



NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

FALL 2013 ISSUE

The Rural Classroom of the Future: Here Today

Picture the rural school of the future. The classrooms are bustling with technology and activity. Students have traded the burden of a heavy-laden backpack for a tablet computer. Students receive instruction and network with world-renowned scholars, scientists, artists and musicians from across the state, without the need to be in the same room. Advanced Placement courses are offered in partnership with schools throughout the region. Younger students collaborate online with a city zoo to share their ideas to improve animal habitats. Another classroom engages in an electronic cultural exchange with a school located on the other side of the globe.

That future is now. It is being implemented in a number of schools, including Pine Valley Central School District, a rural district encompassing portions of northeastern Chautauqua County and northwestern Cattaraugus County.

During the 2012-2013 school year, 350 iPads were provided to teachers, students and classrooms at Pine Valley. This school year, the program has been expanded. Every student from grades three through 12 will receive iPads. Kindergarten through second grade classrooms will also receive a smaller number of the devices. Each teacher will receive her or his own iPad.

Some people might cringe at the thought of providing students with the responsibility to use and care for an expensive electronic device. In practice, though, the school district experienced very few problems with them. Of the 350 iPads given to students, only a very few required repair. The school was able to locate lost iPads using specialized software loaded on the tablets.

Furthermore, a detailed student handbook outlines the requirements for the care, cleaning and personalization of the iPads. It provides details on the software provided, acceptable use of the devices, prohibited activities, and the responsibilities of the school, students and parents. The school has also invested in a protection plan and warranties for the devices.

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FALL 2013 Rural Futures

NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT RURAL NEW YORK STATE

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The NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources is a joint bipartisan office of the State Legislature.



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Integration

Adding iPads to the classroom environment provides teachers with a new tool that is quite flexible. There are a multitude of apps that teachers can use to tailor the device to their teaching style and courses of study. Teachers are encouraged to search for new apps and experiment with them.

The devices will also streamline some of the administrative functions that teachers perform. Because each teacher will have an iPad, it will enable them to take attendance on the devices. With the additional safety and security concerns that school districts face, the devices provide another method for emergency communication.

Through the use of classroom management software installed on the devices, teachers can use their iPads to monitor and control the usage of student iPads. They can limit and change usage to a certain app to ensure that students are focused on the task at hand. Teachers can even use these tools to monitor the amount of charge left on each student's device. They can also help students regain access to their iPads if they forget their passwords.

Additionally, the devices are a step toward a paperless school, a goal that Superintendent Peter Morgante is enthusiastically pursuing. He looks forward to the day when students do not have to carry heavy textbooks, and instead access them electronically.



(Photo courtesy of Pine Valley Central School District)

Virtual Learning

New technology can also be incorporated into virtual learning initiatives. Online and blended learning programs, often referred to as virtual learning, provide schools with cost-effective opportunities to use technology to offer students access to courses otherwise not available.

Mr. Mike Bayba, Distance Learning Specialist at Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES is excited about the impact that distance learning, online learning and other hybrid learning programs will have on schools and students. He is working with most of the schools in his BOCES region to develop and promote new distance learning opportunities. For example, a database developed by Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES lists a multitude of distance learning courses that schools across Western New York have opted to teach or can join.

Rural schools are finding that it is increasingly difficult to provide the coursework that students need to be accepted into many college programs. To address this issue, Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES applied a grant from the State Education Department to create Virtual Advanced Placement (VAP) courses. Pine Valley students are participating in VAP courses including English Language and Composition, Psychology, US Government and Politics. The school is hosting a Spanish Language and Culture course. Many of the students even got a head-start on the school year by starting their VAP courses online, before the school year even began.

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Pine Valley fifth grade students learning with iPads. (Photo courtesy of Pine Valley Central School District)

Virtual learning is applicable across all age ranges, not just high school students pursuing college credits. For example, Pine Valley third graders participated in a distance learning program with the Buffalo Zoo on a project focused on animal enrichment. The program provided the students with the opportunity to design and plan an animal enrichment item, something that an animal could safely interact with in its zoo environment. Along the way, students participated in video conferences with zoo staff to learn about animal behavior and evaluate their plans. The program culminated with a visit to the zoo to see how the animals interacted with their animal enrichment items.

Mr. Matthew Bromberg, Director of Technology at Pine Valley Central School District, is hoping to connect a classroom in Pine Valley, most likely third graders, with a classroom in India. He is making a trip to India and will visit a school there in the hopes of setting up a world cultures distance learning opportunity between the schools. Conducting a cultural exchange is made more effective through the use of classroom technology.

