



## Northern New York Agricultural Development Program News

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### **NNYADP Research Helping Vegetable Growers Feed 'Hungry' Crops**

The total farm gate value for vegetables grown in New York's six northernmost counties: Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence exceeds \$11 million annually. To help fresh market vegetable growers, the farmer-driven Northern New York Agricultural Development Program (NNYADP) funded research and educational outreach on improving soil fertility.

"Consumer interest in local foods is driving a dramatic increase in fresh market vegetable production and sales in Northern New York," says Amy Ivy, a horticulture educator and executive director of the Cornell Cooperative Extension for Clinton County.

"We have seen large increases in vegetable acres – up 38 percent – and vegetable farms – up 60 percent since 2002," says NNYADP Vegetable Fertility project leader Dr. Stephen Reiners of the Cornell University Department of Horticultural Sciences.

"'Hungry' crops are a common sight in Northern New York vegetable fields, and growers' commonly-used solutions are costly and often insufficient to meet crop needs. Our short growing season makes it especially important for growers to keep crops growing at full capacity all season long to get the maximum yield possible in just a few months," Ivy says.

With NNYADP funding, Reiners and Ivy developed educational outreach to help growers increase their potential for season-long productivity, and to respond to new and smaller-scale growers who want and need training on how to best manage production challenges due to the Northern New York region's colder climate and short growing season.

"Many growers in the Northern New York region were suffering the effect of mid-season nutrient deficiencies when crop needs are greatest. Plants experiencing deficiencies of the macro-nutrients nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium will have lower yields, and that negatively impacts farm income," Reiners says.

Reiners says pH issues and uneven applications of soil amendments to try to combat the deficiencies were frustrating growers further.

Working with Cornell Cooperative Extension educators across the Northern New York region, Reiners and Ivy encouraged growers to submit soil samples for nutrient analysis in the fall of 2011. At day-long workshops in Watertown and Plattsburgh in 2012, they presented the results of five soil tests reflecting a range of soil nutrient levels and led

growers in discussions on how to solve the particular issues each test revealed.

Of the 40 Northern New York vegetable growers who participated in the first phase of this project, nearly half (18) indicated they would begin testing their soil on a regular basis. Eighteen growers indicated they would begin using cover crops to improve soil fertility; 20 growers said the training convinced them that investing in irrigation would be worth the cost.

More information on vegetable production in Northern New York can be found under Horticulture on the NNYADP website at [www.nnyagdev.org](http://www.nnyagdev.org) and is available from local Cornell Cooperative Extension offices.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is a farmer-driven program that receives funding from the New York State Senate with support from the New York State Assembly. The Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station provided additional funding support for this vegetable production project. -30-



Dr. Stephen Reiners shows grower Francisco Braun and Cornell intern Catherine May a tomato leaf indicating magnesium deficiency at an evening field meeting in Keeseville, NY. Photo: Amy Ivy, CCE Clinton County