



**Summer 2003: NY FarmNet Continues 17-Year Tradition of Helping Farm Families**

**Issue No. 20**

FarmNet is a statewide outreach program, established in 1986, to help farm families find solutions to the problems they face.

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**year Tradition of Helping**  
**Farm Families**

Since its inception, NY FarmNet has assisted approximately 26,000 farmers and their families. The program has helped them address and reduce the stress associated with the integration of farm and family life as it is impacted by changes constantly occurring in agriculture.

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NY FarmNet is based at Cornell University in the Department of Applied Economics and Management, and is partially funded by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

**Program Mission**

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To provide farm families with a network of contacts and support services to help them develop skills for dealing with life challenges and transitions – through personalized education, confidential consulting and referral.

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The program's mission is accomplished through several established mechanisms.

**Toll-Free Farm Community Helpline: 1-800-547-3276**

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**Services**

A free and confidential helpline is available Monday through Friday from 8a.m. to 4 p.m. Farm-knowledgeable staff respond to farmers who contact the helpline with a variety of questions and concerns related to farm life and operating a farm business. Each call is responded to in a personalized manner, with farmers receiving information, referral or follow up assistance as needed.

**Family and Financial Educational Consulting**

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**Farm Businesses**

A network of 40 community-based FarmNet consultants provide free and confidential family and farm financial consulting. Consultants work directly with farmers to help them address and reduce the harmful impacts of stress on their families, their personal health and educational assistance to farmers in the areas of financial concerns, family relations and conflict, personal stress, disaster recovery, farm management and business transfer.

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**Publications and Website: [www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org)**

The FarmNet website features program information and publications covering a range of family and financial topics. They include decision making, communication, conflict resolution, farm management, business transfer, farm transitions and legal issues. The site also features current news and a calendar of agricultural community workshops and events.

## Workshops

Upon request, FarmNet provides tailored workshops designed for the farmer audience . Workshop topics requested in 2002 included FarmNet program information, stress management and reduction, family relationships and communications, strategies to improve farm business decision making, methods to cope with low price cycles, and exit planning.

### **Directors Corner - Introducing the New Newsletter**

As New York FarmNet begins its 18<sup>th</sup> year, we are pleased to bring you the first edition of our expanded newsletter, *NY FarmNet Working*. We have doubled the number of pages of useful information and put it in a new, easy-to-read format.

*NY FarmNet Working* is written for and dedicated to those who work with farmers. The goal is to provide you with NY FarmNet program information and resources to improve your ability to work with the state's farming community.

program highlights of 2002. Simply put, 2002 witnessed the farm community turning to NY FarmNet for assistance in record numbers.

-Cathleen M. Sheils, NY FarmNet Program Director

### **Highlights of 2002**

Farm Community Turns to FarmNet in Record Numbers During a Difficult Year

In 2002, FarmNet responded to 2,045 helpline calls from the farm community. This was the third highest calling year since the program began in 1986. Farmers who called the helpline needed assistance in

FarmNet's response to helpline calls breaks down this way: provided information to 37% of callers, phone consulting to 22%, referrals to 20% and sending information to 19% of callers.

Farm Sizes worked with in 2002	Compared to 2001	
<b>Dairy</b>		
<50 cows	35%	33%
51-101 cows	41%	42%
101-150 cows	10%	10%
151-200 cows	5%	6%
>200 cows	9%	9%
<b>All Farms</b>		
<50 acres	5%	12%
51-100 acres	12%	42%
101-200 acres	28%	10%
201-400 acres	33%	6%

### **2003 Board of Directors**

**Richard Butler**  
First Pioneer Farm Credit

**Ray Christensen,**  
New York State Department of  
Agriculture and Markets

**Ed Coates**  
NBT Bank

**Alison DeMarree**  
Cornell Cooperative Extension

**Andy Dugan, Vice Chair**  
Richer Feeds

**Dan Huntley**  
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**Wayne Knoblauch**  
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**Bruce Krenning**  
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**Sheila Marshman**  
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**Ora Rothfuss**  
Wayne County Planning

**Ed Scudder**  
Herkimer County Mental  
Health

**Tom Shephard**  
Dairylea

**Gary Snider**

>401 acres                      22%                      9%

**Western New York Farm  
Credit**

<b>Farm Types worked with in 2002</b>	<b>Compared to</b>	
<b>2001</b>		
Cash Crop	11%	8%
Dairy	64%	69%
Fruit	9%	8%
Livestock	10%	9%
Vegetable	4%	4%
Organic	2%	2%

### **Demand for FarmNet Consulting increased by 64%**

The consultant network is the cornerstone of NY FarmNet. Some options and making decisions to improve their farm businesses and family relationships. In 2002, FarmNet consultants provided **998 on-farm consultations, a 64% increase** over 2001 in the number of families worked with.

