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 Q3 2025



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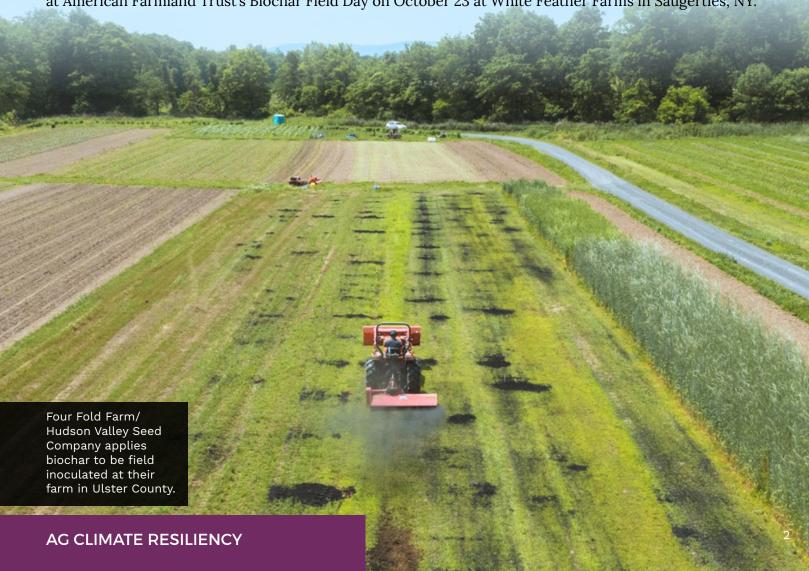
Hudson Valley Biochar Pioneers Program Advances Climate-Resilient Farming

This summer, 14 farms across the Hudson Valley participated in the inaugural Hudson Valley Biochar Pioneers Program. This new initiative aims to apply biochar at scale as a strategy for enhancing soil health and mitigating climate change. Each farm received enough biochar to cover one acre, or approximately 1.5 tons. The biochar was produced by a Saugerties-based supplier, NY Carbon, using scrap wood from a local sawmill. In total, the program distributed over 21 tons of biochar, resulting in an estimated 62 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e) sequestered in the soil, which is comparable to the amount of emissions generated by driving an average gasoline-powered car 143,232 miles (US EPA Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator).

Harvest NY Ag Climate Resiliency Specialist Savanna Shelnutt played a key advisory role in the program's design and provided technical assistance to participating farmers. Her support guided growers in integrating biochar into their production systems and provided best practice recommendations for application and co-amendments.

Farms will be tracked through 2026 to ensure that applications are successful and that producers have ample technical support. This program stands as a replicable model for scaling climate-resilient practices across working lands in the Northeast.

The <u>Hudson Valley Biochar Pioneers program</u> was made possible by the 4 Corners Carbon Coalition and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, delivered in partnership with Giving Green, Terraset, Sustainable Hudson Valley, NY Carbon, and Harvest NY. The program was recently highlighted at American Farmland Trust's Biochar Field Day on October 23 at White Feather Farms in Saugerties, NY.







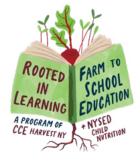
Clarkstown Students Bring Farm History into Apple Tasting Project

When Clarkstown High School students visited Dr. Davies Farm this past September, they didn't just see orchards—they discovered the rich history of farming and the perseverance it requires.

Farm co-owners Lee Davies and Chris Nevins shared how their family's land was taken four separate times through eminent domain, including once to build a reservoir that submerged many of their fields. Through land lost and market shifts, they manage to still operate a successful farm; although shifted from a dairy operation to a diversified pick-your-own orchard and cidery. Through these stories of adaptation and resilience, they reinforced with the students the difficulty of farming – facing unknowns of the weather, market forces, and sometimes even their town as adversaries –the resilience and flexibility it takes to thrive as a farm operation, and the importance of understanding where food comes from and how purchasing locally produced food can support your community.

Students left with a new perspective on farming as both a livelihood and a legacy. Inspirited by the stories told by Dr. Davie's owners, and as a part of their class assignment, they plan to weave this message of resilience into their marketing for upcoming apple tastings at their schools.

The tastings will take place November 6th at Clarkstown North High School and November 7th at Clarkstown South High School, with students designing flyers, coordinating the events, and encouraging classmates to sample and vote on their favorite apple varieties. The project teaches not only business and marketing skills, but also the value of sustaining local farms. Three different varieties will be offered at the tasting, with students from a sustainability and food systems class also participating in the initiative discussing the science behind plant breeding and how it has shaped the food we eat, producing different flavors, colors, and textures of apples.



