



2012 Recommendations for Strategic Investments in New York's Small Farms



About the 2012 Small Farm Summit

On February 29th, 2012, the Cornell Small Farms Program, in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension, hosted the 4th NY Small Farms Summit. This statewide, interactive gathering engaged over 150 farmers, educators, policy makers and community members to evaluate emerging opportunities and prioritize investments to enhance the viability of New York's small farms.

Prioritizing Investment for Small Farms: The Process

To recruit a more voices to the discussion, the Cornell Small Farms Program distributed a survey prior to the Summit. We invited small farmers and stakeholders to rank a list of emerging opportunities in order of importance. We asked respondents to take the 'bird's eye' view and consider how they would prioritize investments not only for their own farm or business, but for their community and colleagues.

We received 573 responses. The demographic of the respondents is shown in Figure 1. We sorted the results of the survey to reflect regional priorities (Figure 2) and presented the cumulative results to participants at the Small Farms Summit. We asked attendees to brainstorm together to create a realistic vision for advancing these and any new opportunities, within a 5 year period. The following report is a culmination of the vision provided to us by the collective 720 survey and meeting participants.

Who Should Read this Report?

Recommendations in this report are intended for *anyone* serving New York's small farm sector. This includes educators, researchers, policy makers, producer organizations, non-profits, agricultural service providers, farmers, businesses and community groups. Additional supporting information on these priorities is available at the Cornell Small Farms Program website: <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/projects/summit/>

Survey Respondents

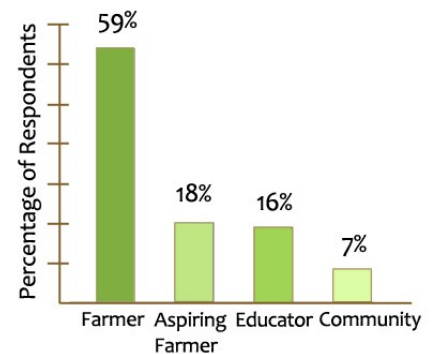


Figure 1

Survey Regions

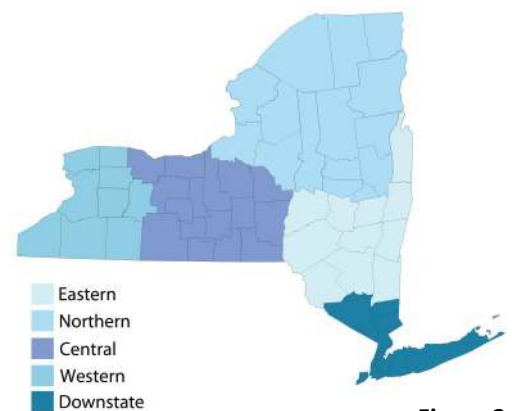


Figure 2

5 Ways to use this Report

- ◆ Justify grant/funding proposals
- ◆ Promote rural economic development and revitalization
- ◆ Stimulate farmer discussion
- ◆ Influence policy-makers
- ◆ Target investment to support the viability of small farms

Top Statewide Priorities to Enhance Viability of Small Farms

PRIORITY 1: Develop FOOD DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES (e.g. collaborative marketing, product pooling and trucking, food hubs) to expand small farm access to local and regional markets

WHY IT MATTERS

While many farmers value direct-marketing for a higher return and the satisfaction of a personal relationship with the customer, increasing numbers of small farms across the state are looking to move product through more economical and efficient food distribution channels. We lack basic knowledge of best approaches, long term strategies, and incentives to help small producers distribute their products to regional markets. Currently, many of our small farms do not have enough labor or product volume to justify the packaging, storage, transportation or liability costs associated with wholesale production or to meet wholesale buyer needs. By aggregating small farm products together, economics of distribution can be improved. There is demand and opportunity for these farmers to increase production capacity if more access to such systems were available.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

⇒ Identify bottlenecks in local and regional food purchasing and distribution.

- ⇒ Create and evaluate strategies that increase farmer-distributor-customer connections.
- ⇒ Provide support and education for new distributor businesses and farmer networks to increase the likelihood of long-term success.
- ⇒ Cultivate new and different collaborations among food distribution, local transportation and local and regional economic development councils.

“There is a mis-match between the productive capacities of many small operations and large segments of the market. Hopefully such strategies could help bridge those gaps--making it possible for small operators to thrive.”

