

NYFarmNet Working

1-800-547-3276

A Newsletter for people working with the farm community

Responding to the needs of Apple Growers: FarmNet leads collaborative effort

by Cathleen M. Sheils

Fruit farming is a very challenging career today. The fruit industry in New York State is undergoing dramatic changes and many farming families are questioning whether or not to stay in the business. The changes in the industry are occurring for many reasons, including shifting consumer preferences, shrinking number of buyers and market consolidation, technological advancements leading to higher production, free trade agreements causing global competition and imports, increased labor and environmental regulations, higher operating expenses, lower prices received for fruit sales and more frequent weather disasters causing fruit quality damage and loss. The challenge of growing the high quality fruit demanded by the marketplace at a profit to the farmer is being affected by these industry changes. Although the

outcome of these challenges may be in question, the one thing that is certain is that the apple industry is changing – and growers need to change with it.

The changes that the industry is encountering need to be addressed individually by growers as they contemplate their future in the industry. The uncertainty of the situation and fear of the unknown are very stressful on both individuals and businesses, complicating and inhibiting decision-making. FarmNet has organized and is facilitating the collaboration of various stakeholders including NY Farm Bureau, USDA/FSA, NYSDAM, Farm Credit, NYS Horticultural Society, Cornell and the Geneva Experiment Station to respond to the needs expressed by the fruit community. Maintaining the focus on serving individual fruit growers, the stakeholders identified are working to implement within 4 programming areas.

1. Awareness and communications: articles and personal stories written that respond to the need for industry members to understand the severity of the current situation, the long term changes occurring, and recognition of the impact on individual growers and their need to address the changes within their own business. A series of articles will appear in agricultural newsletters, publications and on websites.

2. Database creation: respond to the need for creating awareness of current

resources and networking between service providers, promoting services to growers and addressing barriers to grower's accessing the support and assistance available.

3. Development of a decision making workbook and classroom education: respond to the need for resources and publications specifically addressing the changes in the apple industry. There are many decision-making materials developed for other agricultural enterprises, but they have not been appropriate for the fruit industry. This workbook will cover the industry trends, the process of change, decision making skills, dealing with stress, industry benchmarks, and worksheets for individualized business evaluation. The workbook will also be used by Extension Educators and lenders for classroom instruction.

4. Training and support of agricultural service providers: respond to supporting and training agriservice providers and other individuals working with growers (tax specialists, accountants, lawyers, etc.) who are making decisions about how to adapt their business to the changes in the industry, to properly address the stress that growers are facing, and to strengthen collaboration and partnerships among service providers in support of fruit growers.

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www.nyfarmnet.org

NY FarmNet Consulting: A Valuable Resource

by Cathleen M. Sheils



Mike Kiechle, Jefferson County Dairy Farmer and Rus Hodnett, Farm Financial Consultant

You, as an agricultural professional working with farmers, are in a position to help your farm clients understand and connect to the services of NY FarmNet. NY FarmNet is a free and confidential program available to assist farmers and their families in addressing challenges and concerns they are facing associated with operating a farm and farm life.

The reasons that over 2,000 callers contacted FarmNet in 2001 are numerous, and include:

- Farm business and finance concerns
- Diversifying or transfer questions
- Intergenerational conflict
- Struggles with family communications
- Marital conflict or personal stress

The first step in accessing FarmNet services is the initial toll-free call to 1-800-547-3276. Callers include farmers, family members, or those who work with farmers, such as agriservice reps. FarmNet offers callers personalized assistance for the situation which they called about. That assistance may include connecting them to work with a NY FarmNet consultant. Consulting is the cornerstone of NY FarmNet. FarmNet has a network of 34 consultants available to meet with farmers to help them discuss, analyze and improve the situation they called about. There are two types of FarmNet consultants located across the state:

Farm Family Consultants work with farmers who are experiencing personal stress, family stress, conflict and communication challenges.

Farm Financial Consultants work with farmers and their families to review and analyze their farm business and finance problems and options for improvement.

When the FarmNet consultant meets with the farmer, they begin to discuss and analyze the situation with the family, working to develop a plan of action. The overall goal of FarmNet consulting is to help the farmer identify the problem(s), outline possible solutions or ways to lessen the problem, and to implement a plan to carry out the solution.

Meet two consultants:

Rus Hodnett, FarmNet Financial Consultant, resides in Ithaca, New York and has worked with FarmNet since 1986, when the program began. Rus has worked with over 300 farming families in his role as a

consultant. Rus has seen a diversity of farming operations and production methods in his work, including dairy, cash crop, livestock, organic vegetable, pasture raised deer, mushrooms and those producing and selling for their farm market stands. He describes the FarmNet philosophy well. *"A one-on-one detailed visit evaluating a farm business is the most helpful way, and sometimes the only way, some farm families can make necessary decisions."* More often than not, FarmNet consulting is a process which requires several visits to the farm.

Rus Hodnett makes multiple visits to farms he is working with, often in partnership with FarmNet Family Consultants and agricultural service representatives, working as a team to assist a farm family. Rus' background and experiences as a retired Cornell Cooperative Extension agent, an Agway and Seed Cooperative representative, and as a Farm Business Consultant uniquely qualify him for this work. In addition to his work experience, Rus holds a Master's degree from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. His interest in farming stems from growing up on a dairy and certified seed potato crop farm in Steuben County, New York.



Jim Ashton, pictured above, has been a FarmNet Family Consultant since 1995, when he retired from Cornell Cooperative Extension. Living in Clinton Corners, Dutchess County, he works in the eastern part of the state.