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Challenges to Implementation

There are a number of obstacles that must be overcome in the process of implementing virtual learning programs and incorporating new technology into school classrooms.

In rural areas, broadband access can be limited. While the Pine Valley Central School District has excellent broadband capability, there are many areas within the community that do not. It can be difficult to get an adequate signal in some areas to place a wireless phone call, let alone transmit data. It is a problem that is far too common in rural areas.

Pine Valley addresses this problem by making Wi-Fi available in the school parking lot. They also partner with local libraries by providing computers and Wi-Fi access for students. There are a limited number of mobile wireless router cards available for students to borrow. Finally, students are able to view and save much of their work offline, then upload it later when they get to an area with Internet access.

Managing the technology is a big challenge, too. Even though the devices are quite intuitive, especially for the youngest users, simply providing students and teachers with tablet computers is not adequate. Careful planning and significant time are needed to synchronize the devices and manage the multitude of applications needed to keep classroom curriculum functioning smoothly.

Another challenge relates to the school's goal of providing textbooks electronically. Inconsistency among publishers and a lack of availability of textbooks in electronic form makes it more difficult for Pine Valley to go paperless. Still, the district remains optimistic that this is a challenge that will be overcome with time.

Virtual Learning Legislation

With virtual learning gaining in importance throughout New York State, it is an issue being addressed by the Rural Resources Commission.

A Rural Resources bill passed in the Senate (S.5509-A), and sponsored by Senator Catharine Young, would help rural school districts dramatically increase course offerings for students by taking steps toward the creation of a statewide online and blended learning program. The Assembly version of the bill is sponsored by Assemblyman Dennis Gabryszak.

The legislation would direct the Commissioner of Education, in conjunction with other state entities, to establish an Online Learning Advisory Committee and to make recommendations regarding the development and delivery of virtual learning services. The committee would be tasked with sharing their findings and recommendations with the Legislature and the Governor to be considered for inclusion in the budget.

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Looking Forward

The lessons learned along the way are important not just for Pine Valley, but for other school districts that are looking at incorporating this technology down the road.

Pine Valley joins a number of schools across the country that are integrating cutting-edge technology and creating virtual learning environments in the classroom. They have learned a lot throughout the process, and they are eager to share what they have learned.

“We’re not riding the wave, we’re leading the wave,” said Mr. Bromberg.

He recognizes that creating this learning environment can be overwhelming. He recommends that school districts exploring this technology ensure that they have the necessary

staffing and the support of the community, school board and staff. Mr. Bromberg suggests jumping in and fine-tuning the process along the way. Finally, he is quick to point out that BOCES and other organizations can provide a great deal of support throughout the journey.

From the era of the one-room schoolhouse to present day, it has not been easy for rural school districts in New York. Yet, the challenges faced by rural schools provide opportunity for innovation. By using technology to shrink distance, enhance educational accessibility, streamline processes and reduce costs, many of the solutions to the challenges faced by rural school districts may be closer than first thought.

For more information about the school district and their program, please visit Pine Valley Central School District’s website: www.pval.org

Profile of a Rural Teacher: Sarah Olson, Pine Valley Central School District



(Photo courtesy of Mrs. Sarah Olson)

Mrs. Sarah Olson has worked for Pine Valley Central School District for five years, with most of that time spent teaching fifth graders math and science. Simply passing along knowledge to her students is not enough for Mrs. Olson. Like so many great teachers, she clearly has a passion for teaching, and she wants her students to develop a lifelong desire for learning.

“I want to empower the students to want to learn,” she said.

Mrs. Olson did not begin her career as a teacher. She worked in accounting, but

realized that she needed a change in career. “Sitting in an office was not for me,” said Mrs. Olson. So, she told her husband that she wanted to go back to school.

She chose to become a teacher in a rural school. “I’m a country girl,” she said. She drives 45 minutes to Pine Valley because she prefers the close-knit atmosphere of a small community. It is a polite and friendly environment, and one where teachers get to know students, parents and members of the local community.

When Pine Valley embarked on an initiative to bring iPads to the classroom, she leaped at the chance. It was an opportunity to create a paperless environment in her classroom. She did not have to use reams of paper to print out homework assignments or notes to parents, many of which would have ended up crinkled in the bottom of a backpack. Students submitted homework electronically. She used her iPad to grade it. Furthermore, she was able to contact parents electronically to pass along classroom announcements and even share homework assignments, much to the chagrin of some of her students.