-Farmer, Dutchess County

Connecting Farmers & Distributors

Is selling through a distributor right for you? Check out the “Faces of our Food System” series in the Small Farm Quarterly Magazine to read interviews with distributors who serve small farmers. <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/quarterly/>

PRIORITY 2: Document ECONOMIC IMPACT of SMALL FARMS on their communities to increase investment in and support of small farms

WHY IT MATTERS

While we understand the social benefits, there is very limited research and data available that documents the economic impact of small farms on their communities. This lack of data challenges federal, state and local policy makers and municipal employees, community members, and even agricultural economists to articulate the positive value of small farms on local and regional economies. Understanding the contributions of small farms relative to jobs and economic activity will improve access to financial and other support of this sector from private, philan-

thropic, and government resources. Quantifying this impact will also help small farm groups advocate for more resources, garner more focused attention from cooperative extension programs, and justify community investments in infrastructure to grow this important agricultural sector.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

⇒ Collaborate with local communities to develop methodologies and measurements of small farm economic impact to inform future investment decisions at the county, state and regional levels.

- ⇒ Fund pilot programs on different economic impact analysis approaches to improve data collection & generate case studies
- ⇒ Convey findings to both general audiences & economic development councils to attract the widest possible investment.

“Policy makers are political creatures and need to justify their decisions to others. Documentation makes an argument much more compelling to all.”

-Farmer, Tompkins County

Ag Economic Development Trends

Just released! The new report **“Agriculture-Based Economic Development in NYS: Trends and Prospects”** explains the economic contributions and evolving linkages between agricultural production, agricultural service, food manufacturing, and distribution & marketing to consumer markets. This information is essential in defining appropriate firm, industry, and public policy strategies to strengthen opportunities for economic development and improve the competitiveness of agribusiness industries. Download the report: <http://dyson.cornell.edu/>

PRIORITY 3: Develop new and expand existing **LIVESTOCK PROCESSING FACILITIES** and evaluate **LIVESTOCK PROCESSING REGULATIONS AND POLICY** for impact on small farms

WHY IT MATTERS

Small-scale livestock producers are limited in their ability to meet the growing demand for locally-raised meats because of the shrinking number of slaughter and processing facilities and restrictions imposed by current regulations. The combined issues limit the potential use of millions of acres in NY for grazing livestock and producing forages. Additionally, regulations affecting processing facilities are often not scale appropriate, which can be a disincentive for processors to open or to expand their operations. Farmers commonly report receiving different interpretations of regulations depending on which NYDAM, USDA, CCE, DEP, DOH office they contact. Without scale-appropriate and consistent processing regulations, policies, and interpretation, small-scale livestock producers will continue to be limited in their ability to market their products locally and regionally.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

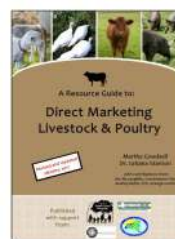
- ⇒ Conduct educational programs on managing new small-scale slaughter and processing facilities.
- ⇒ Create new associations among producers and processors to improve the scheduling bottleneck and foster more effective collaboration.

- ⇒ Create a USDA-equivalent for state inspected slaughter facilities
- ⇒ Clarify & streamline rules and regulations for small producers and processors, and ensure they are scale-appropriate.
- ⇒ Train inspectors and regulators on farmer intent versus interpretation of regulations to reduce the confusion and lack of clarity for farmers and processors alike.

“I started farming in Orleans County in 1983. Since that time I have watched 10 or 11 small slaughter houses close up. Sometimes we have to wait several months before we can get an animal scheduled for processing.”

-Farmer, Orleans County

Guide to Direct Marketing Livestock



A Resource Guide to Direct Marketing Livestock and Poultry helps to clarify & explain complex laws in layman terms, discussing slaughtering and processing at all levels. Download at <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/>

PRIORITY 4: Identify ALTERNATIVE FINANCING STRATEGIES accessible to small farms

WHY IT MATTERS

Access to capital limits small farm enterprise development. Many banks avoid small businesses and non-conforming loans, the classification of most small farm loans. Although the Farm Service Agency (FSA) has made tremendous improvements in providing capital to this sector, small-scale farmers often feel that FSA is not consistently able to assist their diversified operations. While there are a myriad of FSA and other financing options available, small farmers report that it can be very challenging to navigate all the options and resources without assistance. Clearly defining alternative finance strategies for small producers, whether from the local banks, FSA, or community members themselves, would strengthen this sectors' ability to more quickly respond to local and regional demand. Financing is needed to buy equipment and land, to expand operations, and to improve infrastructure.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- ⇒ Support and educate farmers to ensure they are writing solid business plans and maintaining detailed balance (cost/revenue) sheets.
- ⇒ Collaborate with agricultural funders and banks

to provide educational programs, materials and guidance to assist small farmers in navigating sources for traditional loans such as banks, FSA, USDA and non-traditional sources such as community investment funds (i.e., slow money) and venture capital.

