

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

JULY-SEPT 2025

Mohawk Valley Produce Auction Continues Supported Expansion

Crystal Stewart-Courtens, Vegetable Specialist

This year the Mohawk Valley Produce Auction reached the milestone of its first \$100,000 auction day and has continued expansion into markets in Connecticut, Vermont, Long Island, and Massachusetts. The winter auction infrastructure expansion project, which added another 100 feet auction house, made loading and unloading produce safer and easier and has provided room to accommodate the

influx of new produce growers into the region. Our program continues to support the auction through multiple educational meetings per year; in July, over 60 growers attending a field meeting that featured Dr. Steve Reiners and Judson Reid highlighting high tunnel tomato best practices, and Crystal leading an IPM field walk of brassica and winter squash crops. Additionally, the produce auction office hours continued to be an effective way for growers to receive regular support and guidance during the season.



Collaboration Working to Solve Issue of Rapidly Collapsing Strawberries in ENY

Heather Kase, Small Fruit Specialist

The 2025 June strawberry season proved to be an incredibly difficult one for growers. In addition to an very wet spring and very dry summer, some growers were reporting large volume of plant collapse. Though weather can contribute to collapse, rapid collapse was observed in newly planted bare roots; this includes bare roots planted around July 4th, which were collapsing or dead by mid-August. With the amount of collapse being reported, it was necessary to reach out to other colleagues – at Cornell and around the state. Within the University community, we established an email group consisting of Marvin Pritts, Anya Stansell, Janet van Zoeren, Anna Wallis, Scott Cosseboom, Elisabeth Hodgdon, and I. Additionally, we reached out to Nate Westrick, a strawberry pathologist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experimental Station, and met via the Northeastern Berry Call. Whenever a collapsed strawberry plant was observed, samples were both sent to Cornell Plant Diagnostic Lab and the Connecticut Agricultural Experimental station, as both labs use different methodologies to culture pathogens. Weed samples were also sent to Connecticut to identify if nematodes were present, if so the species was identified and quantified. In July, Anna, Scott, Nate, and I met at a farm that was experiencing vast and rapid collapse in their strawberries. After seeing things firsthand, we were able to diagnose the issue, after close to a month of trying to mitigate the spread while figuring out the cause. This instance, and all other grower reports, culminated into the potential to look further into why black root rot complex, specifically *Rhizoctonia*, is collapsing plants so vastly, and seemingly regardless of plant age. *Rhizoctonia* was identified on many of the submitted samples, often alone and in the absence of a nematode vector. These observations deserve more evaluation, and winter discussions will decide how to move forward.

Helping Growers Achieve On-Farm Efficiency

Chuck Bornt, Vegetable Specialist

Talk to any grower and they will tell you that their biggest cost and challenge is labor. On August 12, 2025 the CCE ENYCHP hosted a meeting at Altobelli Family Farm in Kinderhook, NY where nearly 50 growers were able to view first had several pieces of equipment that can improve their labor efficiency.

The first demonstration was a Toro Ag Tempus automated irrigation system that Altobelli Farms installed in April of this year. This system allows a grower to monitor, turn on or off irrigation systems around the farm. The system is Bluetooth enabled and can be accessed from anywhere using your phone and wireless connections. The system can be set to turn on and off automatically based on soil moisture probes placed throughout the field. They can be used on drip systems, overhead systems and even in greenhouses to turn fans on and off. The second piece of equipment demonstrated was a Wolf Pro Checchi & Magli transplanter and direct plastic mulch seeder (see photo). This unit is a combination of a transplanter and direct seeder that can plant through plastic mulch or bare ground. For direct seeding, a seeder mounted to the unit is used to place seed in cups that rotate on a carousel so only a driver is required. For transplanting, seats mounted on the unit allow workers to drop plants into the same cups that are used for direct seeding. Minimally, it takes two people to transplant, the tractor driver and the plant setter (depending on the size of the unit you have). Traditional direct seeding through plastic was done with a water wheel transplanter and took 3 people and was slow. The Wolf Pro can seed an acre in less than an hour and only requires the labor of one person, the tractor driver. Growers were also able to see a pneumatic tomato stake pounder, plastic mulch retriever, a harvest aid conveyor and several other pieces of equipment.



The Wolf Pro Seeder/Transplanter can reduce the number of people required to seed or transplant vegetable crops.

Summer Field Meetings Cater to a Diverse Orchard Community

Mike Basedow, Tree Fruit Specialist

While there is always work to be done around the orchards, July and early August generally give a little bit of time to hold field meetings. This allows us the opportunity to show ENY fruit growers our research trials in action during the production season, so they can observe treatment differences firsthand, and to also learn about new production practices while there is still potentially time to go home and make them happen during the rest of the field season.

