

# Connections

The News Magazine of Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie and Otsego Counties

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

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## Farewell . . .

We are sad to report that Don Smyers has announced his retirement as Association Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie and Otsego Counties effective September 1st, following 14 years of service, first with CCE Schoharie County and then with the consolidated Schoharie and Otsego Counties Association.



“My most gratifying work has been with producers, community members, and 4-H youth,” said Don Smyers. What are his most valued program activities? “Providing technical expertise, helping producers learn of new opportunities, and providing safe environments for youth to acquire confidence and skills,” he answered quickly.

“This past year has been no exception, despite the pandemic at our doorsteps.” According to Smyers, producers, like most people, have been concerned about the pandemic. “In spring of 2020, the epicenter for the pandemic settled in New York City, yet producers needed to continue marketing safe, clean foods, while protecting family, employees, and consumers. At a time when sanitizers could not be found, this Association distributed nearly 4,500 gallons of hand sanitizer with masks to grateful producers in Schoharie and Otsego Counties. The NYS Department of Ag and Markets was an essential partner for providing the products at no cost to producers.”

He continued: “As I look back, I am proud of the many accomplishments made since I began in 2007. Like every organization, we have had challenges, but I’m pleased to report here on some of our accomplishments.”

### **A Ten-Year Milestone**

In 2009, Smyers was asked to serve as interim director in Otsego County while managing the duties of CCE Schoharie County. The effort culminated in 2010, when the members of the two associations voted to fully consolidate into one organization with one board of directors



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## Farewell . . . , continued from page 1

beginning January 1, 2011—marking this year as the ten-year anniversary.

## Site Improvements at Cooperstown Office

The Master Gardeners of Otsego County have brought new energy to the Cooperstown office by fundraising to redevelop the site at 123 Lake Street. Several years in the making, the plans are nearly ready for a construction launch following the successful fund development campaign, Grow with CCE. “The garden project is a big one—educational gardens and outreach programs provided throughout the county—and the result will improve the lives of residents. Otsego County, like many upstate counties, has its share of rural poverty and food deserts,” Smyers cited.

## Program Enhancements

The afterschool program, which was funded with state and federal grants, is entirely self-funded now with parent contributions. Programs are offered in Schoharie and Cobleskill-Richmondville Schools.

The Central New York Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team has grown from two to four specialists, and now includes a livestock educator and a farm business management educator. Schoharie and Otsego County producers have access to services, including farm visits, telephone conferences, and numerous educator programs.

The Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Team has grown from offering four-county coverage—including Schoharie County as one of its organizing members—into a team of several educators who provide technical expertise in the larger Eastern New York area. Commercial producers of vegetables and large and small fruit (including grapes) in Schoharie and Otsego counties, whether using conventional or organic methods, benefit from this service.

In Otsego County, a part-time position was created in recent years—the Ag and Farmland Implementation Specialist—to help bring to life the goals established in the Ag and Farmland Protection Plan.

Changes in local program staffing, some occurring recently, have brought renewed enthusiasm to programs. Jessica Holmes has assumed the Ag and Horticulture Educator position as our newest staff member addition; Catherine Roberts and Teresa

## OUR MISSION

Cornell Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability, and social well-being. We bring local experience and research-based solutions together, helping New York State families and communities thrive in our rapidly changing world.

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New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, New York State College of Human Ecology, and New York State College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension Associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

Adell have brought our 4-H programs to a new level of excellence; Jim Barber has worked to elevate the opportunities for producers in Otsego County as the Ag Specialist; Susan Salisbury continues to coordinate the Afterschool Programs; and Michelle Leveski and Kimberly Ferstler are providing residents with timely and relevant nutrition information through the EFNEP and Healthy Connections programs. The association's support and administrative staff—Lauren Anderson, Colleen Badger, Robin

Henson, Mayra Richter, Madelyn Sanchez, and Linda Sheets—help make everything run smoothly.

“My time in Schoharie and Otsego Counties with Cornell Cooperative Extension has been very fulfilling for me. I've seen the positive impact of CCE programs, the expertise that Cornell and other Land Grant Institutions can make in rural communities, and the value that many residents hold for Cooperative Extension,” Smyers added.

## ... and Welcome!

Please join us in welcoming Marilyn Wyman, the interim Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Schoharie and Otsego Counties!

