



# Cornell Cooperative Extension

## Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

**JANUARY—MARCH 2025**

## **ENYCH Helps Fruit and Vegetable Farmers Access Federal and State Funding Programs**

*Elizabeth Higgins, Ag Business Specialist*

A flood of new financial opportunities for fruit and vegetable farms kept Elizabeth Higgins busy this winter. In December 2024, USDA FSA announced a new program that provided a payment to specialty crop farms to help offset higher input costs, based on 2023 or 2024 sales. The Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops program made \$2.65 billion available, but applications were only accepted in a short window from Dec. 10, 2024, through Jan. 10, 2025. Higgins reached out to growers, directly by phone and email and through her newsletter, *The Bottom Line*, to make sure they were aware of the program and answered many grower questions about how to apply and what information would be needed. She cleared up misconceptions that this was a grant program focused on marketing. She also worked with CCE county offices and other regional ag programs, the NYS Horticulture Society and the NYS Veg Growers Association to ensure that their members were aware of this unique opportunity. FSA began distributing the initial payments on January 17, 2025, seven days after applications closed to over 55,000 specialty crop farms in the US. According to local USDA FSA offices, Eastern NY was well represented with applications.

NYS Ag and Markets, through the New York Farm Viability Institute, offered two new grant programs for farmers this winter; the Beginning Farmer Grant, and the NYS Grown and Certified Grant program. Both programs were unusual in that they offer funding for equipment and infrastructure to for-profit farms. Higgins worked closely with Farm Viability to reach out to growers through her newsletter, which reaches nearly 1600 people, as well as through direct outreach to growers. She personally reached 95 growers through her farm business planning course in January and February, at two statewide webinars and two in-person programs in January (in Dutchess County and Clinton County). She also fielded many calls and emails and provided direct assistance to several farms in Eastern NY on their proposals. According to Ailene Randolph of New York Farm Viability, Higgins' efforts to reach out to and educate growers about the program had a noticeable and significant impact on the future success of both grant programs as both programs received large pools of competitive applications in this first round. Two more rounds of these programs are budgeted for 2026 and 2027.

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## **2025 Eastern NY Fruit and Vegetable Conference Recap**

*Chuck Bornt, Vegetable Specialist*

This year marked the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Eastern NY Fruit and Vegetable Conference, which was held February 19 – 20, 2025 at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center. Even through the COVID years, CCE Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture staff, growers from the 17 counties (and beyond) and industry representatives have participated and made this show a destination for many. This year, we had a total of 343 registrants for Day 1 and 293 on Day 2, resulting in a 10% increase in attendees over 2024. There were also 47 different companies at this year's trade show, representing all aspects of the fruit and vegetable industry including machinery, seed and plant protection. Speakers included Cornell Faculty including researchers from the Hudson Valley Research Lab in Highland, NYS Department of Labor, Purdue University, NYS IPM, grower presenters from the region and other industry members such as Price Chopper/Market 32 executives. Now that this year is over, plans for 2026 have already begun!

## Leafy Greens Meeting Attracts Growers from Throughout the ENY Region

### *Crystal Stewart-Courtens, Vegetable Specialist*

In February, ENYCHP offered a leafy greens intensive in response to the organic grower needs assessment conducted earlier in the winter. This meeting, organized by Teresa Rusinek, Ethan Grundberg, and Crystal and held in Hyde Park, attracted nearly 40 growers for a deep dive into strategies to improve greens production year-round. Speakers from University of Massachusetts were invited to discuss trials on heat and disease tolerant varieties of spinach and lettuce, and a speaker from the University of Vermont highlighted an emerging technology used to rid the soil in high tunnels of diseases and weeds. Grower discussions ranged from varieties working well in changing climates, to methods used to control specific insect and disease issues. Growers left the meeting with new tools and techniques to improve their production practices in this growing season.

This workshop, along with the brassica and allium intensives, are part of a coordinated effort by the team to offer in-depth information that can help growers substantively improve their practices. These meetings often highlight the research being conducted by team members and our cooperators, and represent a novel and impactful educational technique that growers value.

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## A Variety of Winter Tree Fruit Programming

### *Mike Basedow, Tree Fruit Specialist*

In our previous ENYCHP grower evaluation forms, we learned Eastern NY tree fruit growers like to have a variety of programming options for their winter education, and enjoy hearing about a wide variety of production and business management topics. Our major winter program this year was once again the Albany Winter Fruit and Vegetable Conference, which took place on February 19 and 20. This year we offered three tree fruit sessions, and included a mix of production talks, along with marketing and business management topics. Topics were selected with direct feedback from grower surveys that were sent in November of 2024. Tree fruit sessions were attended by over 150 growers throughout the Eastern NY region on day 1, and nearly 80 growers on day 2. For the first time this year, we also recorded the presentations so growers unable to attend the conference in-person could watch the later. This idea came directly from a few ENY growers that had conflicts on those days. These growers were extremely appreciative to still be able to receive the timely information.

