A partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in these five counties: Monroe, Niagara, Orleans, Oswego & Wayne

2023 Annual Report
Year in Review

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Lake Ontario Fruit Program
1st Annual 2023 WNY Fruit Growers Tour

We were excited to host a tour with an industry partner, Lake Ontario Ag Consulting, Inc. We were able to combine expertise across our two organizations on July 28th in Wayne County. We featured several applied research projects at the sites in which the research was conducted. In addition, we featured the work of several companies and farms involved in the development of precision technologies of tree fruit crops. These included grower experiences with the new technologies. Pest management and soil health was also highlighted. Three farms plus a lunch stop concluded with a BBQ at S & L farms in Sodus. Over 250 people attended at least one stop on the tour, and we were told by multiple stakeholders to continue this tour in the future.

2023 Western NY Fruit Conference

For the first time ever, LOF hosted their own multi-day winter conference. It was held on February 27-28, at the RIT Inn & Conference center in Rochester. Over 175 people attended one or both days of the conference. In addition to six educational sessions, there was a cocktail hour and sponsored (CropGrowers) banquet dinner in which three recent retirees were honored. Once again, we received great feedback that consisted of mostly positive reviews, and are planning another conference in early 2024.
Orchard Management Programming –
Mario Miranda Sazo

**First Bilingual IPM Fruit School for Farm Employees in WNY:** A very talented, multidisciplinary, diverse, and large group of Cornell administrators, scientists, CCE regional educators, staff, and one Cornell Ph.D. student, decided to join forces for the planning and delivery of the first bilingual WNY IPM fruit school this past summer. The one-day school was conducted at the Bible Baptist Church of Sodus, Wayne County, on Wednesday June 14. At the WNY IPM Fruit school, each instructor presented first in an English language room and then later in a Spanish language room, or vice versa (same educational content about an introduction to IPM, scion/rootstock/planting site, soil science/health, and pesticide use/safety). There was a hands-on IPM activity with 5 educational stations: 1. Pesticide Safety 2. Insect Pests 3. Diseases 4. Beneficial insects, and 5. Soil health. The school finished with a group activity about leadership development and basic communication skills.

**Cornell Peel Sap Project for Honeycrisp Growers:**
CCE LOF contributed to the research, development, and outreach of the statewide implementation of the peel sap method for prediction of bitter pit risk. We also disseminated several new Cornell recommendations for tree fruit nutrient management and rootstock adoption.

Peels frozen then thawed. Peel sap was obtained with a garlic press in mid-July 2023.

**2023 CCE LOF Spanish-summer tour:**
The number of collaborations, and quality of Spanish-related extension activities significantly increased with the strong support provided by Janet van Zoeren and Liz Tee.

**More Digital Agriculture Technologies Were Featured in 2023:** The CCE LOF conducted Cornell research and extension activities by facilitating the early adoption of new digital technologies and by interacting with key innovative growers and tech-industry partners.

8th CCE LOF Spanish summer fruit tour conducted in collaboration with CSFM and Cornell Soil Health Program in Walworth, Wayne County in August, 2023.
**Twilight Meeting Series:** Regular, seasonal, in-person programming continues to be especially important when talking about pest identification, scouting and management. In an era of Zoom meetings, it can seem easy to provide more virtual programming, especially when growers are busy during the day times.

In collaboration with Anya Osatuke (Harvest NY) and Anna Wallis (NYS IPM), we decided to trial a series of five “Twilight meetings” for berry and tree fruit growers, once a month from April through August, at five different farms across the region. During these 1.5 hr meetings, we discussed pests likely to be encountered at that time on the farm, and management practices and strategies relevant to the growers in that month. So, for example, in April we focused on spring pests such as apple scab, fire blight and berry Phomopsis, as well as pollination, whereas in the late summer meetings we focused on late summer pests such as rots, stink bugs, and weed management.

Twilight meetings were intentionally informal, to provide growers an opportunity to participate with us in conversations about what they are seeing on their farms, and what management strategies they have been employing, which in turn also helps them to stay engaged as well as offering us new insights.

The meetings each had around 15 attendees (and up to 21 at one of them), and in 2023 were held in Niagara, Orleans, Wayne and Ontario counties. Feedback from growers who attended and hosted the meetings was overwhelmingly positive. We plan to continue in 2024, and to include the counties that were not included in 2023 (Monroe and Oswego).
Business Management Programming—Bonaly Nelsen

Bonaly (Bon) Nelsen joined the Lake Ontario Fruit Program as a Business Management Specialist in May 2024. In this role, she conducts programs to improve profitability, resiliency, legal compliance, planning, and decision making on commercial fruit farms.

