

The Finger Lakes Sustainable Farming Center held its 2009 Creative Agriculture in August. Participants were from across the Northeast representing Soil & Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, FSA and extension as well as beginning and experienced farmers.



Morning panel of sustainable farmer presenters

Zaid Kurdieh, Norwich Meadows Farm, LLC, Norwich, NY

Zaid and his wife, Haifa, market certified organic produce through CSAs and farmers markets in New York City, driving the 450-mile round trip twice weekly during the growing season. Recently, the Kurdiehs started a CSA in upstate New York, at their own farm, where members pick up produce directly and spend time working in the greenhouse or fields. The farm's newest venture is eco-halal meat.

Their website is: <http://www.norwichmeadowsfarm.com>

Meg Schader, Wake Robin Farm, Jordan, NY

Meg and her husband are noted for their production of milk and a farm income from 12 Jersey cows. This is accomplished by also running a busy creamery and acting as their own distribution system. They produce more than 600 quarts of yogurt weekly, and "constantly" look for ways to keep the farm's relationship with the environment positive, keep a quality product available, and keep their family finances balanced with the farm.

Larry Lewis, Penn Yan, NY

Larry manages a certified organic farm that produces grains, forages, and beans. He has not stuck to just one crop, but has shifted his production over the course of years to take advantage of various markets.



Afternoon panel of sustainable farmer presenters

Paul Tillotson, Cottonwood Farms, Pavilion, NY

Paul is an organic dairy producer in partnership with his wife, Dana, and their son, Jason and his wife. They milk 320 cows and graze 350 acres on some hillsides in Genesee County. They purchase their small amounts of grain inputs from a nearby farm. Their manure is separated; the solids are used as bedding and the liquid is irrigated on their pastures. Paul explained his time commitment went from 90 hours/week to 45 after giving up row-crop production, and grazing enticed his son to stay on the farm. The stable organic milk price has given them the opportunity to budget for the whole year.

Rick Reisinger, Reisinger's Apple Country, Watkins Glen NY

Rick is a veteran orchardist who really values the ability of his you-pick apple orchard to bring families together actively. To him, the purpose of the farm is to provide income and not expand beyond the ability of the family to maintain it. It is a place where students and families come to learn. Most years, the Reisinger's have operated their farm without debt, increasing the fiscal sustainability.

Floyd Hoover, Penn Yan, NY

Mr. Hoover is widely known for his incredible insights about the relationship between farmers, their communities, and the farmland itself. ("I realize that conventional farming is 80 percent inputs and 20 percent management. Now organic, I do 80 percent management and 20 percent inputs.") Floyd Hoover also operates a regional welding service and mentors younger farmers in the community. He was among the first of his Mennonite community to establish farms in the Finger Lakes, and now leads tours to identify suitable farming areas for other Mennonite communities in the North Country of NY State.

John Santos, Vineyard Manager, Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards, Hector NY 14841

John is known for pioneering the composting of grape pomace with horse manure. Less known (but a subject of this conference) is his efforts to reduce the amount of vineyard spraying by modifying nozzle location to spray only the narrow zone of the vine that might require protection. Additionally, he avoids spraying parts of the vineyard that are not susceptible to various insect pests (for example, spraying only the first three panels in a vineyard row for insects that tend to stay on the perimeter of a vineyard block.)

After each panel, there was plenty of time for discussion at each table, each table's discussion headed in its own direction!

With our speakers Matt Harbur and John Noble, we were looking for the small/large scale debate. They actually talked about the complementary benefits that farms of differing scale provide and how operations of all sizes can work together.

Our dinner speaker was David Corsi, Vice-President of Producer for Wegmans Food Markets, talked about their work with the NYS Agriculture Experiment Station in Geneva, NY and developing a specialized or proprietary variety of red raspberries that grows well in high tunnels. He also talked of their relationship with local farmers, relying on the hand shake as the preferred method of firming up commitments to purchase produce.