



Rural Futures

NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Spring 2014 ISSUE

Herkimer ARC: Caring for the Community

Like countless other sister agencies across the state, the Herkimer Area Resource Center (Herkimer ARC) is a non-profit organization that dedicates itself to caring for people with disabilities and provides them with a range of services. For more than 40 years, the organization has been a meaningful part of the local community.

What started off as a summer camp has blossomed over four decades into a provider of a wide range of programming designed to meet the needs of developmentally disabled people in the county. Examples include educational, residential, medical and vocational programs. Other programs provide respite or help for families and caregivers. With the longer distances that must be traveled in rural areas like Herkimer County, it is no surprise that transportation services are another priority for Herkimer ARC.

In the process of building and providing these services, Herkimer ARC has become the second largest employer in Herkimer County.

Herkimer ARC is in the process of adapting to a changing fiscal climate. There have been many recent changes in federal and state rules, often leading to more limited or decreased funding. In order to provide higher levels of service, Mr. Kevin Crosley, President/CEO of Herkimer ARC, sees the need to seek out new revenue sources and become more self sufficient. He describes the organization's non-profit status as a description that relates more to taxes, and not as an overall operational strategy. "We're a business with a social mission," said Mr. Crosley.

It is an approach they have taken with the establishment of the HARC Business Park in the Village of Herkimer. In 2009, the organization took possession of an industrial site, including a 120,000 square foot building that was donated to them. The 1890s era

(Continued on page 2)

Inside This Issue:

Caring for the Community.....	1
Bringing the Veggies to the Bank.....	4
Project ECHO	5
Community at its Core <i>How a 4-H Club Makes a Difference.....</i>	6
Invasive Species Watch: Water Chestnuts	7
A New Look for Apple Orchards: Tall Spindle System	8
Two Decades of Duck Racing	9
SCORE One for Business Education.....	10
Farm Bill Features	11
USDA Farm Census Data: The Tip of the Iceberg	12
License for Adventure.....	12
Bats Battling White Nose Syndrome... 13	
60 Million Reasons to Love New York State Parks	13
Broadband Awards.....	14
More Yogurt for Schools.....	14
Angling for Awards.....	15
SAVE THE DATES	16

**Spring 2014
Rural Futures**

**NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT
RURAL NEW YORK STATE**

A Publication of the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

The NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources is a joint bipartisan office of the State Legislature.



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(Continued from page 1)



HARC Business Park. (Photo courtesy of Herkimer ARC)

building was in need of significant refurbishment, a task quickly begun by Herkimer ARC. Much of the space has been renovated to make it suitable for manufacturing and commercial use, and improvements continue to be made to the building.

The building already has a dozen tenants. The first to move into it was the local Chamber of Commerce. Other businesses and organizations have followed their lead, and having the Chamber on site is a benefit to the other tenants, too.

Additionally, upgrades to the facility have improved its accessibility for all employees. This is especially important because Herkimer ARC uses much of the manufacturing space to carry out a variety of work functions. More than 60 developmentally disabled employees work in an assortment of manufacturing roles that include packaging and shrink-wrapping tissues, assembling boxes for a local manufacturer, and refurbishing industrial spools for another company in New York State.

Finding a job, even in the best economic times, can be a difficult task. For those individuals with developmental disabilities, the challenges of finding and holding a job become even greater. Furthermore, for many people with developmental disabilities, having a job in a controlled setting like those that exist at the business park are especially beneficial. It creates a positive environment for them, and the socialization opportunities created through the job are particularly valuable.

Clearly, the HARC Business Park is creating new economic development opportunities within the local community. The jobs generated through such a

(Continued on page 3)



In the State Budget...

Protecting Jobs for People with Developmental Disabilities

Senator Catharine Young, Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, successfully included language in the state budget to increase and protect jobs for people with developmental disabilities.

Recent federal and state announcements introduced requirements that foreclose options for developmentally disabled individuals and jeopardize meaningful employment opportunities in our communities.

The language included in the recently adopted state budget requires the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to establish a plan to ensure employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. This includes students transitioning into the workforce, individuals transitioning into competitive or integrated employment, and seniors with developmental disabilities who are looking for job opportunities.

Additionally, the budget includes tax credits to incentivize employers in our communities to employ individuals with developmental disabilities.

(Continued from page 2)

project are vital to local residents, especially to the developmentally disabled employees who have the opportunity to work at the site. It also expands Herkimer ARC's capability to provide services beyond those that are funded through programs like Medicaid.

