

PRESS RELEASE

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Lewis County Farms Featured in Successful Small Dairy Strategies Publication

Two Lewis County farm families and their strategies for operating small dairies will be featured in a new publication called "Profiles of Successful Strategies for Small Dairy Farms." Larry and Barbara Herr of Lowville and Kevin and Amy Sullivan of Copenhagen have shared information about how to profitably operate a dairy farm of less than 125 cows.

Working with a grant from the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program, Steve Richards, Program Director of NY FarmNet and NY FarmLink, developed the new publication with assistance from Cornell Cooperative Extension educators in Northern New York.

"These case studies will be most useful for farm owners who are considering making changes to their operations to increase profitability and to meet personal and family goals. These profiles will provide them with ideas, information and inspiration from their fellow farmers working in Northern New York," says Richards.

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture and the New York Agricultural Statistics Service, 78% of the Northern New York region's 4,572 farms have less than 100 dairy cows producing about 33% of the region's milk. Statistics show that about 92% of the region's farms have less than 200 dairy cows producing about 63% of the region's milk supply. About 82% of the dairy farms in Lewis County have fewer than 100 cows.

"Herrs and Sullivans are just two great examples of successful small farm dairy operations in Lewis County," Peggy Murray, a farm business educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Lewis County. "Because the Herrs and the Sullivans are willing to share their stories, other farmers have the opportunity to learn from good role models about adaptations that can make other dairy operations more profitable in terms of finances, family time and personal satisfaction."

Herrs Beef Up Dairy Business

After moving to Lewis County from Pennsylvania, the Herrs began dairying in 1987 with 60 cows. Today, they milk 64 cows and buy their replacement heifers with income from raising 50 head of beef cattle each year.

"Maintaining ties to the markets in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, allows us to tap a good market for our beef cattle," says Larry, who adds that raising beef complements his dairy business and that the Herr's land resources well fit both dairy and beef enterprises.

Sullivans Go Seasonal

Kevin and Amy Sullivan operate a 65-cow dairy in the Town of Denmark. They converted from a tradition, year-round milking operation to a seasonal and a grazing dairy operation. Their dairy herd grazes on pasture. The cows are milked from March to December and then are dried off from January through March, allowing the family time to enjoy winter activities.

“People initially thought we were crazy, but we eased into the changes, taking three years to become fully seasonal. Budgeting is critical to cover the winter months when there are no milk checks coming in, but we are more profitable now than we were as a traditional dairy and just as happy,” Kevin says.

The Successful Strategies publication will feature two small farm dairies in each of Northern New York’s six counties: Lewis, St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Franklin, Clinton and Essex. Other strategies profiled include partnering and sharing resources: equipment, manpower; making a niche product such as farmstead cheese, and using computerized production technology. Transition Tips can be adapted for any dairy operation.

“Small farms are a vital part of New York’s dairy sector,” says Joanna Green, Extension Associate with Cornell’s Small Farms Program. “In addition to contributing to Northern New York’s economic well-being, small farms support the social infrastructures in their communities, contribute attractive working landscapes and help protect the region’s rich environmental resources. I hope these profiles are helpful to other farmers looking to make adjustments to ensure the successful future of their small dairy businesses.”

The new publication will be available at Cornell Cooperative Extension offices in March. The two farm profiles for Lewis County are now available online at www.nnyagdev.org/dairyfarmprofiles.htm.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is a farmer-driven research and education program specific to New York state’s six northernmost counties. For more information, visit www.nnyagdev.org or contact Board Chairs Jon Greenwood, Canton, 315-386-3231, or Joe Giroux, Plattsburgh, 518-563-7523, or call Dave Smith at Cornell University at 607-255-7286.

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