

Just What Did NY Farms! Do in 2005?

Continued Building Farmer Consumer Connections

Through the use of our website, calendars, contests, and News to Share, NY Farms! coordinated and encouraged interaction between NYS' farmers and consumers. On average nearly three dozen telephone calls and emails requesting information were answered on a weekly basis from individuals, markets, stores or schools looking for local agricultural products or additional information on NY agriculture.

NY Farms! continued to work to build strong networks and alliances between organizations and agencies. News to Share and our Website work as a strong and effective information sharing mechanisms, as does our executive director. By highlighting the work done on projects undertaken in one part of the state, we hoped to facilitate connections and information sharing, spur new ideas, and avoid redundancy, duplicity and pitfalls.

Networking and alliance building continued with NY Farms! displays at the NY Agricultural Society Meeting, the NOFA NY Conference and the Farmers Direct Marketing Conference. We joined Cornell Farm to School and the Pride of NY at the Fruit and Vegetable Expo promoting Farm to School progress.

Board positions and memberships with other organizations such as the PRIDE of NY, NY Ag in the Classroom, Farm to School Statewide Coordinating Committee, NOFA-NY, NY Farm Bureau, PASA and others allowed NY Farms! an opportunity to develop new contacts and project partners.

NY Farms! continued to promote regional campaigns and branding programs in an effort to enhance the environment, meet local food needs, increase economic opportunity for farms and businesses and foster community development.

NY Farms! continued to act as an information clearinghouse for members (with Membership Pages), non-member farmers (with What's in Season) and other organizations (via the extensive LINKS pages currently under development). As of March 20th, 2006 NY Farms! had 153 paid members, exactly the same as one year ago!

Learning more about local agriculture was made fun with various contests and awards.

The Taste, Face, Place of NY Farms! Photo contest which ended several years ago was made into a photo gallery on the NY Farms! website. New photos were solicited to add to the current collection.

The Fourth Annual NY School Nutrition Association and NY Farms! NYHNYK Partnership Awards were presented to New York Schools who put forth tremendous effort in celebrating New York Harvest for New York Kids. This year four schools were recognized for their achievement. In the area of "Working with Local Farmers" Geneva City School District and Block Institute were both recognized. For "Merchandising/Promoting" Salem Central School District was honored and Niskayuna Central School District received the honors for "Building Partnerships & Integrating Farm to School in Wellness Activities".

For a second year, the public was encouraged to submit nominations for the **2006 I Love My NY Farmer Awards**. Nearly 200 entries were received. Ten farmers were recognized for their contribution to NY agriculture, their local community and their "going the extra mile".

The 2005 NY Agricultural Challenge "I Love NY Agriculture" was a grand scale scavenger hunt. NY Ag in the Classroom and NY Farm Bureau Foundation for Agricultural Education partnered with NY Farms! and many of the NY's commodity organizations to encourage New Yorkers to visit farms, fairs and markets. Close to fifty determined entrants (some teams of mother-daughter, husband-wife or brother-sister) were eligible for various prizes donated by sponsoring organizations such as the NY Wine and Grape Foundation, the NY Apple Association, the NYS Association of Agricultural Fairs and many others. Winners were drawn from eligible entries at the NY Farm Bureau Annual Meeting and posted on our website.

The Green Fork Awards recognizing restaurants serving NY products was put on hold.

Creates Public Awareness of Farm, Food and Nutrition Issues

NY Farms! continued to maintain a communications network for informational and educational purposes.

WWW.NYFarms.Info received more than one million visitors in the last six months of 2005. Nearly 10,500 visitors each day clicked on the site, many of them visiting for more than five minutes, and viewing multiple pages.

NEWS TO SHARE has been a fabulous success. Last year we doubled our readership from 3,000 subscribers to 6,000 and this year increased again to 9,500. We were honored to be included as a regular periodical to the National Agricultural Library in Washington, DC. Nearly 100 regular periodicals, in addition to newsletters from our members, contribute regularly to News to Share.

NY Farms! helped to organize informational displays at fairs, meetings, and conferences. The NY Farms! display was visited by many at the NYS Fair and at several county fairs. Visitors learned about NY agriculture at a handful of mall events, agricultural celebrations and farmers markets.