Wyman retired from CCE of Columbia and Greene Counties in 2019, where she was involved in extension work relating to natural resources, agriculture, and rural community development for over 25 years. She has a B.S. in biology and a master's degree in natural resources, with a focus on forests. She helped establish CCE's Agroforestry Resource Center and the 140-acre Siuslaw Model Forest in Greene County, which provides science-based natural resource education and outreach programs. Wyman supervised staff involved with agroforestry, stream stabilization, and forestry projects. She was also involved in regional, statewide, and multi-state projects that focused on invasive species and forest landowner issues. Marilyn and her husband Rick have owned their small farm in Schoharie County for more than

20 years, where they have grown vegetables, raised pigs and chickens, and cultivated shiitake mushrooms. They also manage their forests sustainably for firewood.

She feels fortunate to be able to combine her passion for how local CCE associations can contribute to the viability of their communities, and the opportunities Schoharie and Otsego counties present. “I feel very comfortable assuming the role as interim Executive Director and look forward to working with the CCE community to bring on board a new Executive Director who will take CCE Schoharie and Otsego forward in the best possible ways.”



*Marilyn hiking the Long Path, a trail that runs from NYC to just north of Albany*

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# Join Us!

You are cordially invited to our  
**Annual Meeting and Dinner.**

Generally held in person in October,  
but held last year in November via Zoom,  
this event typically includes a reception  
followed by dinner, plus a keynote speaker  
and updates from the program staff.

It's an opportunity both to pass a pleasant  
evening in good company and directly  
show your support to our association!

Details are being firmed up and will  
be shared as soon as possible.

**If interested in attending, please RSVP  
to the main office at 518-234-4303 to confirm  
the date, time, location, and cost of the dinner.**

Cornell Cooperative Extension | Schoharie and Otsego Counties

# Trees Blinded Me with (Plant) Science

My name is Jessica Holmes, and I am the new Agriculture and Horticulture Educator for Schoharie and Otsego County.

Growing up I did not know where life would lead my career path. One day I was sitting in a high school biology class while learning about trees, and I decided: “That is what I want to do.” Ever since that moment, I have been interested in plant science, and I was determined to learn more about agriculture.

I went to work on a dairy farm, where I made a friend who worked for Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). Up until that point in my life, I thought CCE was limited to 4-H. I was very wrong! While going to college, I did my internship with CCE. I discovered that was where I wanted to work: I loved



being able to inform, teach, and help the public on topics about which I was passionate.

I graduated from SUNY Cobleskill with a B.S. in Agricultural Business Management and later went for a Masters in Agricultural Education from Murray State University. I have experience working in greenhouses, the floral- and landscape-design industries, and dairy farming, but for most of my career I have been with CCE.

It is an honor to be brought on as a part of the Schoharie and Otsego County community. I am excited to work with the Master Gardener programs and local farms and businesses in these two counties!

You can contact Jessica at [jmh452@cornell.edu](mailto:jmh452@cornell.edu) or 518-234-4303, ext. 119.

# TEX-MEX SKILLET

Serves 4

*A skillet dish so simple, yet so full of flavor!*

Source: Broome County Cornell Cooperative Extension



## Ingredients

- ½ lb. lean ground beef
- 2 tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. oregano
- ½ tsp. cumin
- ⅛ tsp. black pepper
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup thinly sliced carrots
- 2 8-oz. cans tomato sauce
- 1½ cups frozen corn kernels
- 1¼ cups water
- 1 cup instant brown rice

- 1 15-oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed
- ¾ cup shredded, reduced-fat cheddar cheese

## Directions

1. Coat a large non-stick skillet with cooking spray, and heat to medium.
2. Add ground beef, chili powder, oregano, cumin, black pepper, onion, and carrots. Cook, stirring frequently, for 5-8 minutes, or until beef is lightly browned. Drain if needed.

## Nutrition Facts

4 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	<b>(334g)</b>
<b>Amount Per Serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>300</b>
<small>% Daily Value*</small>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 6g	<b>8%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 35mg	<b>12%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 880mg	<b>38%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 43g	<b>16%</b>
Dietary Fiber 10g	<b>36%</b>
Total Sugars 7g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	<b>0%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 23g	<b>46%</b>
Vitamin D 0mcg	<b>0%</b>
Calcium 223mg	<b>15%</b>
Iron 9mg	<b>50%</b>
Potassium 857mg	<b>20%</b>

\*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

3. Stir in the tomato sauce, corn, and water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes.
4. Add the rice and black beans. Cook for 5-10 minutes more.
5. Remove from heat. Sprinkle with cheese, cover, and let stand for 5 minutes until the rice is tender and the cheese is melted.
6. Serve warm.