Her students loved the new technology.

Many of them even admitted to enjoying taking notes on the devices. Many parents found it easier to communicate with her and keep up with classroom activities. It made it easier to provide information to students in multiple formats including text, photos and video. It also enabled her to share assignments and classroom notes with students who were out sick.

After teaching topics including fractions, area, perimeter, electromagnetism, optics and ecosystems, Mrs. Olson is moving on to a new role in the district as an Elementary Technology Integration Teacher. Her new responsibilities include assisting other teachers as they incorporate new technology in school classrooms. She is excited to help bridge the gap between the technology gurus, who manage the technology, and the students and teachers, who will use it every day.

In her quest to build a love of learning within her students, Mrs. Olson sees great potential by keeping up with technology in the classroom. Along with her peers, she clearly recognizes the challenges facing rural schools, and she eagerly promotes the integration of new technology as an important solution.

Dairy Farmers: Reaching Out

Ms. Lorraine Lewandrowski is a dairy farmer and a lawyer from Herkimer County. She is not shy about sharing her views on the importance of dairy farmers in New York State. She shares her message in person and via social media, in particular as a prolific user of Twitter, with more than 10,000 followers.



NY Farmers & Friends members and farmers Ms. Tammy Graves, Ms. Deb Windecker and Ms. Lorraine Lewandrowski present a workshop about Upstate dairy farms at the 2013 Just Food Conference in New York City.

She strongly believes that farmers themselves can be among the best advocates for farming and agriculture.

Ms. Lewandrowski has spent the past few years reaching out and building relationships with food interest groups, especially with groups in New York City. It is not always an easy process, and the issues discussed can be contentious.

Still, Ms. Lewandrowski believes that it is worth the effort. She points out that many people interested in food are very interested in where their food originates. Reaching out provides opportunities to dispel myths and share information about the importance of farming in rural New York.

In late March, Ms. Lewandrowski and a small group of dairy farmers made the five-hour trip to New York City. This informal group, called "NY Farmers & Friends" presented a workshop titled "Introduction to the New York Milkshed" at the 2013 Just Food Conference. During the workshop

they shared information about the complexity and diversity of dairy farms in Upstate New York and their connection to New York City. It prompted a lively question and answer session and generated quite a few contacts for the group. The group was asked about sharing their message at schools, and the event resulted in quite a few follow-up discussions via email and social media. It may even lead to urban residents making their own visits to dairy farms.

When she communicates with food-interest groups, Ms. Lewandrowski tries to put herself in their shoes and gives them great credit for thinking about food. She loves meeting urban gardeners and learning about school gardens. She also recognizes the value of two-way communication. It is important to learn about and understand the food-related issues that are raised by urban residents.

Ms. Lewandrowski encourages farmers to reach out to food interest groups in the urban environments closest to them, build relationships, and share what they learn with their fellow farmers.

Read more about Ms. Lewandrowski's March trip to New York City in her "Small Dairies and the Big Apple" blog post on www.dailyonder.com.



Harvest New York: Growing New York's Agriculture and Food Economy

Through the leadership of Senator Catharine Young and the New York State Legislature, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) secured funding to expand and enhance agriculture economic development in Western New York.

Harvest New York, the pilot project in this CCE initiative, began in 2012 with the formation of a regional agriculture team consisting of three new areas of expertise: Dairy Food Processing, Agriculture Economic Development, and Dairy Modernization.

Specialists in these areas develop educational programs to help increase agricultural investments, profitability and sustainability. They maximize connections to the research and resources of Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, respond to emerging opportunities, and assist with workforce development and business expansion.

Dairy Food Processing

As the food and dairy processing industry continues to grow in Western New York, so does the need for a qualified workforce. Western NY processors have struggled to find qualified individuals to staff their facilities. With new plants coming to the region and others looking to expand, the demand for skilled employees grows. Harvest NY staff collaborated with industry professionals to determine what skills are necessary to work in the food-processing environment. They discovered that knowledge of food safety regulations and processing equipment operations, as well as good oral and written communication skills are needed.