On July 17, we held a Champlain Valley Orchard field day at Chazy Orchards. This meeting was developed for large, wholesale Champlain Valley orchards. This meeting highlighted much of Mike's ongoing trials being hosted by Chazy Orchards. Research trials highlighted included Mike's Gala and Honeycrisp fruit thinning trials, our Honeycrisp, Gala, and SnapDragon rootstock trials, mechanical weed management trials, and a review of Mike's previous systemic herbicide and mycorrhizal fungi work. In addition to seeing the results of these trials in the field, growers also heard from invited speakers, including Dr. Monique Rivera on woolly apple aphid management, Dr. Yosef Al Shoffe on soft scald control, and Dr. Jason Londo on rootstock winter cold hardiness.



On August 13, we held the Capital Region Orchard Twilight meeting at Mourningkill Farm and Bake Shop in Burnt Hills. This meeting was developed for small to medium sized, diversified fruit farms. At this meeting, owner Zac Boekeloo gave a tour of his orchard plantings, and spoke at length about his grafting program. From there, we then heard various talks on a range of topics. Kerik Cox discussed late season disease management. Andres Antolinez Delgado discussed late season insect management. Liz Higgins discussed accessing grants. Heather Kase discussed berry pest management, and Mike wrapped things up by discussing peach pest management.

Food Safety Workshops Held at Apple Packinghouses in ENY

Elisabeth Hodgdon, Vegetable Specialist

The pathogen *Listeria monocytogenes* is a serious food safety threat for fruit packing and processing facilities, and has been the cause of several high profile outbreaks and product recalls. This summer, two workshops on controlling *Listeria* in apple packinghouse environments were held in the Eastern NY region, one in Ulster County on June 26 and the other on August 14 in Clinton County. A total of 28 packinghouse employees and facility managers attended the workshops. Food science professor Dr. Abigail Snyder and graduate students Rory Wang, Lyle Massoia, and Calvin Slaughter presented information on *Listeria* biology, monitoring, cleaning and sanitizing, and recognizing risk factors in the packinghouse environment. The afternoon portion of the program included a tour of a nearby apple packinghouse. Participants toured Porpiglia Farms in the Hudson Valley, and Chazy Orchards in the Champlain Valley. Hands-on activities allowed participants to try ATP testing (swabbing) of packhouse equipment, measuring the concentration of sanitizers, and to practice teaching back the content to their peers. Hosts at each packinghouse discussed their cleaning and sanitizing routines, and gave demonstrations of drain cleaning and other protocols. A third *Listeria* workshop was also held in Wayne County, hosted by the Lake Ontario Fruit Program, following our August program. We would like to thank our speakers and packinghouse hosts for working with us to hold these informative workshops.



Graduate student Lyle Massoia leads a demonstration of swabbing and ATP testing as part of an environmental monitoring program for apple packinghouses.

Tomato Variety Trial Updates from the Hudson Valley

Teresa Rusinek, Vegetable Specialist

This summer we ran several tomato variety trials to introduce growers to new varieties and to determine which varieties are best suited to be grown in the eastern NY region. A “slicer” tomato trial was run in both the Capital District and Mid-Hudson Valley. Slicer tomatoes are typically larger, round hybrids that are bred for a meaty texture and firm consistency making them ideal for eating fresh on sandwiches and salads. Each trial featured fourteen varieties that were harvested five times over the season by ENYCHP specialists and evaluated for marketable yield, size, and defects such as cracking. In July, a field day was organized at the Hudson Valley site in New Paltz where growers from the region the opportunity had to walk through the trial and talk with Cornell vegetable plant breeder Greg Vogel and horticulturist Steve Reiners. Another tomato trial we ran this season included “Hy-loom” varieties grown in high tunnels. A Hy-loom tomato is a cross between a hybrid and a heirloom tomato, each having desired characteristics such as disease resistance or excellent flavor. Plants were evaluated weekly for disease resistance and numerous harvests provided data on marketable yield and common defects. A tomato tasting event was hosted at the farm to collect input from consumers on flavor and texture preferences. Results from the trials will be presented to growers in newsletters and ENYCHP winter conference presentations.



Farmers at slicer tomato trial field meeting.



Slicer tomatoes with crack defect at harvest evaluation.



Samples set up for tomato tasting event.

ENYCHP and NYSDEC Host Hudson Valley Pesticide Training

Dan Donahue, Tree Fruit Specialist

Farms in New York State undergo inspections by officers from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) for compliance with federal and state pesticides regulations. Inspections are generally unannounced and thorough, including the review of the farmer's pesticide application records, compliance with central posting requirements, as well as the safety of pesticide storage and mixing facilities, availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the required decontamination supplies/facilities.

CCE-ENYCHP staff in collaboration with NYSDEC officials hosted a two hour "mock" farm pesticide inspection event training at the Cornell Hudson Valley Laboratory in Highland, NY on August 4th, 2025. The training was open to all interested Hudson Valley farmers and predominantly attended by those producing apples, grapes and vegetables. Approximately 30 farmers participated along with five US-EPA staff from New Jersey. Attendees were very pleased with the quality of the training and appreciated the opportunity to interact directly with state and federal regulators in a neutral, non-inspection setting. Privately certified pesticide applicators in NYS (most farmers) are required to renew their applicators license every five years by accumulating at least ten recertification credits, and this meeting offered 2 NYS DEC pesticide recertification credits. CCE trainings such as this foster pesticide safety on our farms and contribute to the continued success of agriculture in NYS.