“A major barrier to entry for new producers is access to reasonable financing. It can be tricky to navigate all options and resources by oneself. It would be helpful to have clearly defined alternative finance strategies, whether those came from the local credit unions, USDA financing, or community members themselves.”

-Farmer, Delaware County

Looking for grants & loans?



An increasing number of grant & loan programs are available to farmers. If you're exploring how to finance your farm, visit our extensive library of opportunities at: www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/

PRIORITY 5: Advocate for GREATER INVESTMENT IN SMALL FARM SERVICES (i.e. research, extension and education)

WHY IT MATTERS

Farmers are losing access to critical information because of shrinking Cornell Cooperative Extension and other educational services. Demand for relevant and timely small farm resources, trainings, and innovations is consistently higher than supply. Small-scale farmers often lack the resources to hire private consultants and the time to conduct their own research to solve problems. Information and services provided by agricultural educators are critical to prepare small-scale farmers for new methods of production, changing market conditions, and new climate and weather patterns. More research directed at increasing the

viability of small farms is critical in enabling this sector to be the most efficient, competitive, cooperative, attractive and sustainable as possible. Maintaining a robust and up-to-date small farm research and education agenda will maintain productivity across the majority of farms in New York.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- ⇒ Increase funding to agriculture educators, service providers, researchers & producer groups serving small farms to develop new techniques for more efficient small-scale production and marketing.

- ⇒ Position faculty and staff at Cornell University to take a leading role in research & education toward rebuilding the local food economy & addressing constraints to ag development and distribution.
- ⇒ Conduct evaluation to insure that new projects are effective in promoting small farm viability.

“I have benefitted greatly from the Cooperative Extension and other local Farm Service Agencies. It seems the money for these is disappearing. Yet many of the decisions I make are based on research information about the ag. systems I am working with. It would be very difficult to farm without that info.”
 -Farmer, Broome County

PRIORITY 6: Develop and promote affordable ENERGY CONSERVATION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES for small farms

WHY IT MATTERS

Utility and energy costs are one of the fastest rising operating expenses on small farms. Farmers are looking to expand and diversify to make a profit while maintaining quality products. Energy conservation and use of renewable energy sources reduces the volatility of production costs and the farm’s environmental impact. By identifying and implementing appropriate conservation strategies, small farms can better manage rising energy costs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- ⇒ Provide farmers with resources outlining local, state, and federal incentives and support for integrating conservation and renewable energy technology into their farms.
- ⇒ Conduct research to identify which energy options

are relevant to small-scale farms and quantify return on investment for each scenario.

- ⇒ Host field days on farms that can demonstrate practical conservation techniques.

Sustainable Energy Virtual Tour

Go on a “Virtual Tour” of small farms around NY that are saving energy and switching to renewable power at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/farm-energy

“We are constantly trying to save money, save the environment, and yet we have a need for fuel & energy. In the end, we cause more pollution than we like. By becoming more conservative and with the use of renewable energy, we cut down on this.”
 -Farmer, Clinton County

PRIORITY 7: Develop strategies to expand on AGRICULTURAL LAND ACCESS

WHY IT MATTERS

With 3 million acres of idle agricultural lands in New York, ample opportunities exist for expanding agriculture production. However, land owners often do not understand the value of putting their land back in production. Similarly, farmers wishing to access the land do not always understand why landowners might be opposed to renewed cultivation of land or the contractual obligations both parties must fulfill. Small farmers need affordable land for purchase or option for long-term leases. Investment in environmental stewardship is limited when long term land tenure is not secure. Additionally, it is difficult to re-

ceive grant funding and secure loans when a farmer does not have a long-term lease. New York has the land base to expand opportunities for land access and ownership by small farmers.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- ⇒ Conduct comprehensive, easily accessible agricultural land surveys and plans on a county and state basis to document the available agricultural land as well as the limited parcels in more densely populated counties. These surveys could be used by non-farm landowners, farmers, and service providers alike.

