Greetings Friends and Supporters of Cooperative Extension—

What a year it has been. Reaching our first one hundred years of service to Rensselaer County has provided a natural opportunity to stop and review our role in the community. We are proud of our roots and reflecting back reminds us of where we started and how we have transitioned over the years. However, looking ahead is paramount. Fostering and growing our association capacity to meet the evolving needs of our county is our top priority. Volunteers and staff are the key to our success. One of my favorite documents that keeps me motivated is our Extension Workers Creed. This creed is as relevant today as when it was originally drafted:

**Extension Workers Creed**

I BELIEVE in people and their hopes, their aspirations and their faith; in their right to make their own plans and arrive at their own decision; in their ability and power to enlarge their lives and plan for the happiness of those they love.

I BELIEVE that education, of which Extension work is an essential part, is basic in stimulating individual initiative, self-determination, and leadership, that these are keys to democracy and that people, when given facts they understand, will act not only in their self-interest but also in the interest of society.

I BELIEVE that education is a lifelong process and the greatest university is the home; that my success as a teacher is proportional to those qualities of mind and spirit that give me welcome entrance to the homes of the families I serve.

I BELIEVE in intellectual freedom to search for the present, the truth without bias and with courteous tolerance toward the views of others.

I BELIEVE that the Extension Service is a link between the people and the ever-changing discoveries in the laboratories.

I BELIEVE in the public institutions of which I am a part.

I BELIEVE in my own work and in the opportunity I have to make my life useful to mankind.

Because I BELIEVE these things, I am an Extension worker.

As we work toward growing the next century, these words will continue to be core qualities in our association staff.

This year in contrast to our roots, the combination of local and regional staff strive to provide the best support possible for our ever increasingly complicated and technologically expanding agricultural and horticultural industries. We have leveraged twenty three educators and support staff to provide expertise in the areas of horticulture and agriculture production. This is in addition to our local staff expertise that works in concert with the regional programs to meet the needs of our producers. There have been unique challenges this year that due to our configuration have been able to meet the evolving changes folks have experienced in their fields, herds, flocks and green houses.

In 1917, many in-home topics we educate about didn’t even exist. Healthy Neighborhoods and Childhood Primary Lead Prevention Programs are made possible through our Rensselaer County Department of Health and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County. This has been a much needed program which allows our educators to work with residents toward decreasing risk factors in the home that will aid in preventing safety concerns and health conditions. Nutrition has been a cornerstone of much of our extension efforts for decades. Our Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program as well as our Eat Smart New York programs teach youth and adults good eating habits, how to stretch their food dollars as well as the importance of being physically active and links to good nutrition and overall health.

Clearly, the thought of cell phones and computers would have been purely science fiction in 1917. Digital Literacy has been an emerging area of education for the past four years. There has been heavy focus on extending offerings to all audiences in particular new and inexperienced users of digital devices. This year there was an added scope. Harvest Connection links farm product to consumers. The Harvest Connection website is a launch pad for farmers to list their product and a landing zone for consumers looking for specific local agricultural products. It has been a highly pronounced need that one of the largest challenges on any farm operation is marketing. This helps provide an avenue for farmers to market and increase consumer awareness of their products.

4-H is more than cows and corn. Our 4-H Youth Development program has continued their community club, afterschool and school enrichment offerings as interests and demands surface. One of the umbrella areas of programming that continues to be very innovative is S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). There is high demand across the board in all delivery modes from 4-H Clubs to afterschool and classroom education. Our agricultural (agricultural engineering, plant and animal sciences), natural resources, communications and general interest areas of programming continue to be integral to the growth of our youth. With the many influences our school aged citizens encounter every day from the digital world, media, to and from school, our emphasis on diversity and inclusivity are front and center assisting our youth better understand, respect and accept each other.

It is estimated that collectively our programs reached ___________________________ households, farmers, producers or residents. I thank you for being part of our ability to serve our county and invite you to reach out to me should you have any questions or comments. I am excited to work with you to help Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County “Grow the Next Century”.

Sincerely,

Bernadine “Bernie” Wiesen

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The demand for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programming has grown steadily. With the intent to spark an early interest in these fields and give youth an idea of the career opportunities available, Rensselaer County 4-H Afterschool is continually adding more program options. Fifth and sixth graders from the 4-H Science Club at Hoosic Valley spent five weeks in the classroom learning how to program computers. Participants used Scratch, software designed by MIT. Youth made their own game controllers using Makey Makey, an innovative way to turn ordinary objects into computer touch pads.

