturer, School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell. Their article, "A review of sexual strategies in Cannabis sativa L. under genomic and environmental controls," explores how *Cannabis sativa* develops male, female, or both types of flowers.


REVIEW

A review of sexual strategies in *Cannabis sativa* L. under genomic and environmental controls

Yousoon Baek | Daniela Vergara

Abstract

Sex in *C. sativa* is mostly determined by sex chromosomes: females are XX and males are XY. However, the environment can also affect sex expression. For example, temperature or certain plant hormones can influence whether a plant shows male or female traits. In some cases, the plant can reverse its sex. Female plants can be made to produce male flowers using sprays, creating "feminized seeds" that are likely to grow into more females and are highly sought in the Cannabis industry.

The paper highlights why sex expression matters in farming. Female plants are preferred for producing cannabinoids like CBD, while male plants may be better for fiber. Monoecious plants, which have both female and male flower types, are useful for seed and fiber production. This research is of value to farmers who make variety choices based on end-use of the crop, which may include fiber or cannabinoids.

The review also explains that *C. sativa* and *Humulus* sp., which are closely related genera from the family Cannabaceae, appear to share homologous sex chromosomes due to their common ancestry.

The Northeast Berry Call Series

The Northeast Berry Call is a series of weekly virtual meetings where researchers, educators, and industry professionals discuss berry crop phenology, disease management, and new trends concerning the regional berry crop. Our group includes over 80 members, located from Indiana all the way to Nova Scotia!

This series is co-organized by Anya Stansell, Berry Specialist with Harvest NY; Heather Kase, CCE Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program, and Marvin Pritts, Horticulture Professor in Cornell University's School of Integrative Plant Science.

This year, our berry call ran from April 1 through July 8. We invited guest speakers who presented on the topics of insect pest management, precision weeding technology, and spray drones. Thanks to our camaraderie, we are able to collaborate across institutional boundaries to better serve our growers.

A field of strawberries undergoing collapse from black root rot. The healthy-looking variety in the far left, Dickens, was identified by our group as a relatively resistant cultivar and will be recommended for growers struggling with this soilborne disease.

From Hydroponics to Hot Lunch: An Unlikely Farm to School Journey

At Yeshiva Ahavath Israel Bnos Viznitz, a girls' school in Rockland County serving the ultra-Orthodox community, participating in New York's 30% Initiative posed a unique challenge: they don't serve meat in their school meals, so reaching the required local procurement threshold meant finding creative sources of protein. The Lower Hudson Valley Procurement Specialist began the search for alternatives and reached out to a fellow Cornell Cooperative Extension program: New York Sea Grant. The school had already had a relationship for the production of its fish sticks: Neiman's Fish, a small kosher fish processor in Rockland County, and CCE's NY Sea Grant's Aquaculture specialist found Nuponix, a hydroponic cannabis operation in Romulus, NY, that also happens to produce fish as part of its integrated aquaponics system.

The fish, once considered a waste byproduct, were redirected into the food system through Neiman's Fish, a local kosher processor in Rockland County. Although Nuponix had never shipped fish before, Neiman's brought sourcing experience and provided support with trucking and logistics. It took creative problem-solving, flexibility, and tenacity from all sides to overcome regulatory, transportation, and certification challenges. The result: a steady supply of locally sourced, kosher fish sticks delivered to the school every other month. This collaboration not only helped the school shift its sourcing to align with the 30% requirements but also created a mutually beneficial supply chain between a rural aquaponics farm, a small kosher processor, and a faith-based school community. The school is now preparing to apply for 30% reimbursement—supported by this inventive, cross-sector partnership.

New "Rooted in Learning" Initiative Aims to Deepen Farm to School Integration Across Cafeteria, Classroom & Community

CCE Harvest NY (HNY) is excited to announce the launch of the Rooted in Learning Farm to School Cooperative Partnership Program—a bold new initiative designed to deepen the connection between the three C's of Farm to School: cafeteria, classroom, and community. Building on HNY's statewide leadership in Farm to School local food procurement, Rooted in Learning expands the movement by bringing high-impact food and agriculture education directly into school communities.