Similar efforts are underway in other districts, all thanks to a Rooted in Learning Grant received by Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations of Putnam County and Rockland County. The Rooted in Learning initiative supports the expansion of handson farm to school education and strengthens connections between the classroom, cafeteria, and community. Ten awardees across the state are participating in this program, which is made possible through Harvest NY's partnership with the New York State Department of Education.

By connecting classroom learning with local farming, students are helping to ensure that the story of resilience and sustainability continues—one apple at a time.



Cultivating Climate Resilience on Urban Farms

As a major urban center, New York City is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change with temperatures projected to increase between 4-6 degrees Fahrenheit by the 2050s. Urban farms experience extreme conditions with record-breaking summer temperatures, increased pest pressures, flooding of streets and subways, and drought. Faced with these climate challenges, urban growers are using mitigation and adaptation strategies to alleviate the impacts of the urban heat island effect.

In collaboration with the New York Climate Exchange, Harvest NY Specialists Savanna Shelnutt and Yolanda Gonzalez organized a Climate Week NYC event, "Cultivating Climate Resilience on Urban Farms." Thanks to funding from NY Soil Health, over 100 participants from the urban ag community, including urban farm managers, service providers, legislators, and policymakers, learned about the basics of climate resilience, adaptation planning, soil health and biochar. Farmer panel speakers included Eve Brown from the Grow NYC Teaching Garden, Chelsea Encababian from LaGuardia Community College, and Bill Hilgendorf from White Feather Farm.

For many, biochar was a new topic and could serve as a potential tool to build soil health. The Governor's Island Teaching Garden tour featured perennial varieties that were more resistant to pest and disease pressure, like pawpaw trees and ginger, and climate-related pressures like extreme heat and plant hardiness. This climate week event is part of ongoing educational programming to serve urban growers who are most impacted by climate change.



Ag Climate Resiliency Specialist Savanna Shelnutt discussed impacts of climate change on urban agriculture in New York City (above). Urban Agriculture Specialist Yolanda Gonzalez presented Harvest New York's role in building climate resilient urban farming systems in New York City.

Connecting Agritourism Operations with Stakeholders: Agritourism Regional Networking Events

According to the 2022 USDA census, in New York there were 947 farms that offer agritourism with earnings of \$55.5 million in income. The number of farms has tripled since 2007 when there were only 372 farms offering agritourism. With the number of farms diversifying their revenue streams through agritourism, support for agritourism operations has been needed.

Between 2024 and 2025, Lindsey Pashow (CCE Harvest NY), Laura Biasillo (CCE Broome County), and the CCE Agritourism Program Work Team hosted nine agritourism regional networking events across the state. These events were focused on bringing agritourism operations and other stakeholders (tourism, municipalities, and not-for-profit agencies) in the industry together. During these events, agritourism operations and stakeholders learned from each other and found ways to connect with their local Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA). During these events, there were over 205 participants (2024: 80 participants and 2025: 125 participants) in the event. This event was possible through funds provided by Cornell Cooperative Extension Program Work Team and USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Grant.



Agritourism networking event held at Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) in Buffalo. Participants are standing in front of MAP's mobile market truck.

On November 10, 2025 at the statewide agritourism conference, there will be an evening networking event that will bring agritourism operations and stakeholders together from across the state. More information about the event can be found at CCE Agritourism Events Webpage.

New Discoveries Magnify Impact of Biocontrols on Urban Farms

From indoor hydroponic farms to rooftop market gardens, urban farmers contend with a range of insect pests – often while avoiding the use of chemical controls. In a 2025 CCE survey of New York urban farmers, zero farms used conventional pesticides and 60% used only organic pesticides, leaving another 40% that use no chemical controls at all. For some this is a matter of preference or concerns about food safety, but many farmers have little choice in the matter due to mandates from the landowner or the public-facing nature of the farm.

Urban Agriculture Specialist Sam Anderson helps New York City's urban farmers to adopt new integrated pest management (IPM) practices while avoiding conventional pesticides. Eight years ago, at the beginning of this work, fewer than 10% of outdoor urban farms had attempted to release insect predators or other biocontrols as a pest management practice. After several projects on the subject, and extensive one-on-one work with over 50 urban farms, the 2025 CCE survey found that 47% of urban farmers now release biocontrols as an IPM strategy. That figure excludes urban hydroponic operations, nearly all of which have adopted biocontrols.