A course on dairy processing equipment. (Photo courtesy of Harvest NY)

Ms. Tristan Zuber, Harvest NY's Dairy Processing Specialist, is developing a plan to expand accessibility to Cornell's Dairy Food's Extension Certificate Program, a program designed to train employees in the areas of fluid milk, fermented dairy and cheese processing. Ms. Zuber has been working with industry professionals, Rochester Institute of Technology staff, regional economic development centers and community colleges to bring short courses to Western New York.

Food Processing Courses

Basic and Advanced Cultured Dairy Products courses: Ms. Zuber developed two short courses for those seeking to expand their knowledge of cultured dairy products, such as yogurt and cottage cheese.

Food Processing Certificate Program: The Genesee County Economic Development Center organized a two-week training program for the underemployed or unemployed who expressed interest in a career in food processing. Harvest NY staff taught the Basic Dairy Science short course. Of the numbers of employees trained, 80 percent had no previous experience working in the food industry. Yancey's Fancy invited 18 participants for a visit and an opportunity for a more formal interview/application process. Alpina and Perry's also expressed interest in participants.

Community College Degree Programs

Ms. Zuber worked with community colleges in Western New York to help develop curriculums that will meet the needs of a growing workforce in food processing. In February, she helped Genesee Community College apply for a SUNY High Needs Grant. Genesee Community College was awarded \$238,719 to hire faculty and offer an associate's degree program in Food Processing Technology. The curriculum was approved by the GCC Board of Trustees and now awaits final approval at the SUNY level.

Ms. Zuber also supported curriculum development at Erie Community College. They approved a ten-month food processing program track in their Biomanufacturing Certificate Program and are exploring the development of a degree program in food processing.

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Agriculture Economic Development

Since April 2013, Ms. Cheryl Thayer, Harvest NY's Local Foods Systems Specialist, assisted multiple agricultural businesses to identify and apply for a total of \$978,636 in grant funds. If awarded, grants will help organizations create and retain jobs, as well as generate more income in the state's agricultural sector.

Food Hub Feasibility Study and Business Plan

Ms. Thayer, in collaboration with Field and Fork Network and New Venture Advisors, is working through the market research and business planning phase of developing a regional food hub to assist the many small farmers with their entry into larger and more diversified markets. This project will directly benefit Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming and Genesee Counties, with secondary benefits to Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties.

Tri-County Farm to School

This project proposes to unite Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara Counties in a collaborative partnership that will increase the ability of schools and farms to find mutually beneficial purchasing relationships.

Farmers Market SNAP Incentive Program

Ms. Thayer is assisting the Field and Fork Network in bringing the Fair Food Network's highly successful "Double Up Food Bucks" program to Western New York farmers markets. Leveraging the support of public and private funds, this project matches Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at participating farmers markets dollar-for-dollar, up to \$20 per visit, 100 percent of which is retained by farmers.

Intensive Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training, Technical Assistance and Market Development:

Building on Cornell's existing GAP trainings, this project aims to increase the number of GAP certified farms in a five-county region of Western New York with a goal of helping small and mid-size farms break into new wholesale markets.



Harvest NY staff help host a food system roundtable discussion which included a tour of Foodlink in Rochester, NY, a regional food bank. (Photo courtesy of Harvest NY)

Dairy Modernization

The "Ten Pound Club" is a discussion group for dairy farmers in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties organized by Harvest NY's Dairy Modernization Specialist, Ms. Beth Dahl. The group brings together ten dairy farms with over 1,700 cows. The goal is to expose participants to a variety of applied management and facility options which support increased milk production. The group resumed meeting in the late summer with a tour and discussion at Cabhi Farms in Clymer, NY.

Individual farm consultation by Ms. Dahl helped Chautauqua County farmers develop a plan for growth and modernization. A profit team, which included other CCE specialists, a Farm Net consultant and a herd nutritionist, was assembled. Utilizing data provided by Harvest NY, John and Laura Knight were able to analyze detailed growth options for their farm. Models and budgets provided by the profit team were key to increasing the Knight's comfort around succession planning, preparing them for 15 percent herd growth this summer, and updating their facilities and routines to accommodate the planned growth. Continuing work will include planning for a new barn and milking facility.

For contact information or to learn more about Harvest New York, please visit their website at www.harvestny.cce.cornell.edu.

■ USDA Rural Development in New York State An Interview with Lee Telega

The mission of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development agency is to improve economic conditions and the quality of life for rural communities. Lee Telega was recently appointed as the New York State Director for USDA Rural Development. He took a moment to meet with Rural Futures to discuss what Rural Development does, who the agency helps, and what projects and resources are available to rural residents and communities throughout New York State.