## Notes:

- Ground turkey can be substituted for the ground beef.
- Add a side salad to get your greens in for the day.
- For a vegetarian option, try adding an extra can of drained and rinsed beans in place of the ground beef.
- Try substituting the black beans with another of your favorite beans.
- Try eating this dish with a whole grain tortilla or chips.
- Leftovers may be stored for 3-4 days in the refrigerator.

## Know the facts . . .

- Tex-Mex cuisine (from the words Texan and Mexican) derives from the culinary creations of the **Tejano** people of **Texas**. It has spread from border states in the southwestern United States to the rest of the country.
- Examples of modern Tex-Mex dishes and ingredients: corn, tortilla chips, cheese, tacos, salsa, chilies, and beef dishes.
- This dish is packed with lean protein in the forms of black beans and lean ground beef.
- Chili powder and cumin add bold flavor to this dish.
- Cumin is a member of the parsley family, and the spice we use is the dried, ripe seed of the plant. It is rich and hearty, warm and earthy, with a hint of both sweetness and bitterness. It is often available ground, but also crushed or as the whole seed.
- Try our companion recipe, **Frozen Fruit Cups**, for a refreshing end to your meal!





"Instant baby food: 'mash up' papaya in Sittee" by Joshua Berman is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

# Homemade Baby Food: So Easy, a Baby Could Do it (and Happily Eat it!)

Bringing a baby into the world and keeping them safe and healthy can seem really overwhelming—and expensive—sometimes, even when it's not your first one. I want to assure you that making your own baby food can be super simple and convenient, and often easier on your budget than foods packaged specifically for babies.

## First Things First

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025 recommends breastfeeding or formula as the primary source of nourishment for the first 12 months. Usually around 4 to 6 months of age, babies are ready to start adding solid foods into their diet in preparation for weaning: their tongue thrust reflex has faded, they can sit up with some support, and are able to hold their head up; they may be reaching for (your) food, tracking food with their eyes, opening their mouths for food, and licking their lips.

## And are YOU ready?

You probably have most, if not all, of the tools you will need to make baby food:

- Prepping: a cutting board and knife
- Cooking (for foods that are not already soft): a pot, or steamer, or baking dish
- Pureeing: a spoon, or fork, or potato masher, or blender, or strainer, or food mill
- Storing: heat/microwave-safe dish (for 1-2 days in the refrigerator); wax paper, plastic wrap, and freezer bags or containers (for 1-8 months in the freezer)

## Did You Know?

Sanitation is super important with baby food, because their immune system is not yet fully developed. Shortcuts that you might take with your own food might be very unsafe for your baby.

- Be sure to use hot, soapy water when cleaning surfaces, tools, and hands when prepping the food.
- Give a good washing to fresh produce, especially the ones you're not going to cook before feeding.
- When thawing, be sure to use the safety guidelines to avoid the growth of bacteria. Do not thaw on the countertop!
- Avoid unpasteurized foods (like milk and cheese) and non-commercially prepared canned foods.
- Be sure to date the containers you put in the freezer (and refrigerator) to ensure best quality as well as safety.



Continues on page 8

## **Homemade Baby Food, continued from page 7**

- With meats, use a meat thermometer to ensure it has reached the proper internal temperature, as well as ensuring it is tender enough for baby

### **No Added Sugars...your baby is sweet enough already!**

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025 also recommends that no added salt, sugar, seasonings, or fats/oils be in baby foods before age 1.

- If using packaged foods to make baby food, watch for added salt, sugar, and fat in the nutrition label and ingredient list. For example, canned sweet potatoes are often in syrup, and so aren't ideal for baby food.
- Don't offer fried foods; instead, use methods that don't add oils, like steaming, boiling, baking, and roasting. Tip: if boiling, use the smallest amount of water you can, and then use that nutrient-rich water to thin the texture of the food.