The predatory mite *Phytoseiulus persimilis*, a hyper-efficient predator of twospotted spider mite (the top pest of tomatoes and several other crops in NYC), was unknown to most urban farmers as recently as five years ago, and Anderson only found one outdoor operation that had tried releasing it. In 2025, at least 12 commercial urban farms purchased and released *persimilis* mites, with some reporting tomato yield improvements of over 20% compared to previous seasons.

New evidence also emerged this summer that some released biocontrols have established overwintering populations, a surprising and potentially very impactful development. Anderson discovered two examples of persimilis and fallacis mite populations in 2025, a full year after their last release on urban farms in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and also identified persisting Feltiella acarisuga populations - a predatory midge that also specializes in twospotted spider mite – at two different sites, a full four years after their most recent release. Stethorus ladybeetles, another predator of mites, also appears to have established long-term populations at several urban farms, and Anderson found perhaps the first sighting of Horseshoe ladybird (Clitostethus arcuatus) east of the Mississippi, feeding on cabbage whitefly at Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



Horseshoe ladybeetle larvae feeding on cabbage whitefly at Brooklyn Botanic Garden (left); Feltiella acarisuga larvae on tomato leaf on an urban farm in Brooklyn (upper right); Neoseiulus fallacis mite feeding on twospotted spider mites on an urban farm in the Bronx (lower right).

Urban farmers have demonstrated that increased adoption of carefully selected and well-timed biocontrol releases can simultaneously ward off crop losses while reducing pesticide usage. If those predators and parasitoids continue to establish long-term populations, farmers will save hundreds of dollars each year while retaining all the benefits of biocontrol releases.

2025 High-Cannabinoid Cannabis sativa Field Day

This year's 2025 High-Cannabinoid *Cannabis* sativa Field Day, organized by Dr. Daniela Vergara and the Harvest NY team, featured a full day of presentations, panels, and field demonstrations highlighting the latest research and practical knowledge for New York growers. Cornell researchers presented on nutrient management in controlled environment agriculture, soil health and composting, genetics of color and minor cannabinoids, disease management, and post-harvest drying and curing.

A highlight of the day was the Living Soil and Regenerative Agriculture Panel, moderated by Precious Brown, with panelists Derek Montana (Blackbird Gardens), Gaetano Scollo (Living Soil MDV), Caleb Johnson (Tap Root Fields), and Amy Hepworth (Hepworth Farms). Their discussion inspired attendees to think critically about sustainable practices and the role of living soils in high-quality cannabis production.

We were honored to host Simone Washington, the new Chief Equity Officer of the NYS Office of Cannabis Management (OCM), who shared important updates during the OCM session. We deeply thank Osaze Wilson and Karen Patricio from OCM for their continued support of this event and their commitment to New York's cannabis community.





Photos by Ashli Owens, NYS Office of Cannabis Management.

This event would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors: <u>New York Farm Bureau</u>, <u>LPC Naturals - Prime Superior</u>, <u>Rimol Greenhouse Systems</u>, <u>IPM Labs</u>, <u>Bristol Extracts</u>, <u>Ayrloom</u>, <u>Living Soil MDV</u>, <u>NY Small Farma</u>, and Cannabis Farmers Alliance, and <u>cannamatrix</u>.

The content was incredible this year, from morning presentations to afternoon field tours, and we encourage everyone to explore the full set of materials, including presentations, handouts, and videos, available on the <u>field day's agenda</u>.



ipmlabs

















Spotted Wing Drosophila Parasitoid Releases Underway in New York State Berry Farms

The spotted wing drosophila is an invasive fruit fly that causes major crop losses in berry crops. This year, thanks to a New York Fam Viability Institute Specialty Crops Block Program grant, New York State's berry farms are fighting back against this pest by hosting a parasitoid wasp in their hedgerows. The research project was devised by Dr. Gregory Loeb and Dr. Binita Shrestha, and involves multiple releases of the parasitic wasps across multiple blueberry farms across our state. Harvest NY's Small Fruit Specialist Anya Stansell worked with Burdick Blueberries in East Otto, NY, to facilitate releases in 2025. Burdick Blueberries is a 30-acre U-pick blueberry farm seriously concerned with the ecological burden of repeat insecticide applications, as is the current industry standard for combating spotted wing drosophila. Together with the growers, we released 2 vials of parasitic wasps and collected data on parasitoid survival, spotted wing drosophila population growth, and identified potential hedgerow host plants for both of these insects. A total of 6 berry farms participated in the study this year, which will continue into 2026. The goal is to identify if parasitoid wasps can become a viable, no-spray means of population control for New York berry farms.