Question: Please tell us a little more about USDA Rural Development and how your agency works with rural New York residents and communities.

Lee Telega: Simply put, Rural Development is the (rural) economic development arm of the United States Department of Agriculture. Through our three mission areas – Housing, Utilities and Business – we seek to improve the overall economy and quality of life in rural communities. With more than 20 programs solely designed to assist rural communities throughout New York, chances are we have something that may benefit an area and its residents in one way or another.

Q: How does Rural Development assist rural communities?

LT: As I was just mentioning, we have three main mission areas. They consist of the Rural Housing Service (RHS), the Rural Business Service (RBS) and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) as well as a Community Programs component.



Lee Telega, New York State Director for USDA Rural Development. (Photo courtesy of USDA Rural Development)

The Rural Utilities Service can support such essential public facilities and services as water and sewer system expansion. The Rural Utilities Service also supports electric, telephone and broadband network expansion. The Rural Housing Service is made up of two program areas: Single Family Housing and Multi-Family Housing. Single Family Housing can assist with purchasing, renovating or improving the energy efficiency of a rural home while Multi-Family Housing works to provide affordable rental housing for very low to low and moderate income families, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Our Community Programs can support construction, renovation or expansion of rural health clinics, schools, provide assistance to Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), and help emergency service facilities including

police and fire departments purchase equipment, vehicles and other invaluable lifesaving tools.

The Rural Business Service promotes economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks, credit unions and community-managed lending pools to those that are both interested and eligible to participate – whether a rural community wants to establish a revolving loan fund or a business or producer is looking to expand their market reach.

Additionally, we offer technical assistance and other information to help agricultural producers and cooperatives get started and improve the effectiveness of their operations. We provide technical assistance to help communities undertake community empowerment programs – and so much more.

Q: What funding is available?

LT: The level of funding will vary by mission and program area each year. As you might imagine, budget and funding commitments change each fiscal year as well. These changes are driven by either Departmental focus or Presidential initiative.

However, it is safe to say that funding in the form of (direct) loans, loan guarantees, grants and a combination of all of the above are readily available.

Q: How are you currently working with New York State?

LT: Recently, members of my staff and I met with Senator Young to discuss what opportunities existed for us to partner. Appearing in your publication

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is just one example of how we are already working together and identifying how to better reach interested stakeholders.

Our primary interest is in connecting with other state leaders and organizations to ensure that federal investments in rural communities complement those of New York State.

In the coming months my team and I will be sharing success stories with you and your readers on how we have assisted communities and residents throughout the state.

Q: Where are your offices located?

LT: We have 10 offices geographically dispersed throughout the state. Your readers can visit our NY Offices webpage and find the nearest office and contact information. So, depending on where you live, we may be in your county, in your town or even down the road. We are generally co-located with other USDA agencies, such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and many others. These centers serve to be a one-stop-shop for interested stakeholders, so I strongly encourage your readers, if they are interested, to log on, call or stop by. Our folks are eager to help.

Q: How do I find out if my community is eligible for assistance from USDA Rural Development?

LT: I would encourage any interested reader to visit our eligibility website and select, by interest, the program they wish to learn more about in relation to their eligibility.

Each program we offer has different criteria that determine whether or not a community or residence is eligible – ranging from population of a given community to Median Household Income (MHI).

Thank you for stopping by Lee. It was great to talk to you and learn more about your agency and what partnership opportunities exist.

LT: Thanks again for having us. I look forward to working with Senator Young, Assemblyman Gabryszak and all of the members and staff of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources.

Mr. Telega can be reached via phone or email at Stanley.Telega@ny.usda.gov or at (315) 477-6400. Their website is www.rurdev.usda.gov/nyhome.html.



USDA Rural Development worked with Mercy Flight Western New York to provide a combination of loans and loan guarantees totaling more than \$3 million dollars for the purchase of two state-of-the-art helicopters designed to enhance their emergency medical transport capability. (Photo courtesy of USDA Rural Development)

Fighting for the Rural Hospital



State leaders discuss the future of rural hospitals with representatives from rural healthcare facilities, community healthcare organizations and officials from the New York State Department of Health.

With so many changes happening on the state and federal levels with healthcare, often, it is hard to answer the most important question: what do these changes mean to me?

