

# Cornell Cooperative Extension

## Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL-JUNE 2025

## New Invasive Pest Research Projects Launched This Spring

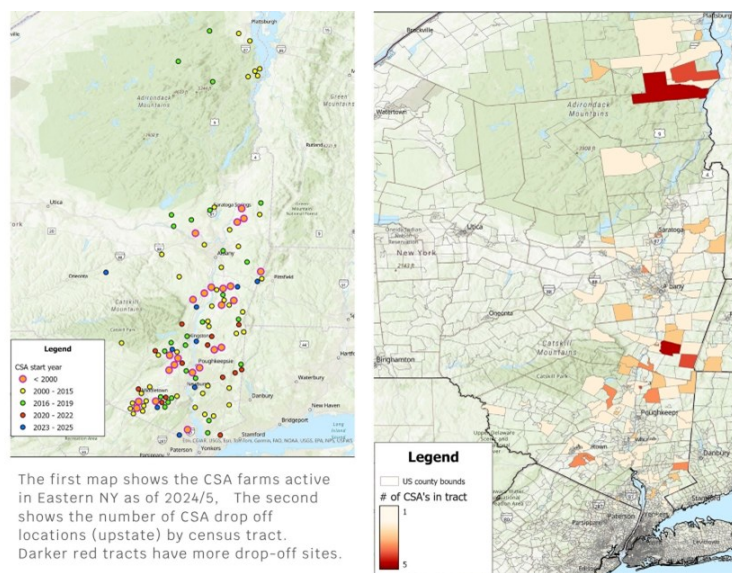
*Elisabeth Hodgdon, Vegetable Specialist*

New integrated pest management (IPM) projects were launched in the northern part of the ENY region for three invasive pests this spring: swede midge, leek moth, and spotted wing drosophila (SWD). The first project, funded by a Northeast SARE Research and Education grant awarded to Elisabeth Hodgdon, focuses on working with small-scale and organic vegetable growers to better manage swede midge, a pest of brassica crops. Monitoring for swede midge on farms, demonstration of ground barriers to prevent midge emergence, and IPM consultation with growers is underway on three farms in northern NY, as well as on additional urban farms in the western part of the state. Second, a leek moth monitoring network and biological control project began in April on four participating farms, funded by a Northern NY Agricultural Development Program grant awarded to Elisabeth Hodgdon. Results from the trapping network are used to assist allium growers with applying pesticides and other management strategies for leek moth. Parasitoid wasps are released on the farms to gauge grower perceptions of their efficacy to reduce leek moth damage in their crops. The wasps are egg parasitoids of the leek moth. Lastly, a NY Farm Viability Institute grant awarded to Anna Wallis includes three sites in ENY testing two new behavior-modifying products to manage SWD and reduce insecticide application in blueberry crops. The products include BioMagnet Ruby, an "attract and kill" product designed to lure flies to insecticide-coated sachets, and CombiProtec, a certified organic feeding stimulant added to insecticide to improve efficacy. Both products allow growers to either reduce their spray schedule or use lower doses of insecticides per spray.

## SUNY New Paltz Intern Helps to Develop Maps of CSA Farm and Customer Locations in Eastern NY

*Elizabeth Higgins, Ag Business Specialist*

This spring (2025) Liz Higgins worked with a SUNY New Paltz intern, Alec Azara, to collect CSA price and location data to develop GIS maps of CSAs in Eastern NY. One outcome of the project was that Alec, a graduating senior in Environmental Studies, created some of the first maps in the region of CSA distribution sites. These maps could be used by CSA farms to identify underserved or overserved markets. USDA Economic Research Service did a similar analysis about 10 years ago to identify areas in the USA where farmers markets were likely under or over-saturated as a marketing channel. The next steps for this project will be to overlay population, income and demographic data in order to help refine the analysis and to put the maps into an accessible format.



## New Approaches to Orchard Weed Management in Eastern NY

### ***Mike Basedow, Tree Fruit Specialist***

Over the past three growing seasons, a few orchardists have reached out to me for information on alternative orchard weed management approaches. Some previous work that has been done in this area on campus has found good results from using mulch underneath the trees, paired with organic herbicides in a stacked approach. At the same time, an influential grower in Western NY told me he was looking to purchase a mechanical weeding platform to evaluate in his orchard, and that I should consider looking into it in Eastern NY. A few months later, a Champlain Valley orchard purchased a similar piece of equipment.

Given all of this falling into place at the right time, we wrote an ARDP grant to look at two objectives: to look at using a stacked mulch and organic herbicide weed program in the Hudson Valley where suburban mulch is plentiful, and to evaluate the mechanical weeding tool here in the Champlain Valley. We were awarded the grant in the Spring of 2025, and our field trials are now fully up and running. At each site, we are comparing these novel approaches against the growers standard herbicide management practice.

While data collection is underway, a major focus of this project is the extension component as a real world field demonstration. We have been working very closely with the growers on this project, working with them on applying the mulch, deciding when to run the mechanical weeder, and when to apply the various herbicides.