The recommendation on no added sugar continues to age 2! It's also recommended that you not offer fruit/vegetable juice before age 2, either; stick with whole fruits and vegetables instead.

It's important to expose your baby to a variety of flavors, not just sweet, so be sure to offer vegetables and meats in addition to fruit.

### **Let's Get Started!**

That ripe banana, avocado, or peach on the counter just needs to have the skin/peel and pit removed. For older babies, you might leave some of the skin/peel on, but for beginners that texture is usually too much. Once peeled, mash it up with a fork—or put it in the blender—until it's a smooth puree, and it's ready to go.

Same for that can of peas, beets, or pears. Just remember to make sure there was no added sugar or salt listed in the label: that means looking for fruit canned in its own juice rather than in syrup and veggies that are not pickled or in a sauce. The same goes for frozen fruit and vegetables.

For fresh foods that aren't soft enough to be mashed with a fork, cook until they are puree-able. Steaming and roasting are methods that hold nutrition the best, and boiling and baking are also good methods.

Set aside some of what is going on your own plate (but remember not to season or add oil to it);

or make a whole batch just for baby (freeze what you can't feed in a couple of days).

### **Fresh vs. Canned and Frozen**

Starting with canned or frozen (thawed) fruits and veggies can be a real time and energy saver! Many have already been peeled and cooked to a soft texture.

Commercially canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are good choices for everyone in the family, as they are usually processed within 24 to 48 hours of harvesting. Studies have shown they are as nutritious as the fresh produce you bought in the supermarket (nutrition is lost during the shipping and storage time of fresh produce).

Again, just be sure to choose ones that have no added sugar, salt, or fats, and to thaw frozen foods safely.

### **A Note on Texture**

Peels and seeds may provide too much texture, especially for a beginner. If in doubt, push the food through a fine strainer to remove lumps, strings, seeds, and other solid bits.

Adding a little breastmilk or formula to thin out the texture may also be a help to beginners. Or, as mentioned earlier, if you boiled the food, use the water you boiled it in (some of the nutrients will have leached into the boiling water).

Please note: thin the food when ready to serve, not in preparation for freezing. If adding before freezing, the texture will likely suffer. Re-freezing is also not recommended because the texture will worsen.

### **Freezing Your Homemade Baby Food**



*"Carrot baby food" by Ross Catrow is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0*



Freeze portion sizes appropriate for your baby—1 to 2 teaspoons for a beginner, or maybe 4 to 6 tablespoons for an older infant—as that will make it more convenient when thawing, with the least waste. Creating individual portions on a baking tray or in an ice cube tray works well, though small, individual, freezer-safe containers can also be convenient.

If using a baking tray, line it with parchment paper; this will help release the frozen puree. Silicone also releases well, and so it would also work as a liner or as the material of the ice cube tray. Place as many portions on the parchment as will fit, cover with plastic wrap, and place in the freezer until frozen. If using ice cube trays, covering with plastic wrap is also recommended. After the puree is frozen, take off (or out of) the tray and store in a freezer bags or containers (for 1-8 months in the freezer) depending on the food.

The general rules for freezing apply to baby food:

- Freezing does not sterilize food.
- Leave head space (½ to 1 inch) for expansion while freezing.
- Most glass is not freezer safe: don't re-use glass

baby food jars.

- If not cooking, you might consider blanching: blanching (placing in boiling water for a minute and cooling quickly) slows the enzymatic processes that cause loss of flavor, color, and texture.
- For best quality, cool before freezing, and freeze only as much at a time as will freeze in a few hours (general rule is a maximum of 2 to 3 pounds per cubic foot).
- If transferring the frozen puree to a freezer bag, take out as much air from the bag as you can. Air space allows for more crystals to form, which can affect texture.
- For best texture, don't thin the puree before freezing.
- Remember to label and date the frozen food!