NY Farms! continued to promote agricultural events and conferences. What's Happening and Save the Date, the two calendars compiled by NY Farms! became the primary referral for many organizations including the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and Cornell University's Small Farm Program, Community Food and Agriculture Program and FarmNet/FarmLink. These calendars are continuously updated. NY Farms! continues to solicit events for listing.

Save the Date is a calendar for farmers, educators, agents and others directly involved in agriculture. It's a listing of conferences, meeting, workshops, etc...Approximately 100 listings a month, during the busy winter conference season are sent in for publication.

What's Happening is a calendar to invite the public to on farm events, farm market happening, festivals, dinners, etc. From late spring until the year's end, there are hundreds of listings from all across the state. This calendar is a great way to find out what others are doing.

Promoted Agricultural Understanding and Food System Literacy

NY Farms! actively served on several advisory committees to national, state and county government officials in 2005. Currently NY Farms! serves as a member of Senator Clinton's Agriculture Advisory Committee. Our board positions ensure that NY Farms! can effectively act as an industry advocate, statewide coordinator and communicator and leader.

Testimony for a **Food Policy Council for NY** was brought before the NYS Assembly. Felix Ortiz, then chair of the Task Force on Farm, Food and Nutrition, later brought together a committee to begin official formation. NY Farms! has remained active on this project.

NY Farms! understands the importance of educating and informing policy makers. While we have a clear internal policy not to take positions on issues, proposed regulation or legislation, we believe that we do play an important role of providing information from both sides of an issue. Through the News to Share, NY Farms! has helped to inform and educate policy makers within the NYS Assembly and Senate. In addition our director attended Farm Days in D.C. and personally visited with numerous legislators and senators throughout the year. Creating awareness especially at the legislative level is a high priority for NY Farms!

NY Farms! worked with authorities to identify current stumbling blocks and to suggest regulation changes which were and are needed. Some of the issues worked on this year included: National Animal Identification, Farm licensing, CWD, Disease Control, Meat Processing, Vacume Packaging, Sales tax on livestock, Distribution, and Auction Reporting.

Identifying and implementing ways to market and distribute NY products more effectively was a concern of NY Farms! and our member-partners.

A FAID grant well underway, is developing a **Guide to Direct Marketing Meat and Poultry**. This project aims to help producers understand the complicated meat laws, while helping to solidify that understanding by USDA and NY regulators themselves.

The Southern Tier Livestock Renaissance Project is another program intended to help the livestock industry. From growing more farmers and larger herds, to developing infrastructure for slaughtering, processing, distribution and marketing in south central New York, there is much work to be done.

Assisting farmers with **risk management** has been a focus for NY Farms! for 2005. NY Farms! has worked in cooperation with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the USDA Risk Management Agency. News-to-Share is being used as a tool to help farmers reduce risk by helping them and those that assist them (and those who govern them) understand the greater picture both within the U.S. and around the globe. In addition, specific information regarding risk management is included in most issues. Outreach to beginning farmers included Risk Management. NYSAWG hosted a series of meetings addressing risk management. NY Farms! addressed marketing and market risks at a few of these meetings held in various locations across the state. The Small Farm Quarterly included two articles on risk management written by the NY Farms! executive director.

Fostered Consumer Loyalty

Directing consumers to local farms, farmers markets, CSA's, retailers and restaurants by fielding calls and emails and by promoting various guides and websites has been an increasing role for NY Farms!

What's in Season? highlights seasonal products throughout the year. Twelve releases (one for each month) feature a NY product, nutrition information, preparation tips and recipe links. This year this collection was included on our website. We worked with many databases to pull these together including the PRIDE of NY, NYSDAM Farm Fresh Guide, Farm to Table (Earthpledge), Local Harvest, Eatwell, NOFA, New Farm locator and other guide listings. This year as a service to our readers, we encouraged all farmers, and those who work with farmers, to check their listings with the various electronic and printed guides.

NY Farms! continued to support a **Buy NY!** campaign and assisted regional 'Buy Local' projects across NY State. In addition to the various links from our website, we have carried the brochures of these campaigns to the NY State Fair and have mailed them on request.

NY Farms! has been an active participant on the PRIDE of NY advisory board. Though we may disagree at times, we do support the PRIDE program and believe our programs compliment the Department's efforts.

