Cornell Cooperative Extension

Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

Quarterly Highlights

OCT - DEC 2025

Cover Crop Event in Willsboro Highlights New Research and Technology

Elisabeth Hodgdon*, Vegetable Specialist*

On Oct 21, farmers and agricultural service providers gathered at the Cornell Willsboro Research Farm in Essex County for ENYCHP's Cover Crop Field Meeting. The meeting highlighted new research projects at the farm, included a farmer-to-farmer discussion on cover cropping in the North Country, and ended with a demonstration of seeding winter rye into sweet corn by drone. The research projects included a winter pea nursery planted at the farm this fall. Dr. Solveig Hanson from Dr. Ginny Moore's cover crop lab on campus discussed best management practices for growing winter peas, and pea contributions to soil health in a farm's cropping system. CCE's Judson Reid gave the audience a tour of our latest high tunnel project, a variety trial of different cover crop species and mixtures that will overwinter and provide soil fertility for next summer's tomato crop. Alex Menard, owner of Precision Spraying in Clinton County, discussed the pros and cons of aerial seeding cover crops by drone. Participants enjoyed seeing the technology out in the field, seeding winter rye into a sweet corn stand. 21 attended the program, representing horticultural and field crop operations, local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Controlling Colorado Potato Beetle with Alternative Methods

Chuck Bornt, Teresa Rusinek, Ethan Grundberg,* and *Sarah Tobin, Vegetable Specialists

In the late summer of 2024, ENYCHP specialists were contacted by an organic potato grower in Ulster County, reporting that they were not having any luck controlling Colorado Potato Beetle (CPB) with their normal insecticide applications of the organic insecticide called Entrust (active ingredient: spinosad). This was a common issue that was being reported throughout the Northeast and beyond and CCE ENYCHP specialists immediately collected egg masses, nymphs and adults from the grower's field mentioned above, to be sent to Cornell University Entomologist, Dr. Brian Nault for insecticide resistance screening. Upon completion of the screening, it was determined that 90% of the CPB's collected from this farm were resistant to Entrust.

The next step was to determine what could be done for the rest of the 2024 season, but more importantly, how to move forward in 2025. While researching alternative control options, a newer technology of using a "plant sweeper" to physically "sweep" the beetles off the plants and into a catch basin seemed to have some very good control possibilities. A one-row unit was purchased by CCE ENYCHP from a local grower in Vermont that is building small commercial units. The plant sweeper or "Beetle Bopper" was one of 4 different treatments used in trials during the 2025 season. Potatoes were harvested this fall from all the treatments with the Beetle Bopper resulting in one of the highest yields compared to the other treatments.

This research led to several developments. First, a local grower that borrowed the ENYCHP Beetle Bopper, was impressed with the control he received that they are in the process of purchasing a 2-row unit from a Dutch company called FieldWorkers, to hopefully be delivered in time for Spring of 2026. Second, the results were also encouraging enough that ENYCHP received additional funding to purchase a 2-row unit and continue with further research on alternative CPB control methods.

Improving Red Color and Quality of EverCrisp

Daniel Donahue*, Tree Fruit Specialist*

The EverCrisp apple is a recent introduction from the Midwest Apple Improvement Association and has currently found favor with both growers and consumers in the Hudson Valley. Producers have much to learn about how to grow, when to pick, and under what conditions to store this high-quality cross of the Fuji and Honeycrisp varieties. Fuji and Honeycrisp have been consumer favorites but challenging to grow. What surprises does this new variety have in store, we need to find out. Our oldest plantings are only in their nineth year, literally "infancy" for an apple variety, and we are already regonizing issues with red color development and internal water core. In short, delaying harvest to improve red color also increases the incidence and severity of water core. Moderate water core can result in rejection of entire truck loads by the wholesale buyers.

ENYCHP staff in the Hudson Valley conducted a large,, replicated experiment in 2025 to evaluate the use of mylar reflective ground cover as well as spray applications of micronutrients, macronutrients, and a plant growth regulator to improve red color. Apples were harvested in three weekly picks and evaluated for a number of fruit quality and maturity parameters. Apples from two of the experimental treatments were placed in refrigerated storage and will be re-evaluated after four months. Our secondary objective is to determine the optimum harvest date that maximisers red color, minimizes water core, provides a excellent consumer experience (sugar content, fruit firmness, appropriate titratable acidity), while providing a good financial return for the grower.

Our preliminary results are suggesting that mylar light-reflecting ground cover improves red color. Our data analysis is ongoing and will continue through the end of the storage period in March. Preliminary results will be presented at our 2026 CCE-ENYCHP Fruit & Vegetable Conference where attendees will hear our updated recommendations for the 2026 EverCrisp crop.