Yet the business park is not the only capital project being undertaken by Herkimer ARC. The organization is currently raising funds to establish the HARC Community Park, a recreational facility that can be enjoyed by families of all abilities. The goal of the project is to make improvements to a village-owned park that is located adjacent to the HARC Business Park.

It will be a state-of-the-art facility that will be fully accessible for people with and without disabilities. It will include fitness trails, athletic fields, a basketball court, play areas and bocce courts. A picnic pavilion, band stand and concession area will also be included. Mr. Crosley describes the project as being much more than just a park. He expects that it will become a regional destination. Herkimer ARC plans to break ground on the project in 2015.

Whether it is caring for individuals with disabilities, supporting their families, creating job opportunities, or developing a recreational site, it is clear that Herkimer ARC is looking to care for its local community.

More information about Herkimer ARC can be found on their website at herkimerarc.org.



Floor space ready for a manufacturer at HARC Business Park.
(Photo courtesy of Herkimer ARC)

Bringing the Veggies to the Bank



*Irrigating crops at the Patroon Land Farm.
(Photo courtesy of the Patroon Land Farm)*

Like many other produce farms in New York State, a wide range of vegetables are grown and harvested on a farm in Voorheesville, New York. However, the bulk of the crops are not sold at supermarkets, roadside stands or farmer's markets. Instead, most of the vegetables are sent to the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. The rest are delivered to participants in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, an arrangement that generates funds to help operate the farm.

The farm has its origins as a family-owned dairy farm. In the late 1990s, Ms. Pauline Williman decided she wanted the farm to continue as an agricultural entity. She also believed that it was important to provide quality farm-fresh products to help feed the hungry, and she wanted to create an opportunity for young people to learn about and experience life on a farm. As a result of these strong personal convictions, Ms. Williman created the Patroon Land Foundation to meet her lofty goals.

Starting in 2001, Ms. Williman began to grow corn and squash on the farm. As a volunteer with the Food Bank, she offered to provide the Food Bank with the produce she grew. Ms. Williman continued to run the farm for another five years with the help of family, friends and volunteers.

In 2006, the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York and the Patroon Land Foundation became partners in this endeavor to provide fresh produce to the hungry. Mr. Mark Weinheimer responded to an online job posting and was hired as the Farm Manager. He had farmed when he was younger and was delighted to return to this type of work. "For me, it was kind of a dream job," he said.

Initially, the farm consisted of very minimal infrastructure and was operated by Mr. Weinheimer, Ms. Williman and a small number of volunteers. Over the ensuing years, the farm has expanded significantly through investment in upgraded water and electrical power systems, additional farm equipment, and a number of new structures. In 2010 a barn was built, and a greenhouse was added in 2011. A farm shop was constructed last year, enabling employees to more easily work on tractors and other equipment.

To help fund the operation of the farm, a CSA was established in 2008. Participants in the CSA can sign up for either individual or family shares. An individual share costs \$260 for the season, and a family share costs \$420. Participants receive a variety of fresh, hand-picked produce each week. They can pick up their weekly supply at locations including the farm or the Food Bank. The farm also delivers directly to many participants' workplaces in the Capital District. In 2008 there were 40 participants. That number has grown to nearly 500 families last year. As participation in the CSA has grown, so too has the farm.



*Loading produce at the Patroon Land Farm.
(Photo courtesy of the Patroon Land Farm)*

Even with four full-time employees, the farm continues to rely heavily on volunteers to help meet their goals. A core group of volunteers, generally retirees, shows up two or three days per week to help. Other groups and businesses have provided much-needed financial and in-person support. The use of volunteers goes hand-in-hand with the farm's goal of providing educational opportunities. The farm has hosted school groups from pre-school all the way through graduate school. Not only do the visitors get to learn about the farm and the Food Bank, but they also find opportunities to get their hands dirty – literally. Perhaps most surprising is just how much help even the youngest visitors

Bringing the Veggies to the Bank *(Continued from page 4)*

provide. Mr. Weinheimer is quick to point out that pre-school children can be quite helpful, especially when it comes to weeding. "They have fun and they are productive, too. They have hands sized just right, and they are already down there near the weeds," he said.

The farm currently has 13 acres in production and leases another four acres on a different farm. They grow a diverse range of vegetables including cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, cucumbers, tomatoes, summer squash and more. Even with challenging weather conditions due to heavy spring rains, the farm produced 161,000 pounds of vegetables last year, including 38,000 pounds of cabbage. Nearly 100,000 pounds was provided to the Food Bank.