After five classroom sessions, 32 youth participated in a cumulative field trip to three local businesses in Troy, NY. We gathered at the Tech Valley Center for Gravity, where youth designed a wearable electronic, visited Tech Valley Game Space, where youth discovered how the Game Space started their company and learned how to create a game on a web platform. Finally, we stopped by 1st Playable Productions, where youth learned about the variety of college degrees that were employable in the game design industry. With programs like these, we hope youth continue engaging in science, technology engineering and mathematics practices and build relationships with these local businesses.

In the 2016-17 4-H year, we reached 3,483 youth through our clubs, afterschool, school enrichment, and special interest programs, focusing on STEM, Citizenship, and Healthy Living. We had 927 4-H community and afterschool club members, 456 youth participate in short term special interest programs, and 2095 youth participate in school enrichment programs. 169 volunteers helped ensure our youth had a positive adult mentor to help guide them through their experiences.

The fair is special to many families in our 4-H community. Those who participate, especially the youth, spend months preparing for this event. It is stressful and time consuming, but nothing compares to the feeling of accomplishment at the end of the week, and as educators, we know it is the perfect highlight of the Essential Elementals of Youth Development. Youth not only learn what it takes to care for an animal, but during the six days at the fair many of our youth get the opportunity to practice generosity. Throughout the fair in the cattle barns, older members can be seen helping younger members clip their cows and giving tips on how to better prepare for shows, a perfect opportunity to practice and serve others. The fair is also a time for youth that have been showing at the fair for years to engage in a level of mastery. Older members often step in to help younger members lead larger animals, building the confidence of our older members. Allowing them to teach the younger members and engaging them in their own learning builds their sense of belonging and empathy towards others. Our younger 4-H members gain independence by building confidence and seeing themselves as able to accomplish more in the future. One of our goals is to continue to get our youth excited about these events, and to increase participation knowing the positive youth development outcomes and the important life skills they are gaining.

In 2016, Rensselaer County 4-H was honored to receive a two year Diversity and Inclusivity grant through New York State 4-H, funded by Bernice Scott Foundation and Smith Lever Funds. This grant allowed Cornell Cooperative Extension to provide free programs and services to underserved populations within Rensselaer County. So many in this grant’s targeted population are already seeking out the services, and are working with service providers in our community. We found our greatest strength is not being a stand-alone service provider, but rather, our greatest impact comes when we partner with others who complement the services that we provide. Throughout the two years, we have gained partnership with emergency shelters, schools, libraries, community groups, and churches who we continue collaborating with today. We also have had two teenage boys join through this grant, and continue with 4-H attending Career Explorations this past year with 26 other teens from our county. We were able to establish new partners and now we continue to offer 4-H programming to hundreds of undeserved youth in Rensselaer County. These relationships will last well-beyond the end of the grant period, and will continue to allow us to expand the impact of 4-H and Cornell Cooperative Extension in Rensselaer County.
Spring Garden Day was held on Saturday, March 11 at the Tamarac High School and attracted over 200 paid attendees. Master Gardeners lead many of the educational sessions, coordinated and served the coffee and lunch, donated food items, raised funds at the plant sale and pick-a-prize auction, garnered door prizes, and assisted attendees in innumerable ways. $2,156.10 was brought in through fundraising, in addition to the admission receipts. The theme of the keynote session was “Shade” and the stage committee made a colorful display. Attendee evaluations showed very positive results.

64 Master Gardener volunteers completed their 2016 Master Gardener Service Diary reports. Master Gardeners gave a total of 3,910 volunteer hours to CCE in 2016, worth an estimated $92,119.60. Total Master Gardener hours (which include volunteer time as well as meetings and education) were 5,380 for the year. Notable examples of volunteer time were 467 hours volunteered for presentations to community groups, 726 hours answering gardening questions, and 1,243 hours dedicated to community horticulture projects.

The 30 Hour Training Course For Pesticide Applicators was held for six days in February in our office. 23 attendees completed the course and became eligible to take the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation pesticide exams. Several other people were present as one-day attendees to earn pesticide credits.