Strawberry Seminar in Cornell Small Farms Program's BF 122: Berry Production

Heather Kase*, Small Fruit Specialist*

Similarly to December 2025, working in conjunction with Harvest NY's Anya Stansell and Ag & Market's Jim O'Connell, CCE ENYCHP Small Fruit Specialist delivered an approximately 50-minute-long seminar on Strawberry 101. This included information on site selection considerations, pre-planting tasks, planting strategies, cultivar selection, integrated pest (and disease) management, and other information regarding strawberry production. This information served as new information to beginner strawberry farmers, or a refresher for current strawberry farmers. A presentation was given via Zoom to growers across all of New York State. Questions were then answered within a 20-minute session, making the total presentation including questions just short of 1.5 hours. This was the Week 5 seminar within the 6-week long Berry Production course offered by Cornell Small Farms program.

Can a Chemical Apple Thinner Be Repurposed to Reduce Bitter Pit in Honeycrisp?

Michael Basedow, *Tree Fruit Specialist and* Jenn Stanton, *Program Aide*

Honeycrisp is a popular apple variety that has the potential to bring the highest returns by variety to the apple grower… if all goes well. Unfortunately, this apple is one of the most difficult to grow, and packouts can suffer from a number of disorders. Bitter pit one such disorder, which leaves fruit with bitter, sunken pits in the peel of the fruit. While growers can potentially increase their profitability with Honeycrisp by storing a portion of their fruit when supply is more limited, bitter pit has prevented a roadblock for stored fruit, as fruit that appear clean going into storage can come out a few months later with significant (30-50%) losses from bitter pit.

NAA is a plant hormone that is used by growers for thinning apples when fruit are 6 to 15mm in size. Interestingly, recent research out of Michigan suggests NAA could be applied to Honeycrisp later (at 30, 45, and 60 days after petal fall) to reduce bitter pit. However, this remained unevaluated in Eastern NY conditions.

In the spring of 2025, we coordinated with local growers and Fine Americas (who manufactures a formulation of NAA) to conduct replicated on farm experiments. One experiment was held in Chazy, and the second in Peru. Trees were treated at the recommended rates and timings. Fruit were harvested at commercial harvest timings, and stored for at least 90 days in commercial storage.

While we have not yet evaluated the Chazy samples, the treated Peru samples showed no decrease in the amount of bitter pit. In addition, we also noticed at harvest at both sites that the overall crop load on the treated rows was much lower than the control rows. While we usually don't anticipate seeing a thinning response from NAA that late in the season, we believe we likely did see some this year based on our data.

While this data does not appear very promising for the future use of this material for this purpose, it demonstrates the need to systematically field test research studies from other regions in our local real world grower conditions. The growers would much rather have strong data from small plot extension experiments before they test these experimental programs at a larger scale on their orchard.

Sweet Potato Variety Trial

Sarah Tobin, Ethan Grundberg, *and* Teresa Rusinek, *Vegetable Specialists*

This summer, we conducted a field trial to evaluate the yield and culinary quality of several purple skin, white flesh sweet potato varieties in collaboration with Christina Chan of Choy Division Farm. Growers in the Hudson Valley have struggled to identify sweet potato varieties that perform well in local soils while meeting the needs of Asian specialty markets. The trial was conducted at the Chester Agricultural Center in Orange County, NY on Pinnebog muck soil.

Sweet potato breeder Dr. Don R. La Bonte of Louisiana State University focuses on developing new cultivars for the sweet potato industry. In this trial, we evaluated two of his experimental selections, '21-157' and '21-260,' alongside slips produced on site from sweet potatoes sourced from the Korean grocer H-Mart and the northeastern commercial standard, 'Murasaki,' for both yield and taste. No statistically significant differences were observed in yield among varieties. However, in the culinary evaluation, the H-Mart variety received the highest scores, followed closely by '21-260.' Results will be shared with Dr. La Bonte and farm collaborators.

SAVE THE DATE

2026 Eastern New York Fruit and Vegetable Conference
February 25-26, 2026

The Crowne Plaza Desmond Hotel & Conference Center
660 Albany Shaker Road Albany, NY 12211

View the schedule, register, and find out more at:
http://tiny.cc/2026-eny-fvc

October - December 2025 Numbers

228	Phone Consults
206	E-mail Consults
100	Farm Visits
12	Field Meetings and Trainings
330	Meeting Attendees
7	Online Meetings and Trainings
385	Meeting Attendees

Eastern NY Commercial Hort Team Publications

Publication Name	Issues Sent	Recipients
Tree Fruit E-Alert	9	725
Grape News	2	672
Berry News	6	591
The Bottom Line (business)	5	1537

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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