Hunger is an issue affecting New Yorkers across the state. The need for fresh, healthy food from farms is immense, and certainly the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York and the Patroon Land Foundation are doing their part.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, donating to the Food Bank, or to sign up for the CSA, visit regionalfoodbank.net or facebook.com/PatroonLandFarm.

Project ECHO

Access to quality healthcare is a vital issue for people living in many rural areas in New York State. Challenges include the lack of available healthcare providers and the lengthy geographic distances that patients must travel to get to a medical facility. Therefore, it is no surprise that telehealth and telemedicine provide opportunities to overcome these difficulties. In many cases, patients can be remotely connected to medical providers by using real-time video and audio technology.

This same technology also allows health providers to connect with each other. It can be an especially helpful tool for primary care physicians who seek to consult with medical specialists in the treatment of a patient.

A program at the University of New Mexico, called Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes), has been doing just that for the past decade.

Project ECHO is an award-winning program established by Dr. Sanjeev Arora, a liver disease specialist who became concerned about the availability of healthcare in rural areas while running a clinic at the University of New Mexico. His clinic treated hepatitis C patients in Albuquerque. Treatment for the disease is a complicated process, one that requires specialized care. It also requires frequent treatments necessitating travel to a treatment site.

Dr. Arora recognized that hepatitis C patients in rural New Mexico often did not get the care they needed due to the high costs, the lengthy travel requirements, and the lack of specialists nearby.

He decided to create a new approach. He developed a program where community healthcare providers could communicate remotely with a team of nurses, pharmacists

and specialists to come up with treatment plans for their patients.

During weekly videoconferences, providers are able to discuss patient cases and work to create treatment plans for their patients. In the process, they are learning directly from specialists how to manage complex treatments for a challenging disease. It functions almost as a long-distance version of the rounds that take place in a university hospital. It is a process that builds expertise within the rural communities where providers and patients would not otherwise have access to such specialized care.

As a result, patients do not have to travel long distances for care, and they are more likely to seek the healthcare treatment that they need. The results of the program have been positive, with outcomes described to be as good as those for patients visiting the University's clinic.

Since its establishment, Project ECHO has grown to include the treatment of other chronic conditions and complicated diseases including substance abuse, asthma, diabetes, chronic pain and others. It is also being applied as a concept in other parts of the country.

Telehealth and telemedicine are increasingly important tools being used to provide healthcare in rural areas. Expanding access to this technology is a priority for the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, and the Commission has introduced legislation to improve the availability of telehealth and telemedicine in rural areas.

More information about Project ECHO can be found on their website at echo.unm.edu.

Community at its Core

How a 4-H Club Makes a Difference

They may be young, but the members of the Schuyler Hillbillies 4-H Club have a keen grasp on the importance of community service and personal development. It is demonstrated in the activities and volunteerism of this active 4-H group located in rural Herkimer County.

Late last year, their local community was devastated to learn that a tragic accident had claimed the life of a local dairy farmer. Immediately, neighbors volunteered their time to run the farm and help the family with difficult business decisions. Demonstrating their leadership and compassion, the young members of this local 4-H club volunteered, too. They organized a large meal on the day of the funeral at the local firehouse, serving more than 100 people during an emotionally difficult time. They coordinated the food, helped with the necessary preparations, served the meals and cleaned up. Prior to the meal, club members took the time to call on the family and pay their respects.

“They don’t think twice. They know what to do,” said Ms. Debbie Windecker, a 4-H parent and a leader within the club. “They see life for what it is – precious,” she said.

Those values are evident in many of the club’s activities which include an annual pancake breakfast and nursing home visits where they have brought gifts and some of their animals for the residents to enjoy. They also participate in Relay For Life events to honor the memory of a previous club member who passed away at 17 years old.

Further evidence of the positive impact of this club is apparent in the story of 15-year-old Autumn who has spent the past few years actively involved with the club. Prior to moving to the area, Autumn lived downstate and faced an uncertain future. After moving to Herkimer County with her grandmother, she joined the Schuyler Hillbillies 4-H Club.

It has profoundly changed her life. She has gained confidence by participating in a wide range of activities. She has leased cows from the Windecker family, learned to care for them, and has successfully shown the animals at fairs. She also participates as a member of Herkimer County’s Dairy Quiz Bowl team. Along the way, Autumn has improved her public speaking skills, and 4-H is serving her well in her goal to become a veterinarian.

“It makes you a better person. I would recommend it to anybody,” said Autumn.

“4-H showed her that she could excel at something she had never done before,” said Wendy Davy, Autumn’s grandmother and leader of the Schuyler Hillbillies. “We have lots of blue ribbons to prove it,” she said.