In addition to this large annual in-person event, we also held a few smaller, more focused meetings. Collaborating with Cornell faculty and the Lake Ontario Fruit Program (LOFP), we held a Honeycrisp, NY-1, and EverCrisp Intensive workshop in Syracuse on March 19 and 20<sup>th</sup>. This meeting was a deep dive into growing these challenging varieties, and was attended by growers statewide, including a few from the Champlain and Hudson Valley.

We also worked with Cornell faculty and colleagues at NYSIPM to host an IPM meeting in Chazy on March 28<sup>th</sup>, which was immediately followed in the afternoon with a plant growth regulator program that was held in partnership with Valent BioSciences and Valent USA.

All of these programs provided Eastern NY tree fruit growers many opportunities to attend a variety of winter tree fruit programming, whether in-person or online.



March 19, 2025 Cornell In-Depth Fruit School



March 28, 2025 Champlain Valley Apple Pest Management Refresher



## Garlic and Brassica Workshops Offer Farmer-to-Farmer Discussion Opportunities for North Country Growers

### *Elisabeth Hodgdon, Vegetable Specialist*

Growing well in cooler temperatures, alliums and brassicas are staple crops in the North Country and were highlighted by growers in this region as priorities for 2025 outreach. In March, ENYCHP offered two vegetable workshops focused on garlic and brassica crops in response to an organic grower needs assessment organized by specialist Crystal Stewart[1]Courtens. On March 4th, the workshop was offered in Essex County at the Whallonsburg Grange, and again on the 11th at the CCE St Lawrence County Learning Farm in Canton. A total of 37 farmers and agricultural service providers attended the workshops.

Both workshops featured presentations on production practices for garlic and brassicas, invasive leek moth and swede midge management, and brassica disease research results by ENYCHP team members Crystal Stewart-Courtens, Elisabeth Hodgdon, Teresa Rusinek, and Ethan Grundberg, as well as farmer David Marchant. A large portion of the program was dedicated to roundtable discussions on these crops, in addition to a general discussion of vegetable issues. Participants commented that they enjoyed the farmer-to-farmer format, which allowed them to learn from their peers and share their own expertise and experiences. Funding for these events was provided by the Northern NY Agricultural Development Program and the USDA Rural Business Development grant program



March 4, 2025 Essex workshop attendees hear about brassica production at North Point Community Farm before the brassica farmer-to-farmer.

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## Blueberry Pruning Workshop at Irona Berry Haven, Altona, NY

### *Heather Kase, Small Fruit Specialist*



March 26, 2025 Growers gather around young blueberry bushes to watch blueberry pruning demonstration.

On March 26th Elisabeth Hodgdon, Jennifer Stanton, and Heather Kase of ENYCHP, and Lindsey Pashow of Harvest NY, co-hosted a Blueberry Workshop in Clinton County NY. This workshop gave growers an in-depth understanding of dormant pruning blueberries, pest scouting in early spring, food safety, and agritourism. Growers got an introduction to the farm from the owner Jeffery Guerin, who offered insight on his production strategies. In the field, the snow held off for a demonstration how to prune established blueberry bushes from three to eight years in age. Challenging concepts, such as which canes to remove at a young plant age and other pruning decisions such as whether specific laterals should be removed, were discussed as a group, giving all growers an opportunity to state their reasoning and hear the thoughts of other growers and educators for the choices that were being made. Growers were also given insight to techniques such as how to tell determine the age of blueberry bush, and how to tell floral buds from lateral buds.

The interactive blueberry pruning workshop led to participants pruning individual bushes at Irona Berry Haven, with Jeffery and Heather observing, offering suggestions, and answering pruning questions. At the end, participants cleaned up pruned off laterals and put them in containers to be burned; burning laterals and canes were discussed in the demonstration as a technique for destroying debris appropriately as to not spread insects/disease. Donuts and coffee were provided, which is always a bonus.

## January—March 2025

**324** Phone Consults

**263** E-mail Consults

**72** Farm Visits

**55** Field Meetings and Trainings

**1737** Meeting and Training Attendees

**34** Webinars/Distance Learning

**1219** Distance Learning Participants

**11** Tree Fruit E-Alert reports were delivered to

**740** growers;

**3** Grape News were delivered to **311** growers;

**6** Berry News were delivered to **593** growers;

**4** Business Reports (The Bottom Line) were

delivered to **1584** ENYCH subscribers.



*The Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program is a Cornell Cooperative Extension partnership between Cornell University and the CCE associations in Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Essex, Fulton, Greene, Orange, Montgomery, Putnam, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Ulster, Warren, & Washington.*

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