In partnership with Morrisville State College, working under a NY Farm Viability Institute Grant we have begun developing an online farmers market and mail-order type distribution system. As part of the project, products for a NY State gift basket are being inventoried and will soon be collected, promoted and sold in some very unique markets.

"Buy Local" cross promotional discussions with NOFA, NYSAWG, NYFDMA, NYFB and PRIDE of NY are currently in progress. We're hoping our combined voices and outreach will impact NY purchases. Look for great things to come!

In cooperation with the PRIDE of NY, the NY Wines and Dines program of the NY Wine and Grape Foundation, Slow Food, Chefs Collaborative, the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty and Farm to Chef Express, NY Farms! is able to recognize and promote those restaurants which feature "local" menus in **Farm to Restaurant**. Nearly seven hundred restaurants are now listed on the website.

Continued work to Create Rural-Urban Partnerships

Renewing the Countryside is national syndicated book project which highlights rural diversity and the local economic development that is created as a result. A website for the project was developed by SUNY Morrisville Students. Recently, Senator Young expressed an interest in the project to work in concert with an agri-tourism initiative she is undertaking. Various county tourism offices have also recently expressed an interest. A small amount of funding was received and we have begun to have several stories written.

NY Farms! is a **Growing Home Partner**. This is a collaboration between many partners (NYSAWG leading the way!), to develop very local food chains/systems. This encompasses farmer education, legislative education, consumer education, and working with local economic development and planning departments. The goal is to get local food to local people at all income levels and to increase NY's spending on local food by 10% each year. Projects proposed encompass developing markets and outlets for fresh local food where none currently exist or where they are currently underserved.

Through our website, NY Farms! promotes the Empire State's agricultural museums and agri-tourism farms and markets.

NY Farms! Leads and Partners in "Farm to School"

NY Farms! a co-founder in the Farm to School movement in NY State and has an active role on the Steering Committee. Farm to School is a program that works with schools, distributors, processors and farmers, to get fresh NY grown fruits and vegetables into local schools in a form schools can use.

Four editions of NY Farms! Farm to School News were electronically published in 2005. Farm to School news is also regularly included in News to Share.

Under a 2004 FAID Grant NY Farms! has worked as a facilitator to bring local, fresh fruits and vegetables into k-12 school and college cafeterias. Now near completion, this project looked specifically at sourcing NY pears and processing NY carrots (in addition to apples and potatoes) for the 2005-2006 school year. Individual facilitation was necessary to develop grower-distributor-school buyer business partnerships.

With our partners, Cornell Farm to School and the NYS School Nutrition Association, NY Farms! has helped provide resources and workshops for food service directors and farmers.

A SARE grant is currently funding the development of a toolkit for extension educators which will assist them in becoming the individual facilitators in continuing Farm to School business partnerships. NY Farms! developed many of the resources which will be included in this toolkit. Currently the toolkit is in a second round revision stage and will be nearing testing at an implementation level shortly. Educators are currently being recruited who are interested in receiving instruction on how to best use this information.

NY Harvest for NY Kids Week which connects teachers and students to NY agriculture is promoted partly through NY Farms! An entire section of our website is devoted to NYHNYK--it's history, past projects and ideas for starting a NYHNYK celebration. To help food school food service personnel and educators plan for the event, NY Farms! works with the Cornell Farm to School Program and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets updating websites and resource material for this weeklong event.

NY Farms! is also on the Advisory Board of Agriculture in the Classroom (secretary). NYAITC works on developing agricultural literacy through all the grade levels. A newly developed food and fiber curriculum which sets bench marks students should reach at specific grade levels will help children to develop an understanding of agriculture. NY Farms! has played an active role in agricultural education within the school setting.

Guidance Councilors were the target as a first step in encouraging careers in the farm and food industries. Ag Careers were brought to their attention at a two day, state wide seminar. The response received was surprise but positively supportive.

Ag Literacy Day was a recent success. We helped as a project leader to encourage every county to participate, to find county coordinators and to publicize the event.

We have helped further the Ag in the Classroom connection to the Kids Growing Food program and have forwarded funding opportunities for school gardens to schools and parent-teacher organizations.

In all, it was a busy year. There is much work still to be done. Several of our projects are a work in progress, several programs continual. We invite our members to participate in programming discussions, to join a working committee or to offer your thoughts, suggestions or constructive criticism.