- ⇒ Increase number of regional Farmer/Landowner match programs. Provide up-to-date databases populated with detailed property descriptions, sample leases and directory to local agricultural educators trained in facilitation and mediation. Follow up with successful matches to provide ongoing support.
- ⇒ Design strategies to improve communication among land owners and farmers, with support and coordination from agricultural partners and policy makers to ensure farmland accessibility.

“The number one reason I am having problems expanding my farm is access to additional land. Every farmer requires land and it seems this is out of reach.”
 -Farmer, Schoharie County

Land Link Programs

There are a growing number of land-link programs in New York and the Northeast. Find a directory of organizations near you at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/beginning-farmer/

PRIORITY 8: Promote Resources and Education targeting CONSUMER EDUCATION IN LOCAL FARMS AND FOOD

WHY IT MATTERS

Despite consumers’ growing interest in local, regional, and fresh foods, farmers still struggle with how to best educate their customers on the value of their farms, their products and their contribution to local community vitality and economic development. Ongoing efforts towards increasing consumer education, while important, remain inadequate as consumer agriculture and food literacy levels are still low. Consumer education should include highlighting the values inherent to a local and sustainable food system, diversity of farming systems and impacts of climate and seasonality on product availability. Training is also needed preparing whole foods economically and efficiently as an alternative to processed foods.

- ⇒ Train farmers in marketing, promotion & building a loyal customer base. Offer classes/workshops in targeting the right market, capturing market share, pricing, packaging, selling through new online channels and connecting to consumers through social media.

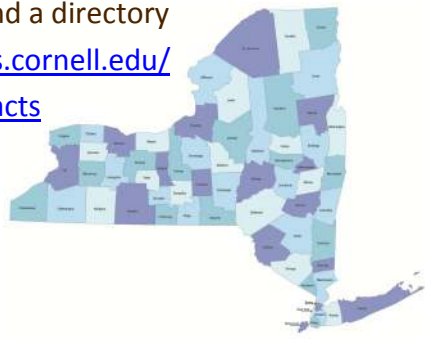
“We need more allies. We need consumers engaged in local agriculture. Showing the general public what benefits small farms bring to a community will increase the support we have.”
 -Farmer, Suffolk County

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- ⇒ Design and facilitate workshops around local food purchasing and home food preparation to increase individuals’ skills to cook and process local and seasonal foods.
- ⇒ Embed food literacy in school curriculum to instill a long-term attitude and behavior change among the next generation of eaters and consumers.
- ⇒ Increase the visibility of farmers and their products through maps, profiles, articles, media reports, and field days to increase consumers’ con-

Need Local Help?

Almost all of New York’s 57 counties — and New York City — now have a designated Cornell Cooperative Extension “Small Farm Contact” to answer your questions. Find a directory at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/contact/local-contacts



NEXT STEPS: ACTION!

The 2012 Small Farms Summit provided a venue for small farm supporters across the state to meet, prioritize opportunities, and suggest specific actions for meaningful change and progress. The outcome of that process is now in your hands, and it's time to put the knowledge to work. Bring the report to a town hall meeting, a producer group, or a legislator. Choose a 'recommended action' that inspires you, or generate your own creative approach to addressing a priority area. Reach out—to farmers, educators, representatives from USDA, state colleges, economic development councils, farm service companies, planning commissions and farm advocacy groups—to forge a collaboration that can tackle the complexity of the issue. Cite this report as justification when applying for funding to support your project. Stay in touch. We'd like to share any outcomes of your work.

For Detailed Information....

The information in this report is a concise summary derived from a rich transcript of hundreds of voices across New York. To obtain more detail about any priority listed in this report, we encourage you to visit the Cornell Small Farms Program website:

<http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/projects/summit/>

You'll find:

- ◆ **A ranked list of the complete 16 priority areas.** To keep this report concise, we discussed only the top 8 priorities as ranked by the respondents of our online survey and the statewide Small Farms Summit meeting. You'll find Priorities 916 posted online.
- ◆ **Justifications for Recommendations.** The 573 survey respondents collectively provided a massive volume of thoughtful feedback justifying their rank of priorities. Read a summary of the additional justifications and recommendations for the issues described in this report in respondents' own voices online.
- ◆ **Video of the 2012 Small Farms Summit Meeting.** Did you miss the meeting? Watch the morning presentations, including comments from Katherine Boor, Dean of CALS (College of Agriculture and Life Sciences) regarding Cornell's commitment to Small Farms.
- ◆ **Statewide survey results sorted by region.** Interested in finding out survey priorities sorted by region? New York is a geographically and demographically diverse state, and opinions about highest priorities varied somewhat depending on location. Compare sorted results online.