The Schuyler Hillbillies 4-H Club is just one of many in New York State. In any given year, there are 15 to 20 active 4-H clubs in Herkimer County alone, serving approximately 200 members within communities throughout the county. “4-H prides itself on its community service involvement. It’s a huge component of 4-H,” said Jennifer Collins, Extension Educator/4-H Youth Development at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County.

4-H is the largest youth organization in the world, and it has existed in New York for the last 100 years. Historically, the 4-H program has been active in rural areas with a focus on agriculture, but it is expanding and offers a diverse range of activities with a focus on science, citizenship and healthy living.

More information about 4-H in New York State can be found at nys4h.cce.cornell.edu.



Autumn, a member of the Schuyler Hillbillies 4-H Club, shows her calf at the Farmer’s Museum Jr. Livestock show in Cooperstown, New York. (Photo courtesy of Wendy Davy)

Invasive Species Watch: Water Chestnuts (*Trapa natans*)



A thick mat of water chestnut plants. (Photo courtesy of the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District)

New York State faces an invasion of water chestnuts, just not the plant species that is often used in Asian-style cuisine. Rather, it is a plant species known by the same name, and it has been identified in a number of New York's lakes, ponds, and slow-moving rivers and streams.

These water chestnut plants have a distinctive look. Circular clusters of glossy green leaves, called rosettes, float on the surface of the water. Individual leaves are roughly triangular in shape and have saw tooth edges. The leaves are attached to a lengthy stem, up to 16 feet in length, and rooted to the bottom of the water body.

Water chestnut is an annual plant. Each rosette is capable of producing multiple nut-like seeds that sink to the bottom of the water body, and each seed can produce multiple rosettes in the following seasons.

The aquatic plants are native to Europe, Asia and Africa where they are kept under control by native insects. In North America, however, they are free to grow into thick mats that float on the surface of the water. As they spread, they create hazards for recreational activities like boating and swimming. Additionally, the seeds can be painful if a swimmer steps on them.

Water chestnut plants also dramatically alter the local ecology. They force out native plant species that serve as sources of food and shelter for other organisms and animals. The floating canopy prevents light penetration into the water, limiting the growth of native plants and reducing the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water.

Identifying areas of infestation and removing this pesky plant is part of Mr. Scott DeRue's job as District Technician – Water Resource Specialist for the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District. "Early detection and rapid response are very important to controlling and eliminating the problem," said Mr. DeRue.

The early identification of water chestnut makes it much easier to control because smaller populations can be removed by hand, before they become too large or produce seeds. Larger areas may need to be cleared by mechanical harvesting or through the careful application of herbicide. Furthermore, areas of infestation will need to be monitored in subsequent years because the seeds can remain viable for a decade or more in the sediments on the bottom of the water body.

By educating the public, identifying sources of infestation, and removing plants promptly, Mr. DeRue believes the problem can be effectively managed. He urges anyone who comes across the plant to note the location, take a photo and contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District.

Preventing and controlling the spread of invasive species continues to be a priority for the New York State Rural Resources Commission. The Commission has introduced and passed legislation in the State Senate to support the roles of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in taking on the challenges posed by invasive species and to educate the public.

More information about identifying invasive species, including water chestnuts, can be found at Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District's website: waynecountynysoilandwater.org.



A water chestnut plant. (Photo courtesy of the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District)

A New Look for Apple Orchards: Tall Spindle System

In the wake of difficult times experienced by apple growers just over a decade ago, a concerted effort was initiated to strengthen New York's apple industry. As a result, there has been significant investment in the apple industry including orchards, storage systems, packing plants, and marketing.

Part of that effort includes the work of Cornell University Professor of Horticulture Terence Robinson who is located at the New York State Agricultural Engineering Station in Geneva, New York. Prof. Robinson has focused on developing a new orchard system, called the tall spindle system, designed for planting trees in much higher densities. It allows orchards to plant 1,000 or more trees per acre, as compared to the 400 or 500 trees per acre that were typical in the 1980s and 1990s.

Each tree in the system consists of a single central trunk that rises vertically to a height of ten feet. Small branches extending from the trunk carry fruit. Individual trees are spaced only three feet apart instead of the much wider spacing that used to be typical. Essentially, a tall spindle system row appears more like a wall of fruit-bearing branches rather than a row of traditional trees.

Planting new trees is an important and costly long-term investment for growers. The tall spindle system provides a quicker return on this investment. Earlier availability of fruit and improved fruit yields over the lifetime of trees are key reasons that growers are choosing to use this newer system.