The demand for financial consulting, given the stressed farm economy, accounted for this huge increase in farm consultations. Many farm families needed assistance focusing on both family and business issues, with 37% of the consulting time being spent on family concerns and 63% on financial ones.

### **NY FarmLink, 2002**

NY FarmNet created the FarmLink project in 1996. In 2002, NY FarmLink expanded its people, products, and services to better support farm business transitions within New York State. Here are some of the accomplishments:

**Workbook Development:** Business Transfer Guides were written for both generations involved in a farm transfer. Over 500 farm transfer guides were distributed in 2002.

“This is the first time that this information has been pulled together in a clear, concise manner. I feel better prepared.” –*Central NY Farmer*

**Farm Transfer Workshops:** 15 farm transfer workshops were held for farm families in every region of New York State. Over 200 farm families attended these workshops.

“The program was excellent. It was presented in common English, so it was easy to understand.” –*Eastern NY Farmer*

**Dr. George Show:** A program held at Cornell University for SUNY students returning to their family farm after college. Over 250 students and family members attended.

“It provided a way to get my family to listen to my views and opinion.” –*Student*

**Farm Opportunities Website:** A place to advertise farm opportunities in

New York State. There were 17 “matches” in 2002 consisting of: 5 owners provided opportunities for new farmers, 7 new farmers found farms to work on, 2 management positions were filled, and 3 rental properties found renters. These matches keep growing!

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### **NY FarmNet Board Guides, Supports Program**

The NY FarmNet Board of Directors, formed in 1995, exists to assist in securing public and private funding, to network with various stakeholders, to provide input on program components and to set future directions.

Board members represent stakeholders from many sectors of New York agriculture: lending, milk cooperatives, farming, government, Farm Bureau, public services, Cornell, and Cooperative Extension.

Board members serve for two three-year terms. In 2003, FarmNet saw two founding members retire – Gary Bradley with First Pioneer Farm Credit and CJ Britt with Lyons National Bank. Gary served as vice chair and chair after the retirement of Eleanor Jacobs in 2002, and CJ served as finance chair since the board was created.

Eleanor, Gary and CJ worked to create a stronger foundation for FarmNet by identifying and securing diverse funding sources, promoting the program’s impact to stakeholders, enhancing financial accounting and establishing new program initiatives. We extend our sincerest thanks to them for their dedication and support.

At the Board’s winter meeting, Dick Peterson of Northeast Agriculture Technology Corporation was voted as chair and Andy Dugan with Richer Feeds as vice chair.

If anyone ever doubts the importance of FarmNet or the dedication of agricultural leaders to provide financial, family and legal assistance to farmers who need help in making decisions, they only need to look at the sincerity of the FarmNet board as it works to secure the future of the program.

#### 2002 Program Contributors

**NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets**

**Cornell University  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
Department of Applied Economics and Management**

**Cornell Cooperative Extension**

**NYSEG**

**County Farm Bureaus**

**Herkimer County Mental Health**

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### **Apple Growers Share Stories about Change**

*by Ruth A. Maltz, CSW, NY FarmNet Consultant*

New York State’s apple growers are facing significant changes: retail consolidation, oversupply, increased global competition, weather disasters and changing consumer preferences. These growers.

These changes force growers to make decisions about the future of their farm businesses and their families. To help them understand the changes and aid growers in decision making, NY FarmNet embarked on a project in 2002 that was funded by a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The project included interviews with 20 growers. We wanted to learn what challenges they were facing and

what changes and decisions they were making to improve business performance and family life. These growers talked about decisions, both successful and not, that they had made to adjust to the marketplace.

Change, while not always welcomed, is a constant in the apple growing businesses. Many of these growers attended educational programs and sought resources that could help them gather information and evaluate decisions. Resources included NY FarmNet, Cooperative Extension, Cornell University, Geneva Experiment Station, Direct Marketing Association, lawyers and other growers.