Wishing you and your baby years of happy, healthy eating! If you are interested in more helpful tips or nutrition information, or to participate in our free nutrition/cooking classes, visit our website ([cceschoharie-otsego.org/nutrition-health](http://cceschoharie-otsego.org/nutrition-health)) or contact our nutrition educators: Michelle Leveski, [mml39@cornell.edu](mailto:mml39@cornell.edu), 518-234-4303 ext. 115, or Kimberly Ferstler, [kmf2349@cornell.edu](mailto:kmf2349@cornell.edu), 518-234-4303

## [FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov)

### Safe Storage of Puréed and Solid Baby Food

Purees and Solids (opened or freshly made)	Refrigerator	Freezer
Strained fruits and vegetables	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 months
Strained meats and eggs	1 day	1 to 2 months
Meat/vegetable combinations	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months
Homemade baby foods	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months

Date Last Reviewed April 26, 2019

Information from [foodsafety.gov/people-at-risk/children-under-five](http://foodsafety.gov/people-at-risk/children-under-five)

# PROGRAM EVENTS

Go to our website [cceschoharie-otsego.org](http://cceschoharie-otsego.org) to see the most up-to-date listings offered. Due to New York State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our programming has become more fluid, and some is being brought to you online.

## What's For Lunch?

Wednesday, September 8, 2021, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
Additional sessions in the series: September 15, 22 & 29, October 13 & 20

Join our nutrition educator, Kimberly, for a 6-week virtual series of classes to learn about both the "why" of eating healthy and the "how." One hour a week includes a nutrition lesson and time for a cook-along dish. All ages are welcome! In each class you can choose to cook along and prepare something for lunch. Each recipe will be easy to prepare using typical kitchen tools. The recipe for each week will be shared about a week in advance, so you'll have plenty of time to purchase ingredients and gather equipment. The recipes generally make 4-6 servings. Companion recipes will also be sent. Please note that the companion recipes may NOT be part of the cook-along. The classes are free for all participants, but you need to provide the ingredients and kitchen. Reliable wi-fi connection is recommended. Registration required. If interested contact Kimberly Ferstler at [kmf239@cornell.edu](mailto:kmf239@cornell.edu) or 518-234-4303, ext. 120.

## What's For Dinner?

Wednesday, September 8, 2021, 5:30-6:30 p.m.  
Additional sessions in the series: September 15, 22 & 29, October 13 & 20

Join our nutrition educator, Kimberly, for a 6-week virtual series of classes to learn about both the "why" of eating healthy and the "how." One hour a week includes a nutrition lesson and time for a cook-along dish. All ages are welcome! In each class you can choose to cook along and prepare something for dinner. Each recipe will be easy to prepare using typical kitchen tools. The recipe for each week will be shared about a week in advance, so you'll have plenty of time to purchase ingredients and gather equipment. The recipes generally make 4-6 servings. Companion recipes will also be sent. Please note that the companion recipes may NOT be part of the cook-along. The classes are free for all participants, but you need to provide the ingredients and kitchen. Reliable wi-fi connection is recommended. Registration required. If interested contact Kimberly Ferstler at [kmf239@cornell.edu](mailto:kmf239@cornell.edu) or 518-234-4303, ext. 120.

## Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties - September Board of Directors Meeting

Thursday, September 9, 2021, 6:30-9:00 p.m.  
Meetings are open to the public. If interested in attending, please check with the office at 518-234-4303 to confirm the day and location of the meeting.

## Planting and Growing Garlic

Wednesday, September 29, 2021, 6:30-7:30 p.m.  
Most people use garlic in their cooking at home, so why not grow it? Topics will include learning how to plant, maintain, grow, and harvest garlic. This will be a hybrid meeting with the choice of in person at the Cobleskill office or Zoom. For more information or to register, contact Jessica Holmes at [jmh452@cornell.edu](mailto:jmh452@cornell.edu) or 518-234-4303, ext. 119.

## National 4-H Week

Sunday, October 3 through Saturday, October 9, 2021  
Take advantage of this important week to recognize the remarkable 4-H youth in our communities. Look for 4-H displays, or visit our website [cceschoharie-otsego.org](http://cceschoharie-otsego.org) to see the incredible experiences that 4-H offers young people.

## Fall Tractor Supply 4-H Paper Clover Campaign

Wednesday, October 6 through Sunday, October 17, 2021  
Each spring and fall, Tractor Supply raises money for 4-H programs through the sale of Paper Clovers in their stores. 100% of funds raised benefit 4-H: 90% fund local/state experiences, and 10% supports national 4-H programming. Contribute during the 2021 fundraiser by: donating in-store at the register or at a 4-H local club display; donating online at checkout when making a purchase on [tractorsupply.com](http://tractorsupply.com) (donations will be assigned to states based on the shipping location); or donating by phone when you call TSC Customer Solutions at 877-718-6750.