Through this program, HNY has awarded $497,255 to 10 CCE county offices spanning diverse regions of New York State. Each office will partner with the HNY Farm to School team—which includes a dedicated Farm to School Education Specialist and seven Regional Procurement Specialists—to deliver hands-on, place-based programming in collaboration with schools, farmers, and community partners.

Together, these teams will implement engaging, student-centered activities that reinforce classroom learning and strengthen school meal programs rooted in local food. Funded projects include:

- School gardens and greenhouse programs
- Integration of agriculture and nutrition into classroom curricula
- Local farm visits and farmer guest speakers
- Cafeteria taste tests and farm-to-school sourcing initiatives
- Student-led sustainability and food systems research

To support learning and continuous improvement, HNY partnered with the University of Wisconsin's Co-Create evaluation team, which will work closely with project partners to assess impact, refine approaches, and identify best practices. Each project is uniquely tailored to the needs and assets of its region—underscoring the importance of place-based strategies in building sustainable and locally rooted Farm to School systems.

The Rooted in Learning Cooperative Partnership Program is made possible with support from Federal Formula Funds through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the New York State Education Department.

NY Food Procurement Programs

New York State continues to lead in local food procurement with a suite of programs designed to support NY farmers, strengthen food supply chains, and increase access to fresh, local products. A new resource from CCE Harvest NY outlines five major initiatives—30% NY Initiative, Executive Order 32, Nourish NY, Taste NY, and NY Grown & Certified—each with distinct eligibility requirements, funding structures, and opportunities for producers and institutional buyers.

The guide includes a side-by-side comparison chart, definitions of "local," and tips for getting involved. Whether you're a school food buyer, agency, or NYS producer, this tool simplifies program navigation and supports increased participation in local sourcing efforts.

Evaluation of the Growth and Impact of the 30% NY Initiative

Pathways to Progress: Evaluating the Growth and Impact of the 30% NY Initiative in 2023-24 analyzes the procurement data of 73 School Food Authorities that qualified for the 30% New York State Initiative based on NY food product purchases made during the 2023-24 school year.

Written by Cheryl Bilinski, Local Foods Systems Specialist and Farm to Institution Program Director, CCE Harvest NY with funding provided by New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Expanding Extension in Brooklyn

Brooklyn is very big. With over 2.7 million residents, it's about the size of Chicago. Over 13% of New York state lives in Brooklyn's 69 square miles of land. That land is also home to over 300 community gardens, 30 urban farms, and many more backyard gardeners, school gardens, parks, street planters, and countless other growing spaces cared for by people.

A budding partnership between Cornell Cooperative Extension and Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) is helping Harvest NY's urban agriculture program to reach beyond its established audience of urban farmers and gardeners. BBG hosts over 800,000 visitors per year and runs a vibrant community outreach program and busy slate of horticultural classes. After working together on several workshops, and some guest presenter appearances by Harvest NY specialists, new pilot programs in 2025 are setting the stage for a more expansive partnership between BBG and CCE.

CALS intern Meghan Barr harvests hot peppers for a CCE trial at Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

In spring 2025, Urban Agriculture Specialist Sam Anderson and Urban Gardens Specialist Karen Guzman led a workshop on insect pests for BBG's audience of home and community gardeners; a week later, Anderson taught a similar session at BBG, this time for a more typical CCE audience of urban farmers. Other specialists have contributed to workshops, including a fruit tree workshop taught by Mike Basedow of the Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture team and a planned mushroom workshop taught by Urban Agriculture Specialist Yolanda Gonzalez. Anderson also gave featured presentations at BBG's annual garden conference in 2024 and 2025. Taken together, these events have already reached over 200 gardeners and farmers, most of whom had little or no previous awareness of CCE.