As professionals working with apple growers, you must understand some important points: Decisions growers make are based on each farm's goals and resources. One solution does not fit all farms. Growers are looking for assistance in evaluating options that fit their business and family goals.

### 1. Marketing strategies

- Packaged and sold a branded product.
- Delivered and set up displays at local supermarkets to control quality and presentation of fruit.
- Located a market and grew into its specifications.
- Set up a farm market and sold retail.
- Joined with other growers to rent a distribution center for delivery to New York City.
- Added products, such as flowers, crafts or ice cream, to an established farm market.
- Added agritourism events such as a corn maze or petting zoo.
- Bought a flash pasteurizer for cider to extend shelf life while retaining traditional taste.
- Hired someone to actively seek out new markets.
- Formed a co-op to process and package fruit.
- Tried retail sales. (This grower subsequently decided he was better at wholesale and focused on that.)

### 2. Diversification

- Reduced acreage grown by removing unprofitable orchards.
- Reduced acreage by not replanting all acreage. Bare ground is less costly than orchards whose fruit is not profitable.
- Produced new fruits for specific markets.
- Transitioned to fresh apples from process apples in response to foreign competition.
- Switched some acreage to other products or to organic production.

## NY FarmNet Provides Training to 195 Ag Professionals

by Cathleen M. Sheils, Program Director

Extended low prices for commodities, global competition, changing retailer and consumer expectations, community pressures, regulatory requirements for things such as manure handling, economic uncertainty, family conflict – the list of stressors faced by

**From our 20 interviews, we divided changes into six categories. Within each category, individual growers implemented different changes.**



Sheldon Furber, Wayne County Grower

### 3. Reduce Costs

- Entered into a long-term lease rather than investing equity in land purchases.
- Formed a co-op to purchase gas and chemicals in volume.
- Formed a co-op and built a cold storage facility to improve marketing flexibility.
- Planted higher densities for efficient labor and chemical use.
- Provided housing for seasonal labor for a stable workforce.

### 4. Change Careers

- Returned to school to get a degree to pursue careers in teaching, social work and accounting.
- Exited the industry and found a new job.

### 5. Retirement

- Rented existing orchards to a neighbor.
- Sold land but kept house and five acres.

### 6. Relocation

- Moved to Florida to manage a vegetable farm.

Please call NY FarmNet at (800)-547-3276 for more detailed articles on these changes.

farmers goes on and on.

The good news is that agriservice professionals recognize the high level of stress their clients face. Frequent contact with farmers who face stress created concern among agricultural professionals for the emotional well-being of the farmers and families. These professionals wanted to improve their skills in understanding, communicating and working with farmers under stress.

Many groups have turned to NY FarmNet to design and conduct personalized training programs for their staffs and outreach workers. These include the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York State Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service office, the Genesee County Soil and Water Conservation District, the New York State Dispute Resolution Association and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

NY FarmNet held informational interviews with key staff members of these agencies to develop individualized training programs. The trainings focused on working effectively with farmers during stressful times. Areas targeted included communication skill building, stress management for staff, and partnering and referring to meet the needs of farm families.

Goals of the training session were that participants would learn to:

- Notice changes within their clients signifying stress.
- Communicate effectively.
- Understand the uniqueness of farm culture.
- Refer and work with other agencies.
- Manage one's stress during these challenging times.

NY FarmNet has provided training to 195 professionals since December 2002. The following evaluation responses illustrate how professionals have used the skills they learned:

- I am more aware of how to communicate by listening better, showing empathy and watching for signals.
- I can offer help without being insulting and am better able to make referrals.
- I now understand the importance of listening.
- I am noticing changes within the farmers I work with and am figuring out how I can help before things get worse.
- I do not ignore when a farmer tells me how down he is. I make sure to connect him to help.
- My stress is under control because I call in others to assist me.
- I believe I am now fully serving my farmer client needs.
- Farmers are under a great deal of stress, and I am learning how I can help them address their stress in a positive manner that helps their business nonverbal communication and family work better.

If you would like to learn more about how NY FarmNet can design a training program for your organization, call (800) 547-3276.

## **NY FarmNet's Reach Extends to Washington State**

The Washington State Department of Agriculture used the FarmNet program model to secure a USDA grant used to create the Farm Family Support Network. The program provides personalized educational assistance to fruit growers.