Additionally, the quality of the fruit is improved. Given the design of the system, the fruit has more exposure to sunlight. It is also much easier to care for the trees and harvest the apples, with the capability to do much of the work from ground level.

The system has seen significant increase in popularity in recent years with many growers adopting it on their farms. Prof. Robinson credits the New York Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI) as being a vital partner in the establishment of the tall spindle system. NYFVI funded a demonstration project on three farms in 2007 that was essential for the development and expansion of the system.

NYFVI continues to stay involved in the development of the tall spindle system. A study is underway to examine the labor efficiencies of the system and to explore opportunities for partial mechanization of tasks including pruning, thinning and harvesting. For example, it may be useful to develop machinery or self-propelled man lifts that would allow workers to travel along the rows of trees without the time-consuming, and potentially dangerous, use of ladders.

Currently, New York State ranks second in the nation in apple production. It is both a source of pride for the state and critical to its economic well-being. Continued innovation and investment in the industry will likely play an important role for years to come.

For more information about the tall spindle system, please contact Prof. Terence Robinson via email at tlr1@cornell.edu. More information about NYFVI can be found at nyfvi.org.



LEFT: Tall Spindle System.
(Photo courtesy of Terence Robinson and Mario Miranda Sazo)

RIGHT: A view from the end of a row showing the height and width of the Tall Spindle System.
(Photo courtesy of Terence Robinson and Mario Miranda Sazo)



Two Decades of Duck Racing



The start of the 2013 AdironDuck Race.
(Photo courtesy of the Oswegatchie Educational Center)

For the twentieth time in as many years, a small stretch of the West Branch of the Oswegatchie River in Croghan, New York will be invaded by hundreds of ducks – rubber ducks. With neither a quack, nor a flap of wings, these ducks will jostle each other in a short race to a finish line. This popular event, called the AdironDuck Race, raises funds for the Oswegatchie Educational Center.

The Center, owned and operated by the New York FFA Leadership Training Foundation, Inc., runs a youth camp during the summer months and is open year-round as an educational center and recreational retreat.

The funds raised from this race are used to make the summer camp program more affordable in order to make it available to as many attendees as possible. Last year, 75 “camperships” were provided to FFA chapters throughout the state. In many cases, recipients of the camperships earned them through their own efforts, exchanging their own “sweat equity” for the opportunity to attend camp.

The center is open to all individuals and organizations, not just those affiliated with the FFA. The focus of the summer camp is to provide teens with leadership training, environmental education and outdoor recreation.

“Those three things complement each other perfectly,” said Mr. Bill Waite, Program Director at Oswegatchie Camp. “When you’re paddling along the pond, a ‘nature moment’ is going to happen, whether it might be seeing a loon, a beaver or a snapping turtle.”

In the inaugural year of the AdironDuck Race, a flock of 500 ducks journeyed down the river. The size of the flock has expanded dramatically in the ensuing years, with 6,400 ducks racing last year. This year’s race takes place on April 27th, and Mr. Waite hopes that the entire flock, 10,000 ducks in all, will be adopted.

The first ten ducks to cross the finish line will win cash prizes for their adopters, including a \$2,000 grand prize. While duck-adopters do not need to be present to win, there will be a wide range of activities at the event including music, storytelling and a pancake breakfast.

Ducks can be adopted in advance through the center’s website. Any remaining ducks can be adopted at the event on race day.

To adopt a duck or find out more about the AdironDuck Race and the Oswegatchie Educational Center, please visit their website: adironduckrace.com.

SCORE One for Business Education

Having a mentor can be invaluable, especially for someone looking to start a small business, grow an existing business, or navigate difficult business conditions.

SCORE is one such organization that provides guidance and counseling to small business owners. Throughout the nation, SCORE volunteers work with small businesses, free of charge, to help them achieve success. Volunteers are active and retired business owners who share their breadth of knowledge and experience with other business owners and entrepreneurs.



The services provided by SCORE are not limited to urban environments. Recognizing the need for economic development within rural communities, SCORE is working with numerous rural businesses through their Upstate New York Rural Initiative. According to Mr. William Ritter, Director of Upstate New York SCORE, many rural businesses are turning to SCORE to help them gain a better grasp on their business operations.

Yet, the organization is not restricting its outreach to existing businesses. In addition, they are looking to New York's future business leaders. "SCORE and several Upstate New York colleges have partnered to share strengths and opportunities beneficial to both," said Mr. Richard Hannis, CEO of Upstate New York Rural Initiative.

At Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York, Dr. Theodore Peters is looking forward to the first semester of working with SCORE. As an Assistant Professor of Business Administration, Dr. Peters has witnessed the value of students venturing out

into their community to take on "real world" projects for local small businesses and community organizations. It is an important part of many students' education at Hartwick College. He sees tremendous value in having SCORE mentors who can provide their input on future students' projects. Dr. Peters describes it as both a valuable learning model for students and as a great example of giving back to the community.

Dr. Phillip Taylor, Dean of Commercial Applied, and Liberal Arts at Paul Smith's College has worked closely with SCORE for many years, starting almost from the moment he first stepped onto campus. SCORE volunteers helped out during the process of establishing the business program at this college which is located inside the state's beautiful Adirondack Park. Students work with local businesses on specific projects. Students also attend symposiums that enable them to learn directly from SCORE experts and develop their networking skills. Dr. Taylor sees this as chance for students and businesses to learn from one another. "It's good to see the excitement on both ends," said Dr. Taylor.

At St. Bonaventure University in New York's Southern Tier, Mr. Richard Golas, a SCORE mentor, works closely with Dr. Pierre Balthazard, Dean of the School of Business. The local SCORE branch has helped the school develop its business curriculum. In turn, the university has provided SCORE with the use of office space in its brand new business center on campus. SCORE uses the space to conduct counseling sessions with local small businesses. Students, too, will have the opportunity to interact with and learn directly from SCORE mentors, even sitting in on some counseling sessions.

These are just a few examples demonstrating the value of relationships between SCORE and higher education institutions. There are a number of other projects including partnerships with SUNY Adirondack and Hudson Valley Community College, and likely more to come.

Many of New York State's future business leaders and entrepreneurs are attending college right now. The partnerships being developed between SCORE, colleges and students demonstrate the mutual benefits of connecting academia, business leaders and future entrepreneurs.

For more information about SCORE, please visit score.org.

Farm Bill Features

The Agriculture Act of 2014, better known as the Farm Bill, was passed by Congress and signed by the President in February. With over 900 pages that cover a wide range of rural and farm programs, there are many details in the law that will affect New York's farmers in the years to come.

The process of passing this extensive bill took a long time. Drafting the related regulations will take longer for many programs, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expects to make more details available throughout the spring and summer months. In the meantime, here are some highlights:

Commodity Support Programs

One of the significant changes in the Farm Bill is the elimination of the direct payment programs that paid commodity producers. Instead, they are replaced by the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) programs.

Producers must choose between the two programs this year or they will be automatically enrolled in the PLC program. They can choose to cover their crops under the PLC program which uses target prices to determine eligibility for payments, or producers can choose to participate in the ARC program which bases payments on either county level or individual farm crop revenues.

Dairy Programs

There are also substantial changes that will affect dairy farmers. The Dairy Margin Protection program will replace the current Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program. The MILC program will continue to function until Sept. 1, 2014 or until the new program goes into effect.

The new program will provide dairy farmers with catastrophic coverage at no cost, resulting in payments to farmers when the national dairy production margin falls below four dollars per hundredweight over a certain time period. Producers also have the option to purchase coverage for those times when the margin is between four and eight dollars per hundredweight.

Additionally, the Farm Bill includes a new Dairy Product Donation Program. When operating margins dip low enough, the program will require USDA to purchase dairy products which will then be donated to food banks and organizations that feed the hungry.

Economic Development

Investment in economic development is critical for rural New York State. The Farm Bill continues to fund a number of economic development programs including rural business development, water and wastewater infrastructure, and long-term regional planning investment.

Beginning Farmers Programs

As the average age of current farmers continues to rise, portions of the Farm Bill recognize the importance of supporting new farmers. Included in the bill is funding for the Beginning Farmers

and Ranchers Development Program. Other help for new farmers includes lower premiums for crop insurance and improved access to capital that is necessary for establishing and growing a new farm.

Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance Programs

The bill continues the federal crop insurance program. It restores, and makes retroactive, a number of disaster assistance programs including the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP), and the Tree Assistance Program. Furthermore, the bill also expands the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Conservation Programs

The Farm Bill consolidates a number of conservation programs that existed in previous versions of the bill. Going forward, it also requires that farmers follow approved conservation plans to qualify for crop insurance premium subsidies for highly erodible lands and wetlands.

Also Included...

Of interest are a number of changes that directly affect many New York farms. Apple growers will no longer be subject to time-consuming and costly inspections of their product when exporting apples from the United States to Canada. The bill includes significant investment aimed at boosting New York's maple industry through research, education and promotion. There is also relief provided through NAP for those fruit growers who experienced devastating crop losses in 2012 due to frost and freezing conditions.