Our series of Summer Gardening Programs, held at the Demonstration Garden at the Robert C. Parker School, was once again very popular. On July 13, a team of Master Gardeners demonstrated a variety of Do-It-Yourself projects, including mosaic stepping stones, deep pipes, rain barrels, and ollas. “Mighty Microbes” was the focus on July 19, when presenter Janet Poole spoke about microbes which can benefit our gardens and our own health, and how microbes are important in what we eat. A gastronomic extravaganza was offered during “Cooking In The Garden” on August 1. A Master Gardener team featured recipes using summer’s gorgeous produce, including three kinds of pesto (arugula, kale, and sun-dried tomato), sautéed radishes, gazpacho, tomato/watermelon salad, and spiralized vegetables. Samples and recipes were provided! Yours truly offered “Late Summer Is For Lawns” on August 9, where the discussion focused on lawn weed management, fertilizing, overseeding, renovation and other timely turf topics. “What’s Happening At The Demo. Garden?” was held on August 23 and featured a walking tour of the Cornell Vegetable Variety Trial, Screen Garden, Prairie Garden, Fragrance Garden, Pollinator Garden, Green Roof and more. Each program was well attended with up to 40 people participating.

Our Rensselaer County Garden Tour was held in the greater Frear Park area of Troy on June 29. Despite muggy weather with the threat of rain, about 200 people attended. The gardens of 12 homeowners and one Capital Roots site were featured. Almost $2,000 was raised for the Horticulture Program. More than 50 Master Gardeners served on the planning committee, sold directions/maps, staffed gardens and provided publicity for this event.

Through the CAAHP the Bedding Plant Conference as well as Cut Flower conference was coordinated and held. Additionally hops field days were offered providing an opportunity for current and prospective hops growers to see production in action.
The Healthy Neighborhoods Program is designed to help improve the home environment for individuals out in the community through a process of home visiting, completing a health and safety assessment, providing free education and products, and doing a follow up visit and/or referring clients to agencies that fit their specific needs. We focus on topics such as fire safety, smoking cessation, indoor air quality, child safety, pest elimination and prevention, lead poisoning prevention, and other general safety concerns. In order to receive referrals for the program, it is essential for educators to attend community outreach events. During one such event, children played a board game on lead education. A lot of kids really seemed to enjoy it, along with their parents/guardians. It was a fun way to get them educationally involved and as answer any questions they had, and it resulted in many immediate sign-ups for home visits. All-in-all, it was a great event and important step forward in serving the families in the Lansingburgh school district and helping to make their homes safer and healthier places to live.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Rensselaer County is now in its seventh year conducting lead paint inspections in homes throughout Troy, Lansingburgh, and the City of Rensselaer. The program, administered by the Rensselaer County Department of Health, is one of only three “Primary” lead paint inspection programs in the Capital Region. Since the start of the current grant cycle (April 2017), CCE has completed 90 home inspections. The goal of inspections is to identify hazardous lead paint, a known toxin to children and adults. The inspections form the basis of home owner/renter education-action plans to remove and/or manage the lead paint hazards. The goal of the program is to remove lead paint hazards that pose a toxic threat to those living in the apartment or house.

We continue to partner with the Rensselaer County Office for Aging to ensure nutritious and safe food is prepared and delivered to the county’s senior citizens receiving home-delivered meals, and to those who enjoy hot lunches at any one of the five county Senior Centers: Hoosick Falls, Grafton, Troy, Rensselaer, and Schodack. CCE oversees the production of monthly menus and conducts quarterly educational visits to the sites to work with site staff involved in meal preparation to make sure the food is being prepared and served properly. In addition, we provide a free monthly nutrition newsletter to seniors, and free nutrition classes related to the newsletter topic at each of the senior sites. Monthly, we distribute 500 newsletters and have on average 94 seniors participate in our nutrition classes.

The Capital Region Eat Smart New York Program offers free nutrition workshops to agencies that provide services to low-income adults and youth. This program is also offered to schools that provide at least 60% free or reduced lunch to their students. This past year, 188 nutrition classes were taught in Rensselaer and Albany County elementary schools, reaching approximately 1,100 students. Topics included consuming more fruits and vegetables, the importance of calcium and drinking more low-fat milk, consuming healthier snacks, increasing physical activity, and learning why breakfast is the most important meal of the day. “After my students were taught a lesson on healthy snacks, they all gathered around at snack time and decided amongst themselves which snacks were healthy and which were not so healthy. Since then, I have noticed a significant increase in the amount of healthy snacks the students have been bringing to school,” said one second grade teacher.