Given the economic stress facing the Washington State fruit growing community, Washington's Department of Agriculture realized it needed to create a program that could help growers analyze and make decisions for the future of their businesses and families.

Washington State Department of Agriculture staff consulted with NY FarmNet when writing the USDA Risk Management grant. The department secured grant funding and began the Farm Family Support Network in December 2002.

This type of program was new to Washington State, so Peter Rodionoff, Farm Family Support Network coordinator, continued to consult with NY FarmNet about program design and delivery, outreach consultant recruitment and training, promotion to farmers, and proficiency of on-farm consultations.

Anita Cassard, NY FarmNet Consultant, traveled to Washington State in February to provide training for the program's outreach consultants. The training focused on skills needed to conduct farm visits, such as building trust, communication, follow up and working with stressed farmers.

*Through the assistance of NY FarmNet, we were able to start the program without reinventing the wheel. This assistance was instrumental*

Peter

Rodionoff, program coordinator, Washington State's Farm Family Support Network

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### **NY FarmLink's Expanded Services**

Do you have farm clients who are:

- Looking for someone to transfer the farm to?
- Wanting to find a business partner?
- Looking to get started in farming?
- Looking to rent their farm?
- Looking for someone to fill a management position?
- Looking to get started in a management position?

#### **Then refer them to the Farm Opportunities Database!**

Under Karin Jantz's management, the NY FarmLink database has been expanded, resulting in more satisfied participants. This website previously offered a clearinghouse for retiring and beginning farmers looking to transfer the farm. This has been expanded to capture the intermediate steps that occur before farm transfer, such as farmers who are seeking business partnerships, farm management employment opportunities, and a farm rental property clearinghouse.

**Website - [www.nyfarmlink.org](http://www.nyfarmlink.org)**

**Refer Farmers to NY FarmLink** to answer questions regarding:

- Talking with their family about the farm transfer process.
- Getting started with the farm transfer process.
- Finding or listing farm opportunities on our database.
- Finding farm transfer professionals.

**Referring Farmers to You:** Referrals are made from a database of experienced individuals, including lawyers, bankers, estate planners, insurance agents, financial advisors and government resources, to help farmers with specific needs. If you specialize in any of these areas and want to be included in our database, please contact us at 800-547-3276!

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## **The *New* NY FarmLink**

### **Offering more for transitioning farms**

Transferring farm management responsibility and assets to the next generation or a nonfamily member is an important, but sometimes confusing, process. In addition, exiting farmers face a limited amount of choices for retirement, and new farmers face an uphill battle to obtain the necessary knowledge, skills, and finances.

NY FarmLink is here to help people in these situations, and in many other areas. The program provides educational resources, consulting, and opportunities that enable more farms to be transferred and joint ventures to be developed for the economic enhancement of New York State agriculture.

FarmLink is a sister program of NY FarmNet in the Department of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University. Since January 2002, NY FarmLink has greatly expanded its people, products, and services to support farm business transitions within New York State.

## NY FarmLink's New Resources

NY FarmLink Business Transfer Guides clarify a confusing process. When wage earners get ready to retire, they check their pension and social security benefits, prepare a retirement budget that provides for plenty of travel, and find a place to display the gold watch. For farm business owners, it may not be that simple.

One big difference is that the retiring farm business owner (a.k.a. the senior generation) may need to transfer the business to a younger partner or family member (a.k.a. the junior generation). This presents some interesting challenges that are often unplanned and underestimated.

To help farmers wend their way through this difficult process, NY FarmLink has developed two Business Transfer Guides, one for the senior generation and one for the junior generation. A Facilitator's Guide is also available.

Here is what one Extension educator has to say about these important resources:

*consulting, and opportunities to farm owners who wish to transfer their businesses. Two examples of the excellent family business through the confusing transfer process. One business transfer guide is for the senior generation and another is for the junior generation; both take a step-by-step approach to the issues that need to be addressed by each examples."* Molly Ames, Extension Educator, Jefferson County

For more information about the FarmLink program, or to order the Business Transfer Guides, visit the website at [www.nyfarmlink.org](http://www.nyfarmlink.org), E-mail us at [info@nyfarmlink.org](mailto:info@nyfarmlink.org) or call (800)547-3276.