## Beginner Backyard Chickens

Tuesday, October 19, 2021, 6:30-7:30 p.m.  
Are you thinking about getting your own chickens at home? Join Jessica Holmes to learn about different types of chickens, benefits of having them, and rules and regulations in your town. This will be a hybrid meeting with the choice of in person at the Cobleskill office or Zoom. For more information or to register, contact Jessica Holmes at [jmh452@cornell.edu](mailto:jmh452@cornell.edu) or 518-234-4303, ext. 119.

## Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties - October Board of Directors Meeting

October 2021 – This meeting is usually not held in favor of the Annual Meeting and Dinner, but may be held subject to board action.

Meetings are open to the public. If interested in attending, please check with the office at 518-234-4303 to confirm the day and location of the meeting.

## Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie and Otsego Counties Annual Meeting and Dinner

*Date and location to be determined.*

You are invited to attend our Annual Meeting and Dinner. Generally held in person in October, but held last year online in November, it typically includes a reception followed by dinner, plus a keynote speaker and updates from the program staff. If interested in attending, please check with the office at 518-234-4303 to confirm the day and location of the meeting.

## Budget Bites

*This series is offered regularly; contact Michelle for specific dates.*

This nutrition education series focuses on recipes using fruits and vegetables and is free to income-eligible families. Learn budget-friendly recipes and receive a \$40 gift certificate for the Shoe Department upon completion of the series. Stipend for certificate awarded by Bassett 5210 Initiative. For more information or to register, contact Michelle Leveski at 518-234-4303, ext. 115 or email [mml39@cornell.edu](mailto:mml39@cornell.edu).

## Cooking With Kids

*This series is offered regularly; contact Michelle for specific dates.*

Home with the kids? Try out new recipes while having fun with the family. Just gather some ingredients and come prepare a meal with us! This fun, interactive series of virtual cooking lessons is free to income eligible families. Receive a \$40 gift certificate to the Shoe Department upon completion of 6 lessons. Stipend for the certificate awarded by Bassett 5210 initiative. If interested please contact Michelle Leveski at 518-234-4303, ext. 115 or email [mml39@cornell.edu](mailto:mml39@cornell.edu).

**Visit our website, [www.cceschoharie-otsego.org](http://www.cceschoharie-otsego.org), to see additional events not listed.**



USDA photo by Lance Cheung

## The Dairy Industry is Changing Before Our Eyes

BY DAVID R. BALBIAN, REGIONAL DAIRY MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST

*Originally printed in the Central New York Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2021*

The dairy industry has been changing and evolving for as long as I can remember. The trend towards fewer but larger farms is continuing and has likely accelerated during this period of COVID-19. The sale of quotas has prompted some to cash out and exit the industry. Quotas or a two-tiered pricing system based on historical production has made it difficult to plan for the future. This phenomenon is not unique to the northeast. These types of supply management systems exist in other parts of the country, as well. Yet this approach does not seem to have been very effective in dampening down the milk supply. Some handlers have not implemented supply management systems. These have been mostly independent handlers. They do not have the luxury of charging back to the producer-member losses incurred from excess milk sold at a discount or dumped. One way they deal with an excess supply is to notify some supplying dairies that they no longer wish to purchase their milk. We have seen this in our own local region. It creates lots of stress, and difficult decisions need to be made.

So, what is causing the national milk supply to continue to increase with quotas in place and low milk prices for non-quota milk? Some producers

under quota are still producing above quota and simply receiving a lower price for over-quota milk. Are they thinking their quota might be increased or lifted at some time? Some producers not under a quota are producing well over their historical production. The Dairy Margin Coverage program and other risk management tools are providing income that helps to make up for the low milk price and low margins after feed costs.

Research and new technology have played a big role in increased milk output on a per-cow basis. Computing technology has improved our ability to manage records on large numbers of cows. Cow monitoring systems, robotic milkers, and genomics have all advanced because of computerization. Improvements in dairy nutrition, forage quality, cow comfort, and genetics have all increased milk output. At one time if you had a 20,000 lb. herd average, you had the top herd in the county. Now that is below average. A 30,000 lb. herd average is now the new high-performance standard.

