



Northern New York Agricultural Development Program

PRESS RELEASE

September 13, 2004

Contact: Brent Buchanan or Bill VanLoo, Cornell Cooperative Extension, 315-379-9192

Northern NY Ag Research Looks at Raising Grass-Fed Holstein Beef

How can North Country dairy farmers turn 60,000 bull calves a year into profit? A Northern New York Agricultural Development Program research project is looking at how to raise and sell grass-fed Holstein beef.

Holstein cows are traditionally dairy animals. Female calves are kept and grown into milkers; male calves, which account for slightly more than half of all dairy calves born, says Brent Buchanan, dairy educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County and a cooperating educator on the Northern New York (NNY) Grass-Fed Beef Research Project, are generally sold and shipped out of the area to be raised as veal or feedlot cattle.

"Recent Cornell University research, however, shows us that Holstein steers can produce beef of quality equal or superior to that of the traditional beef breeds - Hereford, Black Angus, and others," says Michael J. Baker, beef cattle extension specialist with Cornell University and principal investigator on the NNY beef research project.

More than fifteen years of research at Cornell University and other institutions support raising Holstein beef on a high-grain diet, but Baker says consumers are increasingly interested in buying grass-fed beef that is produced without growth hormones and antibiotics.

"We need research into the ability of Holstein steers to produce beef on an all-forage diet. This project will give us that needed insight," Baker says.

"We are looking at grass-fed Holstein beef because our trump card here in the North Country is our abundant grass forage," Buchanan adds. "This project began in acknowledgement of a lost resource in our bull calves. The closing of the U.S. border to Canadian beef added an extra punch and the need to analyze the opportunity to create locally-raised Holstein beef."

Bill VanLoo, agriculture and rural economic vitality educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County, says, "Before the border closed, 40 to 50 percent of Canada's beef production had been sold south into the U.S."

Thirty Holstein bull calves purchased or donated from six St. Lawrence County dairy farmers are currently grazing on pasture at the Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County's

NNY Ag Research Looks at Raising Grass-Fed Holstein Beef

2 of 2

Contact: Brent Buchanan, 315-379-9192

Learning Farm in Canton. Caretakers are observing a prescribed schedule of fertilizing and mowing fields and intensively rotating (moving) calves from one field section to another to graze. Intensive rotation allows efficient use and regrowth of grass pastures.

Grass samples are analyzed monthly. Calves are weighed every 28 days to monitor weight gain. At the end of the grazing season, the calves will be moved to Extension's Kennedy Farm for the winter. The calves will be divided into three groups, each group receiving a different all-forage diet throughout the winter.

In spring 2005, the calves will return to the Learning Farm for another grazing season. Researchers will use visual inspection and ultrasound measurement to grade the fat and muscle content of the calves after 90 days on pasture. The calves will be harvested at the high Select quality grade. Meat samples will be evaluated at the Pennsylvania University Meat Lab.

How will consumers like grass-fed Holstein beef? In late 2005, consumer taste panels will evaluate steaks from the project's calves for taste and tenderness.

Northern New York Agricultural Development Program researchers will be sharing project results with North Country farmers on how to grow Holsteins for beef and how to develop markets for grass-fed Holstein beef through Extension newsletters, field days and via the website at www.ansci.cornell.edu.beef.

For more information on the the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program that selects and prioritizes research for practical application to farms in St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Lewis, Franklin, Clinton, and Essex Counties, contact Program Co-Chairs Jon Greenwood, Canton, 315-386-3231, or Joe Giroux, Plattsburgh, 518-563-7523; or R. David Smith, Cornell University, 607-255-7286.

###

Number of Dairy Cows, Number of Traditional Breed Beef Cows in NNY (National Agricultural Statistics Service Census data for 2004)

- Clinton County - 36,300 dairy cows, 1,000 beef cows
- Essex County - 5,400 dairy cows, 500 beef cows
- Franklin County - 31,400 dairy cows, 1,200 beef cows
- Jefferson County - 66,600 dairy cows, 3,700 beef cows
- Lewis County - 49,000 dairy cows, 800 beef cows
- St. Lawrence County - 74,900 dairy cows, 4,000 beef cows

REGIONAL TOTAL - 263,600 dairy cows, 11,200 beef cows

###

The Northern New York Agriculture Development Program selects and prioritizes research the results of which can be practically applied to farms in the six-county region of northern NY: Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton and Essex Counties. For more information, contact Program Co-Chairs Jon Greenwood, 315-386-3231 or Joe Giroux, 518-563-7523, your local Cornell Cooperative Extension, or R. David Smith at Cornell University, 607-255-7286.