During a medical emergency, it is vital to get a sick or injured person to a hospital as quickly as possible. In many rural communities, issues of transportation and geographic distance are important contributing factors to this trip. As healthcare continues to change, it is important that our first line of defense – the rural hospital – remains stable and sustainable.

Rural hospitals are often the largest employer in the geographic region. These facilities provide important services and care, as well as contribute to the economic development of the communities they serve. Recently,

much attention has been paid to the plight of hospitals downstate and in New York City. However, rural hospitals throughout New York State are not only faced with financial and sustainability concerns like their urban counterparts, but they must also confront unique issues such as growing personnel shortages, high volumes of uninsured patients and access to care.

In order to address these concerns, Senator Catharine Young, Chair of the Commission on Rural Resources and Senator Kemp Hannon, Chair of the Senate Health Committee, hosted a roundtable discussion in June focused on the status of rural hospitals. Attendees included CEO's from a number of rural healthcare facilities, community healthcare organizations, representatives from the New York State Department of Health, and members of the State Legislature.

Attendees at the event gave first-hand accounts of innovative models that rural facilities are currently utilizing to adapt to the changing healthcare landscape. The participants spoke about initiatives including telehealth, telemedicine, collaborative efforts, physician recruiting as well as other strategies to both reduce costs and improve outcomes in New York's most rural communities. They shared personal experiences and offered suggestions from their time in rural hospitals.

Given the importance of this topic, it is a discussion that continues to evolve. Future events will include methods to match the needs of communities with local healthcare facilities as well as regulatory and administrative reforms. A full video of the June roundtable can be viewed at the Commission's website.

Positive Results: A Rural Health Telehealth Demonstration Study

Many people who struggle with chronic medical conditions still have a desire to live independently, yet they face many difficulties in managing their health. In rural areas, they may have to travel long distances for routine medical appointments or for emergency care. Home health care providers can also be costly or in short supply.

Solving this problem might be achieved through the use of telehealth technology.

A three-month demonstration study of telehealth services conducted by WILLCARE in Chautauqua County was completed earlier this year as part of the New York State Department of Health's Telemedicine Demonstration Program. The project studied the effectiveness of using telehealth technology to monitor the vital signs of individuals living at home who have been diagnosed with congestive heart failure, diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Each of these diseases can be costly to treat through traditional office or home health care visits and could require hospitalization if not closely monitored.

Home telehealth monitoring equipment was provided to patients, as well as customized training and education related to their conditions. Each patient who participated in the study completed a daily series of monitoring sessions where data like vital signs and oxygen saturation levels was collected. The process took only a few minutes.

The data gathered was transmitted to a monitoring service where it was reviewed by registered nurses who were trained in telehealth. Those nurses flagged any concerns, and they were able to communicate quickly with the patients, caregivers and physicians.

The results were very positive. Because of this proactive approach to healthcare, participants experienced significant improvements in their health status and their functional capabilities. Most importantly, it reduced hospital visits for the patients involved in the study by more than a third. It also reduced the length of hospital stays.

In rural areas, patients often have to travel long distances to get to a hospital. Not only are the distances burdensome, but with rising fuel costs, travel can become unaffordable. Hospital visits are particularly costly, especially when patients are admitted for lengthy stays. A reduction in hospital visits dramatically reduces healthcare costs, eases burdens on caregivers and improves patient quality of life.

The patients themselves provided important feedback for the study. As a result of surveys conducted during the study, patients reported feeling comfortable with using the monitoring equipment. Many of them said that they gained peace of mind and an increased feeling of security as a result of the monitoring.

Telehealth can be an important part of the equation for addressing the healthcare needs of rural New York and improving access to care. The results of this study show just how promising telehealth can be for rural healthcare's future.



Another Tool for the Farm: Crowdfunding

John Condzella is a fourth-generation farmer from Suffolk County. His family has been growing fruits and vegetables on their family farm for over 100 years. They sell their products at local farmers markets and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) relationships.

While growing up on the family farm, Mr. Condzella gained an appreciation for locally-grown produce. With an understanding that locally-grown products often have better flavors and can be higher in quality, he recognized that the same thing could be done with beer. The rise in popularity of smaller craft breweries created a demand for local hops, leading Mr. Condzella to embark on an effort to grow hops on his farm.

He quickly realized that harvesting presented an obstacle to growing greater quantities and more varieties of hops. Because hops have a very limited time frame for harvesting, and hand-picking is quite labor-intensive, he needed to look for a mechanical means to increase productivity.