Jim is originally from Albany County. He served in the US Marine Corps for 3 years, including a year in Korea in 1954. He married his high school sweetheart (Joan died in 1993) and attended school on the GI Bill. He studied horticulture at Farmingdale A&T, entomology at Ohio State and later natural resource management at Cornell. He worked for the NYS Dept of Agriculture for 3 years before joining the Cooperative Extension staff in Oneida County, later transferring to Dutchess County.

Jim and his wife raised 3 boys and a girl, three of whom studied at Cornell. In 1999 he married Helen and they reside and garden in Clinton Corners with her cat and his dog.

Jim brings to Farm Net his background and interest in human resource management, helping farm families deal with issues, such as conflict, communication, leadership, and team building. These are important for both families and businesses that want to succeed. Working with farm families has created an appreciation and greater understanding of the need for the successful farmer to be skilled in "people skills" as well as the science and economics of agriculture.

NY FarmLink, a project of NY FarmNet

Getting Started in Farming

by Steve Richards, NY FarmLink Director

NY FarmNet has seen an increase in requests from beginning farmers for assistance in analyzing their options for starting or finding a farm enterprise of their own.

Getting started in farming is not easy. Of all the farm seekers in the FarmLink database, (www.nyfarmlink.org) approximately 2 out of every 10 may get matched with a farm owner each year. The successful farm seekers differ from their counterparts due to these common traits:

1. **Patience: this process takes time.**
 - o Time to find the right farm and farm owner to work with (1-2 years).
 - o Time to transfer the farm (depending on the size of the farm and the options chosen to initiate the transfer—it could take 10-20 years).
2. **Experience: successful farm seekers have 3-10 years of farm experience.**
 - o Nothing substitutes for real-world experience on the farm. If seekers do not have a lot of experience, volunteering or working on a farm is suggested.
 - o It takes a good farm manager to keep the farm running and supporting a family. Gaining management experience, in addition to farm skills, is crucial.
3. **Investment: it always helps to have the ability to invest in a farm opportunity!**
 - o Ownership of livestock, equipment, and/or cash improve seekers options of farms to choose from.
 - o Off –farm employment by a spouse or part time by a seeker helps with cash flow and savings for a farm.
4. **Initiative: the seekers who take the initiative have an advantage.**
 - o Farm seekers who contact and interview farm owners are more successful.
 - o Creating networks to help them find farm owners that are looking to transfer their farm to an outside party.
5. **Utilization of resources:**
 - o Attending courses, workshops, and tours.
 - o Contacting and using resources like FarmLink, CCE, milk cooperatives and others in agriservice.



Welcome to FarmNet

NY FarmNet would like to welcome Karin Jantz aboard as the new NY FarmLink Program Coordinator! She will be working with Steve Richards, Director, to provide services to new and retiring farmers. In addition to her FarmLink responsibilities, Karin is responding to the NY FarmNet 1-800-547-3276 helpline.

Karin, a 2001 graduate of Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in horticulture, comes to FarmNet from Tompkins County Cooperative Extension where she worked on the Fingerlakes Culinary Bounty Project. Previously, Karin worked for Holcomb Farm, an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in Connecticut. Karin, originally from Putnam County, now resides in Tioga County. She and her husband, John Jantz, enjoy gardening, horses, and downhill skiing.

FarmNet Board Update By Cathleen M. Sheils, Director

The New York FarmNet Board of Directors was formed in 1996. The board exists to assist with professional networking, communicating the program's accomplishments, securing funding and providing input on program components and direction. Board members represent all sectors of New York State agriculture - lending, utilities, suppliers, milk cooperatives, farming, Cornell, Farm Bureau, Ag and Markets, and media.

Four founding board members, Doug Brodie, Steve Hoefler, Eleanor Jacobs and John Runge, retired in 2002. Each of these members worked tirelessly to secure the future of the program. Filling this leadership void was not an easy task. New board members were sought who appreciate, understand and support the mission of NY FarmNet. Those new board members are Andy Dugan, Richer Feeds; Dick Peterson, NYSEG; Tom Shephard, AgriEdge/DairyLea; and Sheila Marshman, SUNY Morrisville. The dedication of these agricultural leaders in directing NY FarmNet reflects the importance of the program for providing financial, legal, and personal consulting.

Board of Directors:

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|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Gary Bradley, Chair First Pioneer Farm Credit | Ray Christensen NYS DAM | Dan Huntley Kraft Foods | Jackie Moody Czub CAO | Tom Shephard AgriEdge/DairyLea |
| Dick Peterson, Vice Chair NYSEG | Alison DeMarree CCE | Wayne Knoblauch Cornell University | Nancy New USDA/FSA | Gary Snider WNY Farm Credit |
| CJ Britt, Finance Chair Lyons National Bank | Andy Dugan Richer Feeds | Bruce Krenning NY Farm Bureau | Joel Riehlman Dairy Producer | Sheila Marshman SUNY Morrisville |

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.

Interested in Being a FarmNet consultant?

If you are interested in strengthening and supporting New York farm families and businesses by responding to the business and financial needs of farmers this might be the part time opportunity for you. If you can work as a neutral third party with no conflicts of interest with other jobs to provide Farm Financial Consulting through financial analysis, education, and support, you may be interested in becoming a NY FarmNet Financial Consultant. **Call the FarmNet office at 800-547-3276 for more information today!**

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Program Director

Cathleen Sheils

Assistant Program Director

Claire Hebbard

Program Assistant

Racheal Pyhtila

Faculty Advisor

Wayne Knoblauch

For questions and comments about the NY FarmNetWorking newsletter, please contact Cathleen Sheils.
Phone: (607) 255 4121
Email: nyfarmnet@cornell.edu