

New York Producers Getting A Handle On Cattle

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Operating a small beef farm is a balancing act between maintaining a profitable market for the cattle and managing cost. More marketing opportunities are available to beef producers that vaccinate their cattle prior to weaning and to those that precondition cattle to feed-bunks and stored feeds. To accomplish these tasks, producers need adequate facilities to prevent injuries to operator and animal.

Due to a lack of facilities and time, producers often do not vaccinate or participate in collaborative marketing programs. As a result, many beef producers miss out on opportunities that could benefit their farms and their cattle.

Martha Wright, livestock specialist with the NWN Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team, has been working to solve these problems and help beef producers make the most of their resources through better cooperation and coordination. One of her main efforts has been helping farmers build their own cattle handling facilities. With proper facilities, the time required to handle cattle is minimal. Developing handling facilities allows producers to do regular health checks, AI, pregnancy examinations, and whole herd vaccinations.

The NY Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program certifies beef producers as BQA

compliant if they pass specified standards. The program requires producers to have a way of safely handling cattle. Commercial handling facilities are available through many equipment dealers, but are often too expensive. Homemade facilities can be built with less cost to the producers.

While homemade facilities are less expensive than the commercial alternative, many producers do not have the capability to build facilities on their own. Martha Wright believed that by working together with other local producers, proper handling facilities could be constructed in a team effort on each farm.

Wright identified the CCE Grants Program For Innovative Small Farm Education offered by Cornell's Small Farms Program as a great way to further her efforts. She worked with an established discussion group of beef producers in Seneca County to develop a proposal for a grant for a "Cattle Handling Systems" project. This was designed to help producers plan and construct affordable handling systems for their livestock.

Wright's expectation was that participants would learn humane handling techniques for working with livestock and then share that experience with other farmers through dialogue during farm tours. With a proper handling system in place, producers would be able to utilize vaccination



As part of the small farms grant, beef producers toured the Cornell Beef Teaching & Research Center in Harford to evaluate home-made facilities built in 1998.

programs, improve herd health, increase marketing options, and see increased profits.

The initial program participants were selected from an established discussion group of beef producers in Seneca County that helped develop the project proposal. Additional participants were recruited through articles in farm publications and by

word of mouth. Meetings rotated through different farms so that producers could evaluate existing facilities and plan a course of action for new facilities. Producers interested in the project who could not attend meetings were provided with printed materials and/or on-site visits.

Sixteen producers toured the Cornell Beef Teaching and Research Center on July 11,

2002. Producers visited the main beef unit and a satellite working facility, participating in an interactive cattle-handling demonstration at both sites. They were able to study a wooden corral, squeeze alley, holding chute, and a purchased head catchall constructed for less than \$1,500. This is equivalent to the cost of three feeder calves or two

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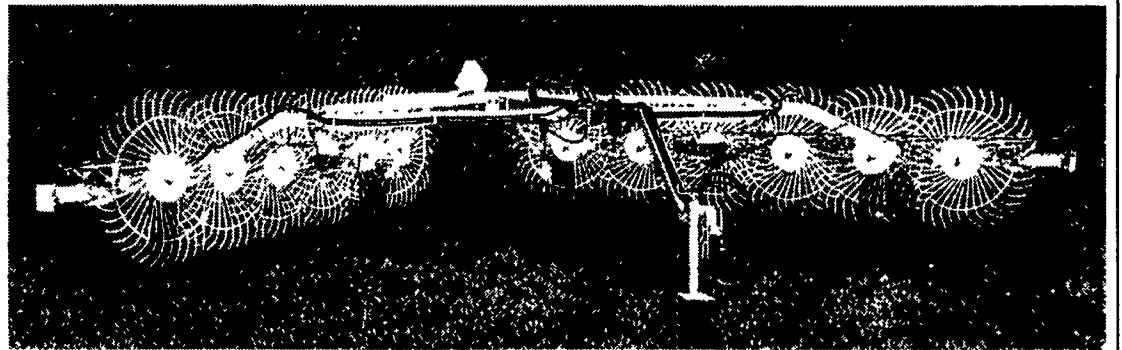


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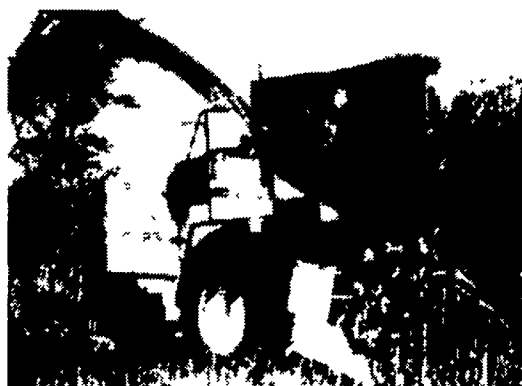
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