He found it in Europe. After a lengthy Internet search, he found a Wolf WHE 140 Hopfen Pflückmaschine for sale on a small farm that was no longer growing hops. The machine can accomplish in mere minutes what would take hours for a person to do by hand.

However, he was not certain that he could get a loan for an expensive machine that would only be used a couple weeks each year. Instead, he turned to Kickstarter, a crowdfunding website, to obtain the money he needed to buy and ship the machine to the United States.

He created a video promoting his idea to raise funds for the harvester, including his plan to share the use of the

machine with other hops farmers nearby. Contributors chose to pledge amounts from five dollars on up to over \$5,000. Each contributor to the campaign received a reward upon the successful completion of the project. Some of the rewards included hand-written thank you notes, contributor

names on a placard placed on the machine, hop plants, beer mugs, clothing, farm tours, meals on the farm, and even naming rights for rows of hops and for the harvester itself. The higher the contribution, the greater the rewards.

He reached out to people he knew and on social media to promote his project. In just over a month, more than 315 people pledged to support his campaign. Most of them live in New York State, but there were contributors from across the country, and even one from Norway. Mr. Condzella did not know most of the contributors, although he made many new friends throughout the process. A number of the people who supported the purchase even opted to decline their reward for contributing, preferring instead that the money be spent fully on the project.

Mr. Condzella met his fundraising goal. He purchased the machine and shipped it across the Atlantic where it eventually arrived on his farm. It enabled him to successfully harvest his crop, something he could not have accomplished without it. Other farmers are already looking into borrowing the harvester. Mr. Condzella plans to add another acre of hops to the farm in the upcoming months.

While crowdfunding might be best known for its use in funding films, art projects or books, there is no reason it cannot be used on a farm. With planning, passion and a bit of innovation, it can certainly be included in the farmer's toolbox.



Long Island hop farmers Mr. John Condzella and Mr. Andrew Tralka, stand in front of Mr. Condzella's Wolf hops harvester after using it to harvest Mr. Tralka's crop. (Photo courtesy of Mr. John Condzella)

Invasive Species Watch: Feral Swine (*Sus scrofa*)



Feral swine in New York State photographed by a trail camera. (Photo courtesy of USDA Wildlife Services)

When it comes to invasive species, feral swine are some of the most destructive and dangerous, especially among the four-legged variety. Popular television programs show trappers slogging through swamps, and trekking through forests and farmland in states like Louisiana, Texas and Florida to capture problematic feral swine.

But it is not a problem limited to the deep South. There are at least four groups of feral swine that have been breeding in New York State. They have been found in Clinton, Cortland, Delaware, Sullivan, Onondaga, and Tioga Counties.

The term “feral swine” refers to Eurasian boars that have been released or have escaped into the wild. They can also be domestic swine that have escaped and are living wild, or a hybrid combination of domestic swine and Eurasian boars.

Many of these animals are quite large and very aggressive. With their razor-sharp tusks, they pose a risk to livestock and people. They root up large areas of crops and other plants as they forage for food. Feral swine can carry diseases that can be transmitted to other animals or spread via nearby water supplies. Their behavior can push out native species like deer and turkey. They pose a danger to threatened or endangered species. For example, it has been documented that feral pigs have rooted out and consumed the eggs of the Blanding’s turtle, a threatened species in New York State.

These animals have caused thousands of dollars in damage to crops and land for New York farmers and landowners. In comparison to many southern states where they cause tens of millions of dollars in damage annually, the impact is nowhere near as extensive. Yet it is an issue that must be addressed before populations of feral swine become entrenched.

Feral swine are capable of producing significant numbers of offspring. With high survival rates of their young, there is the potential for rapid population growth. As populations of feral swine spread out and settle in new areas, the damage could become more widespread.

It is a problem that is being addressed now, lest New York State join the ranks of states that can only attempt to manage the problem, let alone control it.



A muddy wallow created by feral swine in New York State. (Photo courtesy of USDA Wildlife Services)

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Fortunately, the population of feral swine in New York State is still small enough that it can be eradicated. Efforts are underway to locate and remove the existing populations of feral swine in the state. USDA Wildlife Services has been working with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, landowners and other organizations to eradicate the population.

Hunting feral swine is often suggested as a method of controlling the population. However, hunting may cause the population to increase and spread. Feral swine congregate together in groups called "sounders" made up of females and their offspring. Hunting can scatter a sounder, creating new population centers, making the task of eradication all the more difficult.