Cornell Enologist Visits Capital District

Jeremy Schuster, Grape/Viticulture Specialist

On July 31st, Cornell Enologists Chris Gerling and Anna Katherine Mansfield visited the Capital District to meet with local grape growers and gather feedback on the biggest challenges faced by growers in the Upper Hudson AVA. The meeting had a strong turnout, with engaging discussions taking place. A total of six wineries were represented.

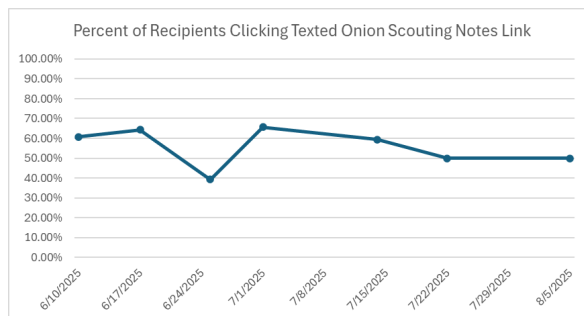
Growing grapes in the Upper Hudson AVA is noticeably different from grape growing in the Hudson Valley AVA. In the Upper Hudson AVA (Capital District), most of the grapes cultivated are hybrid or French-American varieties. This is due to the region's colder winters and risk of a late frost. As a result of growing hybrids, growers face significant challenges, including high acidity and low tannins in the wine, as well as issues like sour rot and drainage in the vineyard. These challenges are currently the focus of active research. The growers had the opportunity to provide input not only on the challenges of making wine with hybrid grapes but also to offer feedback for Dr. Oravec's grapevine breeding program regarding their preferences for hybrid grape varieties. They also shared ideas with enologists and fellow growers about wine nomenclature. Typically, wine nomenclature consists of the grape variety name or the region name found in other parts of the world. However, in the Capital District, there is not yet a reconnection to these naming conventions for hybrids or the Capital District. Therefore, growers discussed how they name their wines and how they educate their customers about hybrid grapes. In the process, the growers developed a vision for what they want their region to be.

Lastly, the growers were able to give suggestions for winemaking research. Those included everything from fermentation sequences and yeast strain impacts to acid control, filtration, and labeling of hybrid wines. Many of these hybrids in production are less than 30 years old; thus, questions remain on how well hybrid wines will age. One research collaboration did develop from the meeting, with the grape grower being very excited to increase their involvement in the research.

Modernizing Outreach to Orange County Onion Growers

Ethan Grundberg, Vegetable Specialist, and Sarah Tobin, Support Specialist

For the 2025 growing season, vegetable specialist Ethan Grundberg and extension support specialist Sarah Tobin collaborated to more effectively provide onion growers with timely scouting reports and management recommendations. Grundberg and Tobin scouted three onion fields dispersed across the black dirt region each week during the peak production season and publicly shared observations on pest and disease pressure. The scouting notes were then published on the ENYCHP blog before growers received a text alert with an embedded link directly to the scouting notes each Wednesday. Multiple onion growers provided unsolicited positive feedback about the approach and followed up directly with Grundberg for more tailored guidance on crop management after reading the reports. On average over the 10 weeks that reports were shared via text, more than 50% of recipients clicked through to read the notes. Compared to the metrics that exist on click through rates for emailed outreach methods, this represents a significant increase in engagement.



CCE Ulster and ENYCH Team collaborate on summer legislative tour

Elizabeth Higgins, Farm Business Management Specialist

This summer CCE Ulster and ENYCH ag educators organized a farm tour for Ulster County legislators, congressional staff, and Ulster County Economic Development Agency staff to showcase the support that Cornell Cooperative Extension offers to growers in the county. On July 9 four farms were visited along the 209/Rondout Valley corridor highlighting our work with cut flower, vegetable and fruit, livestock and agritourism. The tour was also an opportunity for legislators and economic development agencies to get direct feedback from growers about what the current climate is for commercial farming operations in the county and what support the county could provide that would help to keep production agriculture viable. Land access, cost of labor, lack of livestock processing facilities were raised as concerns.

Thanks to Stars of the Meadow Farm, Catskills Wagyu Beef, Long Season Farm and Kelder's Farm for opening up their farms and sharing their farm's history, current operations and future goals with the tour attendees.



July—September 2025 Numbers

556 Phone Consults

257 E-mail Consults

540 Farm Visits

34 Field Meetings and Trainings

1 Online Course

891 Meeting and Training Attendees

25 Tree Fruit E-Alert reports were delivered to **742** growers;

12 Veg News were delivered to **572** growers;

6 Grape News were delivered to **316** growers;

6 Berry News were delivered to **597** growers;

4 Business Reports (The Bottom Line) were delivered to **1557** 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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