The featured program addresses financial risks faced by New York State commercial tree fruit growers due to inexperience with grants as a funding source for farm projects. A variety of federal, state, and local entities make business grants available to help farm operations increase revenues, profitability, and long-term viability. However, many fruit growers are unfamiliar with available grants and procedures for identifying the best grant opportunity for their needs. Consequently, many bypass grants despite the high cost of capital and uneven access to commercial loans.

This program will address this problem by building grant literacy and research skills among commercial tree fruit growers in New York State. Bonaly Nelsen has applied for a 2024 Northeast Risk Management Education Center (NERME) grant (“Building Grant Literacy and Research Skills Among New York State Tree Fruit Growers”) to fund this program. A program consisting of six online sessions aimed at increasing awareness of farm grant opportunities and building skills needed to target suitable grants. Participants in the proposed program will learn how to identify components of a project plan that may qualify for a grant, research available grant opportunities, understand selection criteria and grant requirements, and choose the best funding opportunity for their project. Information will be reinforced with weekly skill building assignments and two participant surveys will measure program impact.

In addition to acquiring skills in identifying, researching, and developing grant opportunities, participants will participate in three panel discussions with representatives from entities providing farm grants (county and municipal economic development professionals, USDA National Resource Conservation Service, USDA Rural Development, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York State Energy Research and Development Agency). These sessions will offer insight into key aspects of projects that are successful in getting grant support. Each panel will also feature a farmer who has received a grant from a funder being featured in that session. Farmers will be asked to describe their experiences with grants and give practical advice. Panel discussions are intended to increase participants’ confidence and improve their ability to target suitable grants.
Starting with the 2023 apple harvest, Keurig-Dr. Pepper (KDP), the parent company of Mott’s, are requiring all of their growers to undergo a successful food safety audit and subsequent certification in order to continue to deliver product to their facilities. For smaller growers that are strictly processing (no fresh fruit sales), this could have proved to be a stressful and difficult undertaking. Craig was approached by KDP in the offseason to offer a training to help their growers learn about Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), and what they can do (and may already be doing) to reduce the risk of microbial contamination on their farms. Another requirement of the audit certification is to have a farm food safety plan, that is use by the auditors during the audit. This workshop also offered a second (optional) farm food safety plan writing session. The 2-day workshop was held on February 2&3, 2023, and 19 people from 15 farms attended one or both days. In addition, there were eight total instructors, consisting of CCE educators and NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets produce safety auditors.

The end result was that these farms were given the tools they needed to successfully meet KDP’s food safety requirements. In addition, they learned additional ways to reduce microbial contamination risk on their farms. One farm followed up with Craig, and he was able to review their food safety plan prior to their audit, which was a successful one.
The team publishes timely information throughout the entire year for growers and industry members that enroll in the program via the county associations.

**“Email Blasts”** - Now that over 90% of our enrollees get electronic versions of our newsletter, the team continues to email more timely information and meeting announcements. We have continued to use this as a key source of key information in between *Fruit Notes* issues.

**“Fruit Facts”** is a weekly email report with horticultural reminders covering the day-to-day activities that are more time sensitive and important at that moment in the growing season. This report is available by fax or email for fruit and berry production.

The **“Harvest Maturity Report”** covers fruit ripening indicators for over 20 apple varieties. This report helps growers make good harvest decisions to ensure optimal fruit quality.

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**Team Publications**

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**LOF Announcements**

From the CCE Lake Ontario Fruit Program

In this LOF Announcements

WNY 11-12 mm Thinning and Pest/Disease Management Meetings Monday 5/22 (Orleans) & Tuesday 5/23 (Wayne), both 10:30 AM – Noon. No registration required.

**“Fruit Notes”** is a comprehensive newsletter covering time-relevant information on various fruit growing topics, for fruit and berry production. (12-16 issues per year, email or mail). A printed mailed copy will have an additional charge in 2024.

**Harvest Maturity Report #2**

August 30th, 2023
Craig J. Kahke, Area Extension Educator, Team Leader, Fruit Quality Management Cornell Cooperative Extension – Lake Ontario Fruit Program

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This is the second Apple Maturity Report for the 2023 harvest season. Reports will be sent out every week, with supplemental reports during peak season if needed.

**Maturity Update:** Although the wetter, cooler weather from most of the summer still have us behind in GDD, **maturity thus far in early-season varieties is highly variable**. While picking dates may average just a few days ahead of last season.
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