### Upcoming for 2003

- Stories of Farm Transfer
- Business Partnership Guide
- Retirement/Exiting Handbook

Claire Hebbard, NY FarmNet Assistant Director

Whether you, as an agriservice professional, balance rations, aid in making a decision concerning Cooperatives Working Together (CWT), create CAFO plans, provide veterinary care, or offer other types of farm business support, you are a resource to each farmer with whom you work.

Agriservice providers who work with farmers daily recognize the relationship between the family's goals or values and the business' performance. Therefore, they work to find ways to support both farmers personally and their businesses. Farmers appreciate the informal chitchat as much as they do your professional expertise. Interpersonal skills directly affect professional success.

#### **Tips to improve professional relationships:**

1. Recognize the family/business intersection. On most farms, family and business goals are often intertwined. The success of one relies on the success of the other. Similarly, stresses in one will affect the other. In tough economic times, business financial stress often results in increased stress on the family members and business partners. During times of business (economic) stress, people frequently don't communicate as effectively or resolve conflict as well, thus magnifying the original stress. Family businesses often fail because of poor communication and unresolved conflict around how to handle these stresses.

2. Nurture your business relationships. Strong relationships are built on trust. Among the many ways you can build trust are to:

- Maintain the confidentiality of your clients, even if it isn't requested.
- Recognize the family's values and goals.
- Recognize the influence the family has on shaping the business.
- Be open-minded.
- Follow through on commitments.
- Begin and end appointments on time.
- Address biosecurity when making farm visits, particularly on livestock operations.
- Keep the channels of communication open.

3. Improve your communication skills. Learn the art of effective listening, ask open-ended questions, and recognize body language. Make sure that your messages come across clearly and that you accurately understand what is being said to you. Good communication skills allow you to recognize more quickly others' discomfort and defensiveness. And you will be better able to diffuse tension. When providing professional advice you may need to talk a lot in order to convey information. But when working on improving relationships, you need to listen more than talk.

4. Recognize when there are problems. There are many noticeable signs of distress: Changes in mood or appearance, unpaid bills, business needs not addressed, and comments of distress or hopelessness. We often think that time will fix things, and sometimes it is the solution. But ignoring stress and letting too much time elapse before dealing with it can also exacerbate the situation. On the other hand, it may not be helpful to make demands or force someone to change a situation or make a decision since stress is already negatively affecting their decision-making ability. The stress must be dealt with before the situation will get any better.

5. Respond to the situation. Helping family members to talk about their stresses may help them feel less stressed and better able to cope. Developing your interpersonal and communication skills will help you feel more comfortable when you want to respond to someone in distress. If you don't have the resources to assist in the situation, steer the family to someone who can help. Whatever course your assistance takes, remember that it is not your responsibility to provide

6. Partner with others. As long as you have a family's permission, involve others in helping a family. Seek help from others who have a stake in the situation or can provide a resource. Don't hesitate to consult with others, work with them as team members, or make referrals. Remember to treat other professionals with respect; some day you may have to team with them to help a farm family.

7. Take care of yourself. Being a resource to others can be stressful. That's why it's all the more important to maintain your physical and emotional health when you are helping others. If you are healthy and happy (not unduly stressed), you can be more patient and empathic when helping others. Take time to relax, learn communication skills, and understand human reactions to stress.

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**[www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org)**

For more information on CWT, health insurance options, milk pricing, and apple industry resources, check out our "Current Issues" section at [www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org). The website also maintains an extensive NY Agricultural Calendar of Events, FarmNet program description and publications.

**Save the date**

Empire Farm Days, August 5-7, Seneca Falls, NY

CNY Farm Progress Show, September 20

*The second annual **Dr. George Show**, November 21<sup>st</sup>  
Bringing the Generations Together in Family Business!*

Agricultural Health Care Summit, October 1 & 2

**Publications – Call for your copy today!**

New NY FarmNet Brochure  
New NY FarmLink Brochure  
Managing Farm Stress – brochure

**NY FarmNet**

**Program Director**  
Cathleen Sheils

**Assistant Program Director**  
Claire Hebbard

**Program Coordinator**  
Racheal Pyhtila

**NY FarmLink**

**Program Director**  
Steve Richards

**Program Coordinator**  
Karin Jantz

**Faculty Advisor (both programs)**  
Wayne Knoblauch

NY FarmNet Mission:

To provide farm families with a network of contacts and support services to help them develop skills for dealing with life challenges and transitions-through personalized education, confidential consulting and referral.