Each year, the Capital Region Eat Smart New York Program launches a “Nourish Your Neighbors” Healthy Food Drive campaign across the Capital District. Agencies, schools, churches, and other groups are given the opportunity to promote healthier food donations within their communities. Participating organizations receive a complete kit to market and implement this effort. This year, over 1,500 Healthy Food Drive Bags were collected and donated to local food pantries. Of the bags collected, approximately 90% of all food items collected were healthy.

At the root of our nutrition education is the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). This is an income-based program for families with children. The goal is to help families better understand and implement food selections that embrace the USDA My Plate guidance, increase physical activity, and adopt safe food handling and food budgeting practices, all to aid in building a stronger family. This will contribute to decreasing nutrition related health conditions. There were 114 adult participants in this program, impacting 479 family members. Additionally, 83 youth participated in a series of six nutrition education sessions with similar goals to the adult sessions. A major focus of youth education is snacking smarter, food safety, overall nutrition, and impacts nutrition has on health. Marketing and recruitment efforts touched 1443 additional individuals. Classes are delivered in a variety of modes from in-home to afterschool and group classes, always with a strong hands-on approach.
CCE Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program (ENYCHP) is your regional agricultural team that works with vegetable, tree fruit, small fruit and grape growers in Rensselaer County and 16 surrounding counties. This year, our team of 12 specialists have been busy with educating growers and conducting on-farm research to help our farmers remain profitable while they market safe and healthy produce in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The members of the ENYCHP have helped growers deal with new invasive pests such as Allium leafminer and Spotted Wing Drosophila. These pests have been responsible for hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of lost produce and income. Because these pests are not native to our region, identifying them on local farms is the first step in management, followed by research to determine the best control protocol. This is the fourth year that ENYCHP has been involved with research to test exclusion netting and attract-and-kill technology. In the summer of 2017, a field meeting was held at the Berry Patch in Stephentown, NY where owner Dale Ilia Riggs and ENYCHP team members talked about the best ways to trap this pest and manage it with the least pesticide possible. Over 50 growers, many from Rensselaer County, attended this meeting. ENYCHP conducted and co-hosted over 30 field and formal meetings in 2017 with over 1,300 growers in attendance. These meetings, along with our newsletters and e-Alerts, are important outreach tools used to help inform commercial fruit and vegetable growers.

Staff continue to do farm visits and continue to meet and get to know our farmers from all corners of the county and their needs. The breadth of services available to our farmers across the county has been diversified and frequent. With participation in the Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program (CAAHP) we have been able to offer over 40 workshops, conferences or trainings. Workshops of particular interest that were well attended were Strategizing the Future: the future of dairy markets and business planning; Pesticide Recertification; Recipe for Success Workshop (how to conduct marketing in preparation for selling an agricultural added product); Winter Green Up; Beef Quality Assurance; Field Meetings, and Profitable Meat Marketing Workshops.

Continued feedback from farmers is encouraged to help assure we are on target with our educational offerings. Rensselaer County was home to a mint and lavender research trial which was established by a CAAHP member. Data has been collected and meetings held on this Rensselaer County Farm to let producers see how the mint and lavender were growing. The CAAHP Team Leader coordinated and held the Capital District Direct Marketing Conference in the county. The conference offered a variety of presenters covering various direct marketing topics.

The digital literacy program has kept up the pace set in its first three years by continuing to grow in curriculum and audience. Most notably, 2017 saw the full-fledged launch of the Harvest Connection project, a three-year program aimed at aiding producers in the use of online direct marketing tools. This program also continues the existing mission of the digital literacy program by providing outreach, education, and support to consumers throughout the Capital Region, in the hope that producers and consumers can meet in an online space marked by utility, equity, and accessibility.

As the first full year of the Harvest Connection project, 2017 was a year of focused outreach to the ag community, with workshops and one-on-one consultations tailored to the direct marketing needs of area producers. Recruitment efforts are ongoing, and as improvements are made to the website, a full-fledged advertising campaign, launched over the summer, is bringing the Harvest Connection to a wider audience.

New workshop offerings in website building, social media, and mobile device troubleshooting proved popular topics throughout the year, and reflected a growing interest among stakeholders in harnessing the tools of the web to take advantage of powerful marketing and communications techniques. Finally, 2017 saw the CCE smart classroom and digital lab fully outfitted, with ten iPads, ten ultrabooks, and a wide array of accessories to facilitate tech-forward trainings both in the office and out in the field.
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