Other pilot projects explore avenues for future collaboration. In BBG's Herb Garden, Anderson set up a public-facing experiment to measure the impact of potassium amendments on hot peppers, with signage that will be read by thousands of visitors. Cornell's turf specialists are stepping up to help BBG create the first bilingual professional development course for landscape professionals.

The most exciting phases of this partnership are yet to come, including deeper collaborations with Cornell IPM, dedicated field trials connecting Cornell faculty and students to BBG, and professional development exchanges between CCE and BBG staff. It all adds up to a much-expanded Cornell presence in the most populous county of New York State.

Deepening Roots and Partnerships in Jamaica, Queens

Kwesi Joseph and Karen Guzman, Urban Gardens Specialists with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Harvest NY team, co-led the launch of the Tree of Life Community Garden on Earth Day, April 22, 2025, at First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, Queens. This milestone reflects years of local collaboration and a shared commitment to urban agriculture in Southeast Queens.

Neighbors, church members, and partners gathered to mark the opening and explore the rows of raised beds planted with leafy greens, brassicas, herbs, and strawberries. The modular design ensures safe, nutrient-rich growing conditions and demonstrates companion planting and permaculture techniques that support biodiversity and integrated pest management.

Speakers at the event included Qiana Mickie, Executive Director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, who highlighted how food and soil connect people and strengthen community partnerships.

This garden builds on the first attempt to create a community growing space at the same site in 2009. Back then, church and Extension staff grew crops like callaloo and collards for community meals, but soil contamination limited what was possible. Today's garden overcomes those challenges with raised beds and clean, nutrient-rich soil, showing how an early vision can take root and grow stronger over time. Rev. Patrick O'Connor of First Presbyterian described the garden as a peaceful place that strengthens health and community ties.

Looking ahead, the team plans to expand the raised beds to support summer crops like tomatoes. A new drip irrigation system was installed this quarter to help maintain healthy growth through the warmer months. Guzman and Joseph will also be hosting workshops to train gardeners and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program educators.

The Tree of Life Community Garden stands as an example of how strong partnerships and local stewardship can help grow a healthier Jamaica, Queens.

Executive Director of CUCE Jennifer Tiffany (now retired), Urban Garden Specialists Karen Guzmán and Kwesi Joseph, and building manager Mr. Ali and company.

Unearthing the Unseen: Pioneering Soil Compaction Research Drives Agricultural Resilience in New York

The critical issue of soil compaction has been a poorly understood challenge for New York's farmers, often overlooked, despite its profound impact on soil functions, crop health, productivity the resilience of our agricultural systems. When soil particles are compressed, spaces for air and water decreases, and density increases, hindering drainage and plant root exploration for vital nutrients and water, thereby reducing both drought and flooding resistance and overall crop yields. This degradation, exacerbated by heavy equipment on wet soils, also impedes water infiltration, leading to increased runoff and nutrient loss, harming water quality.

Recognizing the significance of below-ground threat in 2017, Dr. Kitty O'Neil, Cornell Cooperative Extension's agricultural climate resiliency specialist, embarked on a mission to investigate compaction's on-farm impacts. Preliminary soil health studies quickly revealed a critical gap: existing soil sampling protocols failed to accurately capture the significant variability of compaction within individual farm fields. To address this, Dr. O'Neil partnered with the Cornell Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP), led by Dr. Quirine Ketterings, who played a pivotal role in developing sophisticated yield stability mapping protocols. This collaborative effort, featuring Manuel Marcaida, NMSP Data Analyst, and more recently, Issa Diaz, PhD student, transformed the way compaction could be measured and understood across a wider range of farms, fields and soil types.

Digital penetrometer and related equipment used to collect soil compaction data in commercial farm fields.