WNY Farm to School Workshop

Advancing Farm to School efforts in Western NY was the focus on August 20, when 76 attendees—teachers, educators, food service directors, school food workers, farmers, producers, and distributors—gathered at West Seneca East Middle School. Five hands—on workshops were offered to the dozen+teachers in attendance, including an interactive presentation about a new 6th grade science curriculum focused on food systems and developed by a local teacher, and a vermicomposting workshop. School food service directors, farmers, producers, vendors, and distributors gathered for three sessions focused on advancing local procurement in WNY schools. Ruth Conner from Buffalo Public Schools and Erin Rudroff of Eden Valley Growers discussed the importance and benefits of menu planning and forecasting in successfully procuring local foods. Food service directors from Frontier, Hamburg, and Batavia City School Districts shared differing strategies for increasing local procurement and qualifying for the 30% NY Initiative. And during a regional planning session, the group identified strategies and next steps for developing local food bids and simplifying local procurement.

Meanwhile in the school's kitchen, 27 school food cooks were led by Brigaid chefs, who introduced them to techniques and skills they were then able to implement in real-time to prepare eight different dishes featuring local ingredients. The recipes used were developed by Brigaid in collaboration with NYS Education Department, CCE Harvest NY's Farm to School Program, and six school districts specifically for New York schools, with a focus on local ingredients, scratch cooking, and regional culinary traditions. All recipes developed are featured in the NY School Food Cookbook and meet school nutrition specifications and requirements. The food prepared during the 3.5 hour culinary training session was then served to all those in attendance during lunch.

Following lunch, food service workers and the teachers and educators in attendance engaged with 12 regional farmers, producers, and vendors during an interactive networking session where they learned more about the food products available from each vendor, how they could use those products in their schools, and educational opportunities for students. All attendees then participated in small group special topic discussions on five topics related to farm to school.

The event, a collaboration between NYS Education Department and CCE Harvest NY, was an excellent opportunity for all in attendance to learn from each other and collaborate to advance local procurement, scratch cooking, and food systems education in Western NY.

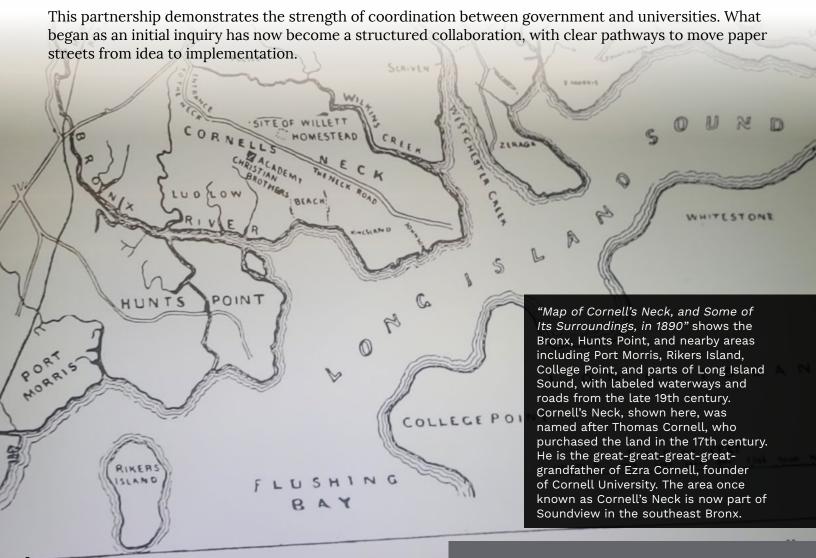
The Paper Streets Project

Paper streets are streets that appear on official city maps but were never built. These mapped but unused corridors exist throughout New York City, often as vacant land tucked between blocks. They offer an opportunity to create new public value through climate infrastructure, ecological buffers, shaded sitting areas, and community gathering spaces.

Last year, the Department of Transportation (DOT) approached the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) to explore the potential of paper streets. MOUA then invited Urban Garden Specialist Kwesi Joseph to help shape the concept. Kwesi drafted an outline to frame how these sites could serve both environmental and social purposes, then invited Dr. Peter Robinson, an Architectural Professor of Cornell Architecture Art Planning to join the effort.