Numerous other programs are funded through the Farm Bill. Investment in local and regional food systems, specialty crops, renewable energy, energy efficiency, research programs, nutrition, forestry, foreign trade programs, and more are all included in the bill.

There are far more programs and details in the Farm Bill than can be summarized in a short article. It is important for farmers and rural stakeholders to keep up-to-date with the changes, especially as regulations are developed this year.

More information about the Farm Bill, including the opportunity to sign up for email updates, can be found on the USDA's Farm Service Agency website at fsa.usda.gov.



USDA Farm Census Data: The Tip of the Iceberg

Every five years, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducts a detailed census of agriculture in the United States. Data is collected via surveys sent out to farmers throughout the nation.

USDA recently released a preliminary report providing a quick look at some of the data from the 2012 Census of Agriculture. It is worth noting that New York State saw a two percent decrease in the number of farms since 2007, while experiencing a small increase in farm acreage during the same time frame. The long-standing trend of an increasing average age for farm operators continued with the age of the average New York farmer increasing by one year. (See the data at right for more details.)

While the preliminary report contains useful data, it is just the tip of the iceberg. There is much more to come in May when USDA expects to release the full report. If the 2007 report is any indication, the final report will include detailed demographic, economic, real estate, production, geographic data, and much more.

The 2012 Census of Agriculture reports can be accessed via the USDA's website at agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/.

New York Farms - By the Numbers

57

Average age of a farmer in NY

814

Decrease in the number of farms in NY since 2007

8,836

Increase in farm acreage in NY since 2007

35,538

Number of farms in NY

\$5.4 Billion

Market value of agricultural products sold in NY

Source: 2012 Census of Agriculture Preliminary Report

License for Adventure

New York State is offering some new incentives to encourage adventurous hunters, anglers and state park visitors to invest in lifetime licenses.

Lifetime licenses are available for hunting, fishing, or a combination of both. The Lifetime Empire Passport can be purchased by those who are looking for a long-term means of enjoying New York's state parks. Purchasing lifetime licenses for hunting, fishing, or state parks saves money when compared to the cost of purchasing them on an annual basis.

As an additional incentive, people purchasing lifetime licenses can request free custom license plates to display their love of hunting, fishing or state parks, using the iconic "I LOVE NY" logo. There are three separate designs for each style of plates: a deer, a duck, or a turkey for I LOVE NY HUNTING; a trout, a walleye or a striped bass for I LOVE NY FISHING; a bridge scene, a beach picture, or a view of Niagara Falls for I LOVE NY PARKS.

Finally, new icons can now be added to a driver's license for those who have purchased lifetime hunting, fishing, or parks licenses, along with an icon for anybody who has received

their New York Safe Boating Certificate. With this change, those who have purchased lifetime licenses will only have to reach for their driver's license, rather than hunt or fish for a separate identification card.

For more information please visit licensecenter.ny.gov/nys-adventure-license.



Bats Battling White Nose Syndrome



Bats may not be the most popular of New York's many flying creatures, except perhaps on Halloween. However, they serve a vital role in the ecosystem. For example, many species of bats spend their nights consuming huge numbers of insects, thereby reducing pests. As a result, they can have a profoundly positive impact on agriculture.

Therefore, it is no surprise that biologists are very concerned about the dramatic population declines of a number of bat species in New York State and elsewhere in the country. A disease called White-nose Syndrome has killed millions of bats in the United States since its discovery only a few short years ago.

The disease gets its name from one of its symptoms, a white fungus that appears around bats' noses and wings. The disease affects hibernating bats, which are clustered together in large populations in caves or mines. Instead of quietly hibernating, infected bats can wake up and search for nonexistent food sources. At the same time, the bats rapidly burn through their reserves of fat and die before the arrival of spring.

However, there is potentially good news. Some reports from nearby Vermont could indicate that the population decline is slowing and could be stabilizing. Even so, if the disease slows, it will take a long time for bat populations to recover, and scientists from the Department of Environmental Conservation and other organizations will continue to monitor these insect-eating friends of agriculture.

More information about White-nose Syndrome can be found at dec.ny.gov/animals/45088.html.

60 Million Reasons to Love New York State Parks

After a cold and snowy winter, warmer spring and summer conditions are just around the corner. New York's numerous state parks and historical sites will once again provide excellent opportunities for recreation, relaxation and education.