In addition to our host farms, we are also showing the trials to growers so they can see the results firsthand. We held a field meeting at our Hudson Valley mulch site in Poughkeepsie on June 25<sup>th</sup>, and our hosting a meeting at the mechanical weeding site in Chazy on July 17<sup>th</sup>.

While still too early to tell, we anticipate the results of our work will help Eastern NY growers feel more confident in exploring some novel weed management approaches in their orchards in the coming years.



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## Collaborative Field Research with Spanish-Dominant Vegetable Growers

### ***Ethan Grundberg, Vegetable Specialist***

Along with colleagues Maria Jose Oviedo from the Cornell Small Farms Program, Raul Lemus Garza with Cornell Integrated Pest Management, and Javier Acosta from CCE Orange County, regional vegetable specialist Ethan Grundberg is working with a cohort of about 15 Spanish-dominant vegetable growers in 2025 to design, implement, and evaluate a collaborative field research trial focused on weed management in specialty Mexican herb production. On May 27th, the group worked together to install the research trial at Two Brothers Farm outside of Middletown in Orange County. The group had met over the winter and determined that evaluating different types of plastic mulch, including white, reflective, black, and biodegradable mulch types for their impact on weed suppression and the growth and development of crops like papalo and pipicha was a top priority. Modeled after rural popular education field schools in Central America, the “Escuela Campesino Agricola” will meet monthly in 2025 to collect data from the research trial, discuss other challenges and successes the cohort is facing, and visit other farms to learn about novel production systems in the region.



## Our 2025 Apple Thinning Meetings Provided Timely and Accurate Advice to Hudson Valley Growers

**Dan Donahue, Tree Fruit Specialist**

While one may think that harvest is the most stressful time of the year for apple producers, the truth is that thinning season wins that recognition. The 30-day period starting at full bloom is the window for managers to figure out how best to reduce the number of fruitlets on the tree by some 90%. While reducing yield might appear counter-productive, if there are too many apples on a tree at harvest, they will be too small in size to sell profitably and return bloom for next year will suffer. Plant hormones and their analogues are applied in carefully timed sprays to cause the tree to drop fruitlets. Honestly, the process could best be described as an uncertain combination of art, science and luck. Decision makers must rely on cooperative extension specialists, industry advisors, and their own experience for guidance. Chemistry, weather, tree health status, tree size, pre-bloom frosts and pollination factors are all taken into account. To assist our Hudson Valley apple growers in making these difficult decisions, CCE-ENYCHP conducts two grower meetings



precisely timed for 6-8 mm fruit size in Ulster and Columbia Counties. The information provided to the growers is supported by observations made during a tour of nine Hudson Valley orchards managing 3,000 acres the day before. Our advice in 2025 could be summarized as follows: Applications made at the bloom and petal fall timings were very effective. The window for thinning at 10-14 mm fruit size would be from May 15-18, after which the weather would turn too cold for thinners to work well. Growers who followed the advice given observed generally adequate thinning, while those that delayed applications were left with over-cropped trees. The fix for this mistake is hand thinning at a cost of \$500 - \$1,500 per acre, likely making hand-thinning the most expensive single labor operation during the growing season. Best to be avoided!

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## Northeastern Berry Call Shares Ideas and Observations Across 11 States and Provinces

**Heather Kase, Small Fruit Specialist**

Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Vermont, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Indiana extension agents join together every Tuesday for an hour to discuss berry phenology progress and collaborate on atypical observations in the field. Originally intended to be 14 meetings between April 1<sup>st</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup>, another meeting was heavily requested by participants, and the collaboration is seen as incredibly helpful. Phenological updates across the Northeast, Canada, and Indiana kept us informed on what to expect, or compare similar experiences, and pass that information along to our growers. Additionally, time was allocated to diagnosing issues in the field and lending potential solutions. It appears once potential diagnoses were discussed in the group, extension agents had more insight to helping their growers in the field once they inevitably came across the same issues. Two examples of this are sunscald/sunburn on blueberries, and symptoms brought on by last year's drought. Interstate collaboration was encouraged and sought out once connections were made via this weekly Northeastern meeting. From driving to troubled farms for teamwork on issues to diagnostic teams working together, extension agents are more apt to come together once meeting each other in the Northeast Berry Call, especially newer agents. Occasionally, other industry professionals were asked to speak at a Northeast Berry Call, discussing topics such as common berry pests and weed issues.

**April-June 2025****456** Phone Consults**290** E-mail Consults**573** Farm Visits**18** In-person Meetings and Trainings**366** In-person Program Attendees**13** Webinars/On-line Trainings**289** Distance Learning Participants**Eastern NY Commercial Hort Team Publications**

| Number Sent | Publication                   | Distribution List |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>11</b>   | Tree Fruit e-Alerts           | 749 growers       |
| <b>7</b>    | Veg News Issues               | 577 growers       |
| <b>3</b>    | Grape News Issues             | 322 growers       |
| <b>7</b>    | Berry News Issues             | 595 growers       |
| <b>4</b>    | The Bottom Line<br>(business) | 1562 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, Schoenectady, Schoharie, Ulster, Warren, & Washington.*

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