The foundational work received crucial backing through two awards from the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program (NNYADP). A 2019 NNYADP-funded study of nine conventionally-tilled dairy farm fields in Northern NY revealed serious soil compaction in all fields measured, with considerable within-field and field-to-field variation. Building on this, a 2020 NNYADP study further investigated the relationship between soil compaction severity and corn yield performance in four fields on two NNY dairy farms using a more intense sampling method. These preliminary findings were significant, revealing a "relationship not previously understood" between soil compaction and historical crop yield: consistently lower-yielding zones showed more severe compaction than high-yielding zones. This discovery highlighted compaction as a potential driver of yield reduction within fields. Moreover, average maximum penetration resistance in all yield zones studied was greater than 300 PSI, which is considered the maximum soil resistance plant roots can successfully penetrate, indicating the breadth and severity of soil compaction on farms.

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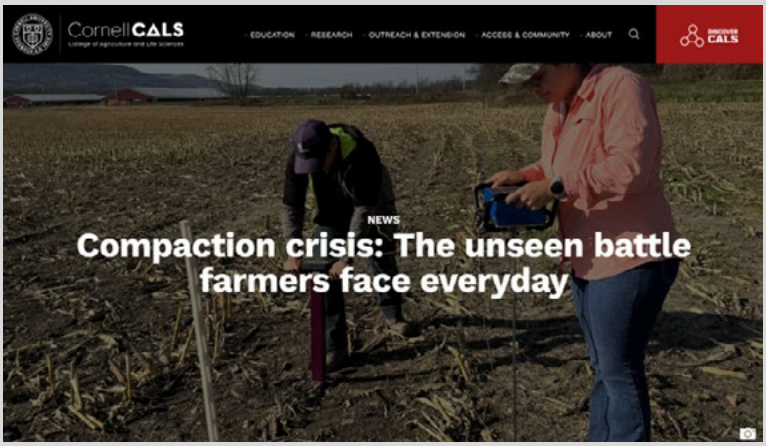
Building on this success, the project expanded significantly, co-funded by a third grant, from the New York Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI), alongside continued support from the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program (NNYADP). This expanded effort involved sampling yield stability zones across seven farms throughout New York, collecting over 8,000 penetrometer readings to further evaluate the relationship between compaction severity and corn silage and grain yield. Issa Diaz has been instrumental in processing this extensive data, with further results anticipated to provide even deeper insights into this complex relationship. The NYFVI grant concluded its funding for this crucial work in spring 2025. Data collected are still being analyzed, but the early findings support previous observations of the widespread and serious nature of soil compaction on farms. The results are expected to inform soil management decisions and practices on New York State row crop farms for many decades into the future.

The team's dedication to unearthing the invisible crisis of soil compaction and its profound impact on crop productivity has garnered widespread attention. This pioneering research by Dr. Kitty O'Neil, Dr. Quirine Ketterings, Manuel Marcaida, and Issa Diaz, supported by grant funding from the NNYADP and NYFVI, has been chosen for a highlight article on the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences newsroom page on July 1, 2025 titled "Compaction crisis: The unseen battle farmers face everyday." The group will use their findings to continue to bring critical awareness to farmers across New York State and beyond, empowering them with knowledge to prevent and mitigate soil compaction for a more resilient and productive agricultural future.



Urban Agriculture Curriculum Development Continues

As part of the National Urban Agriculture Initiative (NUag), Cornell Cooperative Extension's Harvest NY team is developing an urban agriculture training for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) employees. This past quarter, Urban Agriculture Curriculum Development Specialist Kyle Karnuta prioritized revisions of the curriculum in partnership with members of the project team from both Cornell Cooperative Extension and USDA. She also continued managing the filming components of this project, resulting in finalizing the on-farm film shoots (at TigerMountain Foundation in Phoenix, AZ) and filming the first seven lecture courses at the eCornell studios in Ithaca.

Each video will now be edited in post-production and reviewed before integrating into the final curriculum.

TigerMountain Foundation leadership walk Harvest NY Team Leader and NUag PI Judson Reid through one of their community garden spaces. This clip is taken from the footage captured at TigerMountain Foundation in Phoenix, AZ.through of the farm.

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