Following these conversations, Peter decided to make Paper Streets the focus of his fall design studio at the Tata Innovation Center. Kwesi has been written into the studio curriculum as an integral partner. His role is to present on soil health and soil remediation, including the use of biochar and rock dust, and provided the context for the course outline, which emphasizes:

- Mitigating and combat urban heat by increasing the albedo
- Managing storm water by increasing the lag time that surface takes to get to the sewers
- Supporting pollinators by planting native perennial flowers
- Increasing green space to reduce stress and lower crime
- Testing and amending the soil to increase soil health and carbon capture



New Community Garden Soil Testing Program Makes Testing Simple & Accessible

Urban soils are often heavily contaminated due to historical industrial activities at many sites. Community gardens, which transform vacant lots into multi-purpose, productive spaces, play a vital role in growing not only food for the community, but plants that serve a variety of ecosystem services. However, when communities consume produce grown in these soils, they may be exposed to harmful contaminants such as lead, and other heavy metals without knowing. Because these gardens are often run by non-profits or volunteers with limited funding, expensive soil testing is rarely prioritized over immediate operational needs. Yet, it is crucial for community growers to understand what's in their soil, not only to identify contamination risks, but also to prevent environmental harm from excess fertilizer use and nutrient runoff. Soil testing also empowers gardeners to improve soil health, make informed decisions about where and how to grow, and ultimately increase yields.

Soil testing plays a critical role in supporting the growth and expansion of community gardens by ensuring the safety and health of the food they produce. To make this essential service more accessible, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Harvest NY, partnering with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (AGM) and the Cornell Soil Health Lab, launched a no-cost soil testing program for food-producing gardens across New York State. The program combines soil analysis for heavy metals and nutrient levels with technical support and education provided by CCE Harvest NY's Urban Garden Specialists. Additionally, the simplified application process, approachable eligibility criteria, and intentional program marketing has contributed to its 2025 success thus far. Since its launch in March of this year, nearly 300 gardeners have participated, far surpassing the initial goal of 100 in 2025. Program lead Mallory Hohl, CCE Harvest NY Urban Garden Specialist, has also advocated for the option of a Shipping Kit for growers, which eliminates the barrier of a grower-funded shipping cost to send the soil to the lab, a program perk that hundreds of participants have taken advantage of.

One standout garden example had been Two Coves Community Garden in Queens, NY, where over 50 growers have engaged with this program. Soil test results revealed high pH soils and excessive phosphorus from over-fertilization, prompting Urban Garden Specialist Karen Guzman to lead a workshop on soil health and proper fertilizer use, demonstrating the program's direct impact on improving growing practices.

Thanks to strong partnerships with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Cornell Soil Health Lab, this program is available to gardeners statewide. In New York City, collaborations with NYC Parks GreenThumb and the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust have helped expand its reach across all five boroughs. Statewide, this program boasts participation from more than half the counties in NYS and continues to expand.



Soil Testing Shipping Kits ready for distribution to participants at an urban community garden workshop.

Soil Health Field Day Gathers Urban Growers Across WNY and Showcases Cover Cropping in Small Spaces

In September, 65 urban and small-scale growers and agricultural service providers gathered in Rochester for a hands-on soil health field day; the event was a collaborative effort by CCE Harvest NY, CCE Cornell Vegetable Program (CVP), CCE Monroe County, Foodlink Community Farm, Taproot Collective, Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District, New York Soil Health, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Rochester Urban Ag Working Group. The event was a part of the 2025 Soil Health and Climate Resilience Field Days series from New York Soil Health. Attendees came from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, and surrounding areas for a half day of learning, connection, and skill sharing.

The field day featured nine interactive sessions showcasing best practices for building soil health in raised beds while focusing on maximizing biodiversity, soil cover, living roots, and minimizing disturbance. The field day centered around 24 raised bed cover crop demonstration plots highlighting a variety of warm weather and cold hardy cover crops, in addition to planting and termination strategies. Cover crop demonstration plot design was a collaboration between Cornell Vegetable Program Specialist Lori Koenick, Foodlink Community Farm Specialist John Miller, and New York Soil Health Team Member Michael Glos. Other field day sessions included talks on the benefits of cover crop roots and best practices for dealing with heavy metal soil contamination from CVP Specialist Lori Koenick and Harvest NY Specialist Mallory Hohl, respectively.



Attendees gather in cover crop demonstration plots at the Soil Health Field Day in Rochester.

Event feedback thus far has been positive with over 80% of post survey responses indicating attendees learned something new and useful, and plan to implement or change a practice based on what they learned from the event. Attendee comments on something they are taking away from this event included "excitement to do additional experimenting and succession planning with cover crops to improve my farm's soil health" and an awareness "there are many cover crop growing methods that can work in different kind of growing spaces." Over 15 topics were suggested to cover in future events.