So, what do we do to balance the milk supply with demand? To me it seems like the only effective way to hold down production is to have a national quota system that every dairy must participate in. I am not advocating for or against a national quota system, but it seems it would be the only way to

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## *The Dairy Industry, continued from page 11*

effectively control the milk supply. The chances of a national quota system being implemented are pretty much zero. Consumer groups have lots of political clout, and a national system will be met with cries that dairy products will become unaffordable along with cries of “price enhancement.” Politically, a national quota system is dead in the water. Consumers have been the real winners as all of these changes have taken place in the dairy industry. The result has been a plentiful supply of low-cost dairy products.

I will never forget some podcasts that Bob Cropp, Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin, participated in over the years. He discussed what influences milk production output. When milk prices are favorable, total output increases. This is basic economics 101. Dairy producers hate to pay more in taxes, so they reinvest in the business. That often means an expansion, which creates more milk production. When milk prices are low, some producers will increase milk output as a way to increase cash flow. So, the question that comes up is: when does milk output ever go down? Well, the answer is that milk output goes down when milk prices are low long enough to drive some producers out of business and cause cows to go to the beef pen. This is a very slow and economically painful process, but it is reality.

The increased economic competitiveness in the industry has caused some producers to transition to organic production and a few have transitioned to grass-fed organic production. Those categories do represent a small portion of U.S. dairy production, especially the latter. However, it has allowed those farms to remain smaller and still generate a sustainable income. Some (very few) dairy producers have delved into the processing and marketing of their own milk or dairy products. This entirely new and additional enterprise requires a new set of marketing skills.

The geographic center of dairy production in the country has been moving west for quite some time. Not long ago, New York was third in national production. Then Idaho passed us. Now (at least for the month of May 2021) Texas has edged ahead of New York. That will move us into fifth place. New York has still been increasing milk production, just

not as fast as Idaho and Texas. California, Idaho, and Texas all have a new modern high output dairy industry. Wisconsin, along with New York, has a mix of newer and more traditional smaller dairies.

So, what will the future bring? I can only speculate about the future. However, it seems that the past trends of fewer but larger will continue. Some growth in organic, grass-fed organic, and local processing and marketing is what I would expect. I expect long term we will still see a vibrant dairy industry in the Northeast and the upper Midwest. The advantages these traditional dairy areas still have is plentiful water (most of the time), the ability to produce forages at a reasonable cost, and a market that is nearby (New York City, Boston, and the Metropolitan areas along the coast down to Washington D.C.). The big western states of California, Idaho, and Texas will continue to be very big players in the industry. Water is a big issue in California, along with environmental challenges. This is nothing new and we have seen the impacts with some short-term production declines in the past. Farms are drilling wells deeper and deeper in California and Texas to obtain water. Will there be a point in time when those wells come up dry? It is hard to say, but, at some point in time, water and environmental challenges will have an increased impact on dairy production in that part of the country.

Sign up for the CNYDLFC newsletter at their website: [cnydfc.cce.cornell.edu](http://cnydfc.cce.cornell.edu) or contact Regional Dairy Management Specialist David Balbian at [drb23@cornell.edu](mailto:drb23@cornell.edu).



# 4-H Happenings



*Field and Flats Club members*

The Field and Flats 4-H Club held their March club meeting to judge in the *Hoard's Dairyman* contest and to complete a community service project.



*Dog training with Sonja Galley*

The Spring Dog Training classes in Otsego County began in April, with beginner dog handlers and returning experienced dog handlers learning about showmanship, obedience, rally, and agility, through hands-on classes taught by 4-H volunteer Sonja Galley.

In the month of May, 4-H members from both Schoharie and Otsego counties attended the 4-H Tractor Safety Certification course virtually and in person. Youth ages 14 and up spent many hours studying the curriculum and task sheets. A written and driving test was completed in order to receive the Safe Tractor and Machinery Operator's Certification. This course was taught by James Gregory, John Deere Tech Instructor at SUNY Cobleskill.



*Hands on at the Tractor Safety Certification course*

Also in May, Otsego county youth competed in the 2021 4-H Regional Dairy Bowl Contest held in Chenango County. The Otsego county youth placed in Novice, Junior, and Senior levels, both as individuals and as teams. We again wish to thank all the volunteers and coaches who helped make this event fun and educational!