Finally, a bill passed by the State Legislature earlier this year would prohibit the importation, possession, sale or release of Eurasian boar in New York State. The bill is awaiting the Governor's signature. The combination of legislation in conjunction with existing efforts shows great promise for ridding New York State of this invasive species.

To report a sighting of feral swine please contact Mr. Justin Gansowski, Wildlife Disease Biologist, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, 1930 Route 9, Castleton, NY 12033, (518) 477-4837.



Invasive Species Update: Emerald Ash Borer

Larvae of the shiny metallic-green emerald ash borer pose a risk to New York's ash trees, with pockets of infestation occurring across the state. This species is native to Asia. It feeds exclusively on ash trees, killing them by cutting off the nutrients that keep the trees alive.

With this invasive species found in new locations recently, the state announced an expanded quarantine on the movement of ash products by loggers and forestry businesses in the state. This blanket quarantine replaces a more complicated web of local quarantines. It is another step in the effort to prevent the

spread of this destructive beetle. The quarantine extends across the state from the New England border to Western New York. It does not include the Adirondacks, the New York City area or Long Island.

There is, however, some potentially positive news. Recent reports indicate that the US Forest Service has discovered that some species of birds and insects enjoy dining on the emerald ash borer. Red-bellied woodpeckers, white-throated nuthatches and even some native parasitic wasps are making meals of the beetle. Possibly as a result, populations of woodpeckers and nuthatches are growing.

Volunteer Firefighters & EMS: Building a Tradition of Excellence

Rural communities depend on volunteers for a number of important tasks, especially the firefighters and emergency medical personnel who respond with haste when their neighbors are in need. These volunteers protect their communities and serve as the backbone of local emergency response.

In communities like Westons Mills, located in Cattaraugus County, fire protection and emergency response are provided by volunteers who take great pride in their service. Westons Mills Fire Department has built its success on tradition, training and experience.

Family connections are important in Westons Mills, with many volunteers being second or third generation members of the fire department. Members attend monthly meetings, participate in fundraisers, host community events and proudly march in parades. They have built a reputation for winning awards, including their recent selection as grand champion at the Southwestern Fireman's Parade.



There is also a heavy focus on training in Westons Mills, with training conducted weekly. Fire Chief Will Smith wants his department to be trained to the same level as professional firefighters. It is vital because they put that training to work during the 200 – 300 calls they respond to each year.



*A proud tradition of fire protection and emergency services.
(Photo courtesy of Westons Mills Fire Department)*

Westons Mills Fire Department and other fire departments across the state have built organizations where volunteers want to participate in a tradition of excellence. Doing so is vital to recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Yet that does not mean it is easy to find those volunteers. Unfortunately, in many communities, especially in rural areas, it is becoming more difficult to recruit the volunteers that are needed for these critical emergency services.

To address the shortfall, local fire departments and emergency squads are actively seeking new members. In particular, the Firemen's Association of the State of New York and other organizations sponsor a statewide effort called RecruitNY where local fire departments hold open houses in an effort to recruit new volunteers. This year's event took place during the last weekend in April. It is part of an overall goal to recruit 15,000 new volunteer firefighters across the state.

There is no need to wait until next year's RecruitNY open houses. Communities throughout New York are looking for volunteer firefighters and emergency medical responders to build upon their proud traditions of excellence.

Are you, or someone you know, interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter or emergency medical responder? Contact your local fire department, ambulance company or visit RecruitNY.org.

SAVE THE DATES



NYS Rural Housing Coalition, Inc.

34th Annual Conference
October 9-10, 2013
Hyatt Regency, Rochester, NY
ruralhousing.org/events
518-458-8696

Finger Lakes Cheese Trail Open House

October 12-13, 2013 (Columbus Day Weekend)
10 am – 5 pm
Various locations around the Finger Lakes
fcheesetrail.com
[facebook.com/FLXCheeseTrail](https://www.facebook.com/FLXCheeseTrail)

75th Annual Cornell Nutrition Conference for Feed Manufacturers

October 22-24, 2013
Doubletree Hotel, East Syracuse, NY
ansci.cornell.edu/cnconf/registration.html

New York Farm Bureau State Annual Meeting

December 3-5, 2013
Holiday Inn, Syracuse, NY
nyfb.org/news_and_events

**If you have any suggestions for upcoming editions,
Please email the Commission at RURALRES@NYSENATE.GOV**