Urban Agriculture Curriculum Materials Drafted

Urban Agriculture Curriculum Development Specialist Kyle Karnuta is continuing to complete educational materials that will comprise the National Urban Agriculture (NUag) training for USDA employees. This quarter, she completed draft materials for all 10 curriculum modules, edited lecture videos for the first seven modules, and worked with the project's contracted videographer on drafts of five farmer educator videos. Feedback for all 10 courses has been solicited from both an internal project team and from the USDA (the project funder). After reaching this project milestone, the final steps for this project include refining the module materials based on feedback, refining the farmer educator videos, and filming the remaining three lecture videos with eCornell (planned for this November). Karnuta hopes to work with USDA staff in early December to conduct a full but informal, voluntary review of all curriculum materials before integrating the curriculum on the USDA's internal learning content management system, AgLearn, in early 2026.

Local Partnerships Bring New York's Climate Goals to Life on Livestock Farms

In alignment with New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), CCE Harvest NY's Agricultural Climate Resiliency Specialists Kitty O'Neil and Savanna Shelnutt lead impactful outreach to support climate adaptation and mitigation on all shapes and sizes of NY farms. Their work directly supports the state's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience in our critical food systems.

In September, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County invited Kitty to speak at a pasture walk at Bardwell Farms near Remsen, NY. Collaborations with local Extension staff are an effective way to bring climate-focused education and problem-solving directly to producers in meaningful, place-based ways. Bardwell Farms, a beautiful and historic farm with a long and rich dairy and community history, is now managed by the Burton family. They raise a large herd of American Milking Devon cattle for local grass-fed beef sales and their fields served as a perfect backdrop for a few hours of discussions with the group of about 12 local farmers.

During the pasture walk, Kitty and MaryLynn Collins from CCE Oneida provided strategies and resources to the group of farmers and agency partners about pasture management, weed identification and a few other plant, soil and animal management topics. Later, in the upper story of the barn which served as a very popular dance hall in decades past, the group sat down for a slightly more structured presentation and discussion. Kitty's presentation linked the topics discussed outside with evidence-based climate adaptation and mitigation strategies applicable to NY livestock producers. The group recalled recent challenges with flooding and tornados associated with violent storms, remnants of several hurricanes that impacted their farms. They listened to details about local climate trends, adaptation and mitigation planning, and several practical tools that producers can use to build resilience and reduce emissions. This local event exemplifies how Extension outreach is advancing New York State's climate priorities while supporting the viability of family farms and food production.



Farmers and agency partners pose for a photo after a pasture walk and presentation on climate adaptation and mitigation at Bardwell Farms in Remsen, NY in September. Photo by N. Walters, CCE Oneida.

Development of Climate Risk Adaptation Factsheet for NY Livestock Producers

Harvest NY is developing of a comprehensive factsheet that will provide science-based background and strategies for livestock producers to adapt to climate risks and contribute to NYS's mitigation goals. It builds upon outreach and research that the team has conducted over the past few years. The factsheet is currently in draft form, and it provides background on our climate challenges ahead and depicts where our livestock farms fit into the solutions. The document also encompasses guidance on heat stress reduction, forage and feed resilience, manure and water management, and whole-farm resilience planning. Expected to be released in early 2026, the new factsheet is designed to help farmers navigate climate challenges while maintaining productivity and environmental stewardship.

Community Garden Leadership Program Expands

Launched December 2024, the Community Garden Leadership program strengthens the operational effectiveness of garden leadership teams by providing resources on management, leadership and deepening community engagement. To achieve this goal, the program uses a cohort model to build a statewide network of community gardeners to share knowledge, wisdom and to support one another as they navigate the coursework.

Initially, the program drew attention primarily in regions of New York where the concentration of community gardens was highest. In order to broaden the program's reach and ensure the cohort truly reflects and serves the diversity of the State's gardening community, Harvest NY Community Garden Leadership Specialist, Makela Elvy, conducted targeted outreach across New York. Through a series of five (5) virtual and four (4) regional information sessions targeting under-represented regions, she engaged 125 gardeners. This concerted outreach effort resulted in 22 new garden leaders selected to join the program in October. Today there are 40 current program participants, who represent 17 of the 62 counties, and 22 distinct communities in New York State.





Program participant, Caesandra Seawell, leading program at Pelion outdoor classroom.

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Growing New York's Farm and Food Industries

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