*Practicing dairy showmanship*

Youth also spent time prepping for both fairs. 4-H volunteer Susan Menendez taught a Dairy Cattle Showmanship Workshop in June at the Otsego County Fairgrounds. This workshop taught 4-H dairy exhibitors how to show their animal to its best advantage, as well as the appearance of the exhibitor and equipment, and the appearance of the animal.



*Practicing goat showmanship*



*Learning about poultry showmanship*

*Continues on page 14*

## 4-H Happenings, continued from page 13



*Learning about rabbit showmanship*

More than 75 4-H members from across Otsego and Schoharie counties showed their project animals at The Farmers' Museum Junior Livestock Show in July. All species were present: dairy, beef, swine, sheep, goats, and—new this year—meat goats. The youth were very pleased to be able to get in the showing and show what they have been practicing at home. CCE of

Schoharie County 4-H also had various livestock showmanship clinics in which youth were given the opportunity to learn from experienced showmen and sharpen their showing skills.

More than 75 4-H members from across Otsego and Schoharie



*Showing swine at the Junior Livestock Show*



*Showing a beef calf at the Junior Livestock Show*



*Showing a dairy goat at the Junior Livestock Show*



*Showing a lamb at the Junior Livestock Show*

Schoharie & Otsego Counties are so proud of the 4-H youth and all the hard work they put into their project animals.



*Some of the dairy cattle champions at the Junior Livestock Show*

The 4-H shows at the fairs were a success, and photos and news will be included in the next issue of *Connections*.



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# Horses as Teachers

BY LAUREN ANDERSON

*Lauren Anderson is an administrative assistant at CCE Schoharie and Otsego Counties. She has a bachelor's in animal science and has three horses of her own: two thoroughbreds and an Appaloosa.*



If you asked a dozen people what their horse is to them, you would likely receive a dozen different answers. Many own horses for sport, others as a hobby. Some would call them livestock, some pets, some working animals, or a means of transportation. But regardless of their jobs, all horses are teachers—though we don't always realize it.

Horses teach you to work hard for the things you want, to stay determined, and how to be a good leader. They'll test your patience, make you question your decisions, and occasionally shove you out of your comfort zone without warning. But in doing so, they will show you what you are capable of, affirm your confidence in yourself, and leave you with lessons to last a lifetime.

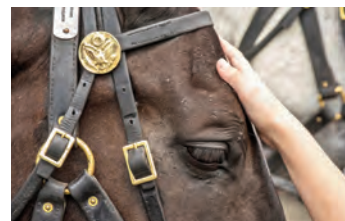
If we, as humans, were to focus only on what a person says and not what they do, we would be missing most of the conversation! Only a small portion of what we say is communicated through the words we choose to use. Most communication is nonverbal, including our tone of voice and body language. To “listen” to a horse, you must train yourself to pick up on nonverbal cues even more attentively.

Horses are the ultimate empaths. They can always sense what you're feeling. If you had a bad day at work and come to the barn in a bad mood, they feel it and will respond accordingly. If your energy or anxiety level is high, so, too, with theirs be. Horses unknowingly coach you to control your emotions, teaching you to keep them in check. They teach you to take a moment at the start of each new day, to leave your negative emotions and distracting thoughts at the barn door, and to be present in the moment. If things aren't going the way you want today, take a step back, sleep on it, and try again tomorrow using the skills you gained today.

Because horses cannot simply tell you why they do what they do, horse-men and -women learn to

look for the reason behind the behavior. “Are they not doing what I ask due to pain, stress, or confusion? Was there a logical reason for this behavior that I don't yet understand? Is there something I could change that would help them to better understand?”

Living animals—humans included—will never be perfect. If you press too hard for perfection, you will be more likely to gain resentment instead. Value the effort that went into the attempt; slowly build upon it in a positive manner for the fastest and most reliable results. Progress doesn't need to happen overnight—be patient!



*Photos courtesy of USDA*



*My teacher, Bear, rolling*

Confidence must be built over time on a foundation of knowledge, skill, experience, and success. Set yourself, and others, up for success whenever possible.

Always be ready to improvise, because things rarely go according to plan. Keep your goals flexible.

If you're no longer passionate about what you're working to attain, choose a new path.

Trust is a two-way street which is difficult to gain but very easy to lose. Use it wisely.

Stay humble. Just when you think you've got it all figured out, you'll find yourself sitting in the dirt while your horse rolls on your saddle.

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