About Small Farms in NY

NY's agriculture is based nearly entirely on smaller farm operations. Using the USDA's definition (<\$250,000 sales,) more than 90% of the state's farms fall into the "small farm" category. This number includes both full and part time operations.

Small farms contribute more than 40% of NY's total agricultural production measured in sales at the farm gate, and own or manage 50% of the farmland resources in the state.

Top Commodities by Annual Gross Sales:

1. Milk and other dairy products
2. Forage Corn
3. Fruits, tree nuts and berries
4. Vegetables, melons, potatoes and sweet potatoes
5. Cattle and calves

Small Farm Summit Host Sites

Thanks to our Cornell Cooperative Extension collaborators for hosting the meeting at satellite locations across the state.

Central NY: Cornell University
Facilitators: Anu Rangarajan & Cornell Small Farms Program staff

Capital District: CCE of Albany County
Facilitators: David Cox & Gale Kohler

Western NY: CCE of Wyoming County
Facilitators: Lynn Bliven & Don Gasiewicz

Northern NY: CCE of St. Lawrence Co.
Facilitators: Brent Buchanan & Betsy Hodge

Downstate: CCE of Suffolk County
Facilitators: Dale Moyer & Sandy Menasha

Resources from the Cornell Small Farms Program

Cornell Small Farms Collaborators

We collaborate with a broad network of educators to create new resources and programs to serve you!

Small Farms Leadership Team

Mike Baker, Small Beef Extension Specialist
Monika Roth, CCE Tompkins County Ag Educator
Karma Glos, Kingbird Farm
Jim Hayes, Sap Bush Hollow Farm
Phil Metzger, Holistic Farm Planning/NRCS
tatiana Stanton, Small Ruminant Specialist
Dan Welch, CCE Cayuga County

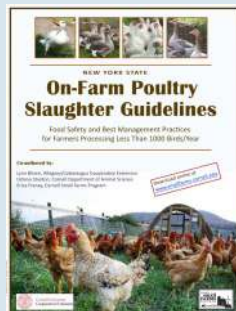
Small Farms Program Staff

Anu Rangarajan, Director
Violet Stone, Program Coordinator
Matthew Goldfarb, Extension Associate (formerly)
Erica Frenay, Coordinator, NE Beginning Farmer Project
Fay Benson, Small Dairy Educator with CCE Cortland Co.

New Publications

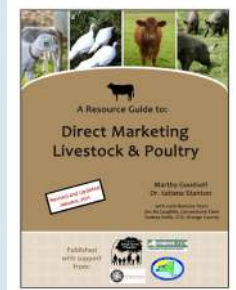
On-Farm Poultry Slaughter Guidelines

Do you process less than 1000 poultry/year on your farm? This Guide is designed to complement a hands-on training in how to properly kill and prepare a poultry carcass for sale.



Guide to Direct Marketing Livestock and Poultry

Helps to clarify and explain the complex laws in layman terms, discussing slaughtering and processing at the custom, state, and federal levels.

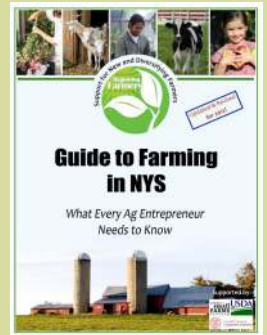


Cornell Small Farms Program
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For Beginning Farmers....

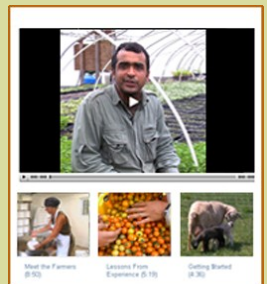
Guide to Farming in NY

Our most popular resource, this Guide contains fact sheets on everything from finding land to financing an operation, regulations on marketing and processing, and tax benefits of farming.



How-to-Farm Videos

Features many different sizes, styles, & locations around NY. Learn how to castrate pigs, breed sheep or transplant starts. Get advice on marketing, profitability & more from successful farmers!



Online Classes

For aspiring, new and experienced farmers. Interactive 5- to 7-week courses connect you to the information and people you need to start a successful farm business or diversify your farm.



Tutorials & Worksheets

Visit the “New Farmer Hub” to work through tutorials and worksheets designed to help you start out with a solid foundation for launching your farm business. The worksheets can be used as a pre-business plan.



NE Beginning Farmer Project
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