With significant investment in state parks in recent years, record numbers, more than 60 million people in both 2012 and 2013, visited state parks, according to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Part of that success can be attributed to the efforts of volunteers who have helped beautify and improve state parks. This year marks the third year that Parks & Trails New York has sponsored "I Love My Park Day" events throughout the state. Saturday, May 3, 2014 will serve as this year's "I Love My Park Day."

Last year's events included activities as diverse as the parks where they occurred. For example, volunteers at Allegany State Park painted cabins and other structures in the picturesque park. At Wellesley Island State Park, volunteers installed netting for an outdoor butterfly house at the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center. Along with planting flowers, volunteers at Midway State Park donated their time to clean up the amusement park rides and arcade games that make it a unique state park.

Parks & Trails New York is looking forward to kicking off the busy spring and summer season with many more opportunities for people to volunteer to show their love for these state treasures.

More information about New York's state parks can be found at nysparks.com. Registration information for this year's "I Love My Park Day" events can be found at ptny.org/ilovemypark.



Volunteers helping at Midway State Park.
(Photo courtesy of Parks & Trails New York)

Broadband Awards

The expansion of broadband availability in rural areas is a priority for the Rural Resources Commission. Broadband expansion is vital for providing healthcare, growing jobs and businesses, strengthening agriculture, and enhancing educational opportunities.

To recognize the achievements within the broadband industry, the New York State Broadband Program Office is accepting applications until April 30th for the 2014 Broadband Champion Awards. Winners will be announced on June 5th at the Annual Broadband Summit.



Award categories include:

- Broadband Leadership Award
- Most Innovative Broadband Project Award
- Most Collaborative Broadband Project/Program Award
- Best Broadband Adoption Initiative/Program Award
- Economic Leadership Award

For more information, or to nominate someone for an award, please visit nysbroadband.ny.gov/2014-summit-awards

More Yogurt for Schools

Greek-style yogurt is in high demand. It is an important part of New York's dairy industry, which leads the nation in producing this product. A recent announcement from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) could further increase demand.

Last year, USDA launched a pilot program to include this high-protein yogurt in the school lunch program for schools in Arizona, Idaho, Tennessee, and of course – New York. These four states could order Greek-style yogurt for schools as part of their USDA Foods Entitlement.

According to USDA, the yogurt has proven to be popular with students, with nearly 200,000 pounds of yogurt ordered between September and November 2013. Given the high demand, the pilot program is being expanded to include an additional eight states that participate in the National School Lunch Program.

Without a doubt, New York's dairy industry and yogurt producers will be watching the pilot program closely.



Angling for Awards



It is a time-honored tradition for anglers to share tales of “the one that got away.” Inevitably, the fish in the story gets larger, and the struggle to reel it in becomes more dramatic with each retelling. Too often, it is hard for the storyteller to convince his or her audience of the story’s accuracy, even when the fish did not escape.

How then, can an angler convince others of a truly remarkable catch?

One possibility is found in the New York State’s Angler Achievement Awards Program conducted by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The program offers three types of awards.

Annual awards are given to the three anglers who catch the heaviest fish of each species found within a list of 45 species. The fish must meet a minimum weight requirement to qualify. Each award winner receives a lapel pin, and the angler who catches the heaviest fish within each species also receives a certificate.

For those who opt to release the fish they catch, a second award category entitles the angler to receive a lapel pin for catching and releasing a fish, as long as it is found in a list of 21 major species of gamefish and meets certain size requirements.


Finally, a truly large fish could result in setting a state record. Any angler who breaks the current state record for any of the 45 categories receives a plaque, a lapel pin and a certificate.

For more information about the Angler Awards Program, as well as a complete list of rules, visit the program’s website at dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7727.html.





SAVE THE DATES



 **20th Annual AdironDUCK Race**
April 27, 2014
Oswegatchie Educational Center
9340 Long Pond Road
Croghan, NY 13327
adironduckrace.com

 **New York State Conference of Mayors
and Municipal Officials**
Annual Meeting and Training School
May 4-6, 2014
Gideon Putnam Hotel, Saratoga Springs, NY
nycom.org/meetings-training/conferences.html

 **I Love My Park Day**
Sponsored by Parks & Trails
New York
May 3, 2014
Takes place at multiple locations throughout the state.
Register here: ptny.org/ilovemypark/findanevent.shtml

 **2nd Annual New York State**
Broadband Summit & Awards Ceremony
June 5, 2014
The Desmond Hotel, Albany, NY
nysbroadband.ny.gov

**If you have any suggestions for upcoming editions,
Please email the Commission at RURALRES@NYSENATE.GOV**