

2008 Small Farms Program Work Team Annual Report

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2008 Small Farm PWT Leadership Team

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Above is a list of the active members of our PWT leadership team. Some of these individuals were active in 2008 because they led some of our work teams. The attached list has a more complete collection of folks who have participated in SFP activities.

Since 2000, Cornell's Small Farms Program Work Team has embraced the mission to support and encourage the sustainability of diverse, thriving small farms that contribute to food security, healthy rural communities, and the environment. To this end, we foster small farms focused research, extension programs and networking/collaboration among CU staff, CCE educators, small farm advocates and farmers. We are committed to linking small farmers in NY with needed resources and knowledge for success.

Key activities in 2007-2008:

Engaging Stakeholders. In 2006, we established the **NY Small Farms Summit**. We engaged over eighty participants in four locations across the state, including members of Assembly Agriculture Committee. Our goals were to reflect on progress to date in meeting the needs of farmers, researchers, extension educators, agency representatives, NGO leaders and senior staff of the New York's smaller farms and identify emerging opportunities that may warrant increased attention from those of us in research, education and other farm services. Based upon the recommendations of the Summit participants, the SFP sponsored four new statewide working groups in 2007: 1) Local Food Systems, 2) Beginning Farmers Training, 3) Improved Grasslands Utilization and 4) Livestock Processing.

Updates from these work teams were the basis for part of the agenda for the 2007 Summit, which took place November 30. Over 120 farmers, Extension educators, researchers, and agency and NGO staff participated at four videoconference sites in Tompkins, Albany, Franklin, and Allegany Counties. The goals of the 2007 Summit were to:

- Provide a forum for discussion and catalyze action on statewide and regional initiatives to enhance small farm viability.

- Continue to strengthen collaborative relationships between small scale farmers, Cornell researchers, Cornell Cooperative Extension, USDA and NYS agencies, and non-profit organizations both statewide and within regions.
- Gather input from small-scale farmers and their supporters to guide statewide and regional program and policy development.

The morning session was largely devoted to discussion with Patrick Hooker, NYS Commissioner of Agriculture, and Mark Kenville, Director of the NYS Center for Dairy Excellence. Farmers in attendance at all four sites had the opportunity to voice their questions, suggestions and concerns directly to Hooker and Kenville, and to hear their thinking on important small farm issues and opportunities.

The rest of the program was devoted to presentations and discussions relating to the four work teams. These priorities had been identified at the 2006 NY Small Farms Summit, and in response, the Cornell Small Farms Program had organized statewide strategic “Small Farms Work Teams” to address these priorities. Discussion at the 2007 Summit was intended to provide input to the work teams from a diverse group of Summit participants. The full report can be read at the Small Farms Program Website: <http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/projects/working/SummitReport2007.pdf>

Outreach and Communication on Small Farm Issues.

- *Small Farm Quarterly* magazine was launched in 2003 as a collaborative effort among CCE educators, farmers, other nonprofit or agriculture service providers and Lee Publications. Current readership is 27,000 farm and rural families across the Northeast.
- *Small Farms Website* www.smallfarms.cornell.edu is a clearinghouse of small farms information, and a gateway to many other Cornell programs and online resources.
- *Small Farms Update and Press Releases*: The monthly UPDATE electronic newsletter shares news, resources, events, grants and other announcements and helps us share important information from our USDA, NYS and NGO partners. As of December 2008, 2,300 individuals receive our monthly email Update and press releases.

CCE Grant Program for Innovative Small Farm Education encourages innovation in regional and local CCE Association-based programs that specifically target small farm businesses and the families who live and work on these farms. Funding decisions are made by a group of five small farm operators. In the last three years, the grants program has emphasized ‘Farmer to Farmer’ learning and discussion groups. In this approach, the role of the Extension educator is not so much to “deliver” knowledge, but to “facilitate” the sharing of knowledge among farmers. To date our grants program has provided Extension support to 27 farmer-to-farmer groups. In 2007-8 we received and reviewed 17 proposals seeking a total of \$63,067. We awarded funds totaling about \$15,000 to eight county-based projects, and \$5000 each to three new Statewide Work Teams (see below.) We received mid-year updates and final reports for all projects, which are now posted online at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/projects/grants.

Other Small Farm PWT Initiatives

- *Beginning Farmers Project* works with a team of Extension educators to enhance and coordinate training and resources for beginning farmers across the state.
- *Organic Dairy Initiative* works with the newly formed NYS Organic Dairy Task Force to address the needs of this important and growing segment of NY’s dairy industry.
- *Small Dairy Value-Added Initiative* uses distance learning technologies to help small dairy producers explore strategies for adding value to their product.
- *Exploring the Small Farm Dream* is a one-credit seminar for Cornell students, giving them a chance to learn about the opportunities and challenges of starting a small farm business.

- *Student Small Farms Club* meets regularly and to sponsor field trips to local farms.
- *Small Farm Clusters Project*, an NRI funded project with Penn State focused on applying the concept of 'industrial clusters' to enhance viability of small farms of the Northeast.

Program Impacts: In the seven years since its inception, the Small Farm Program has helped create a dramatic shift in attitudes and programs within Cornell, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and our USDA and state partners in New York. Small farms now have increased visibility, respect, and resources. We have established a network of committed individuals who seek to enhance the profitability and sustainability of small farms in NY. This network extends beyond CU and CCE, into communities and other organizations actively working with small farms. We have demonstrated successful engagement, research and extension efforts to help solve practical problems of these farmers. We have helped small farmers demonstrate that their diversity and innovation can be a significant engine for local economic and rural development.