



# Oneida County Dairy Farmer Sustainability Action Plan



# 2018

## Introduction

In Oneida County, there are more than 200 dairy farms with 18,000 milking cows and over 500 full-time employees. Our dairy farms represent close to 25 percent of the land mass in Oneida County.

Dairy farmers are facing obstacles revolving around economic development, workforce, infrastructure and tax policy. They also struggle with over burdensome and erroneous laws and regulations from the state and federal level that keep a grip on everything related to the industry including milk prices.

In the 2018 State of the County, the Oneida County Executive announced his administration would hold a dairy forum to hear the concerns of farmers first hand and then work with them and the Cornell Cooperative Extension to create a Dairy Sustainability Action Plan.

## Vision Statement

Oneida County is looking to create a competitive Dairy Farm culture by cultivating agribusiness by alleviating hurdles confronting Oneida County Dairy Farmers. This will be done through advocacy, education, economic investment, and partnership.

## Mission Statement

This plan will serve to alleviate local barriers to dairy farmer's success while creating a legislative agenda so the County Executive and others can advocate the State and Federal Government for policies and legislation that will allow dairy farmers to sustain themselves long-term and secure this vital industry for generations to come.



# Goals

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To strengthen the current, potential and future workforce for the dairy industry which is currently aging and lacking. Additionally, agricultural education would enable the local dairy farmer to be at the leading edge of innovation keeping the industry efficient and effective.

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To create a legislative agenda so our representatives in Albany and Washington can have a direct understanding of the challenges facing the dairy industry with a proper local perspective.

# Current Ongoing Agricultural Projects



## Ambassadors in Agriculture

This program will provide current and emerging research-based education and real-world experiences to youth throughout the County.

### Objectives

- Provide real-life, on-site and in-the-field experiences in agriculture;
- Provide area farmers with interns to provide both labor and fresh ideas to increase production and grow their businesses;
- Reinforce the importance of farming and agriculture in our community;
- Develop agriculture production networks and agribusiness opportunities;
- Highlight technology and improved practices in agriculture;
- Introduce ways to merge non-traditional (ex: computer science and robotics) and traditional agricultural careers;
- Develop leadership, public speaking and decision-making skills;
- Identify new entrepreneurs and small business opportunities;
- Increase more diverse participation in agriculture with a focus on women, minorities and the local refugee/immigrant population, and
- Increase understanding of key emerging issues in agriculture, including economic, political and social issues.

## Careers in Agriculture Day

This relatively new event was held in 2017 and 2018 and already over 1,800 Students have attended. The next event is planned for October of 2019. This is a collaborative effort between Cornell Cooperative Extension and Madison Oneida County BOCES.



## CCE Farm Fest

An Annual event, held on a working dairy farm, provides on-site agriculture education to 600 to 1,000 children in grades 3-5 during the daytime portion of the event. In the evening, the farm is open to the general public and attracts anywhere from 1,500 – 5,000 people.

## Ag Friendly Initiative

An initiative of the County Executive in conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County (CCE) that will create standards to assist every participating municipality in Oneida County partners in Agricultural Development.

Actions include:

- Educating town assessors;
- Review Municipal regulations and procedures for agriculture-supportive policies;
- Develop model language for municipalities to include in their regulations and policies to become more Ag Friendly and
- Assist municipalities with applying for grants to update their comprehensive plans.
- Zoning Regulations

## Farm and Food Business Incubator

A partnership between Oneida County, Cornell Cooperative Extension, MVCC, SUNY Cobleskill and the ThINCubator to create a business incubator that will work with existing farm and food business to diversify and grow while also facilitating new business to grow in the industry.

## Aspiring Farmers Academy

Participants in the training seminar learn how to set goals and objectives for a farming enterprise. They also gain an understanding of the resources available to them in their community and inventory their assets. They begin with their business and marketing plans and leave with an action plan.

## Farm to School

Farm to School is a state wide and national initiative to reform the National School Lunch program. Activities of Farm to School include local procurement, community engagement, and school gardens. Local products are featured at least twice per year in NY Foods Days in many of our local districts. The Mohawk Valley Farm to School Initiative is working to help schools identify local products and convey information on how to procure them. Most recently 120 school food service workers received a two day training on cooking from scratch to aid in Farm to School efforts.

## Farm to Consumer Grant

This grant involves the assessment of existing local food systems in Oneida County and includes the compilation of essential data and creation of a framework for a virtual food hub to support a "Farm to Institution" initiative.

# Goals, Objectives, & Action Items



## Goal I- Long-term Planning

To create a system that addresses long-term planning and execution of this plan and to allow for a leadership steering apparatus to adapt to further or unforeseen challenges in the future while also having the ability to direct this plan to complete fruition.

**Objective 1-** Engage the Dairy and farming community to identify service gaps and barriers in the dairy industry.

**When:** Over 1 Year with the first forum starting in November 2018.

**Who:** Cornell Cooperative Extension & Oneida County Government

### Action 1-

Create a Dairy & Agriculture Community Forum Series.

#### Intent:

To create a series of forums that will build on the public effort of the original dairy forum to allow for input and discussion throughout all aspects of Dairy farming beginning with the Farmer to Consumer/Local Food Forum.

### Action 2-

Identify Topics for the community forum series.

#### Intent:

Establish key topics for the community forums starting with feedback from the original dairy forum and then creating new topics based on feedback from subsequent dairy forums.

### Action 3-

Make all meetings public.

#### Intent:

To publicly announce that all Dairy/ Agriculture Community Forums are open to the public through traditional media announcements (newspaper/ TV) and social media before and after events.

### Action 4-

To establish a branding effort for the dairy forums.

#### Intent:

To establish a branding effort and distribute the results through list creations, invitations, and social media efforts.



**Objective 2-** Establish a committee comprised of dairy farm experts that will lend an additional level of expertise that will aid farmers and act as an advisory body to the Oneida County Executive and implement this plan.

**When:** Completed before Fall 2018.

**Who:** Cornell Cooperative Extension and Oneida County Government

**Action 1-**

The County Executive appoints a Dairy Steering Committee.

**Intent:**

The County Executive appoints a Dairy Steering Committee that will serve as a conduit between different agencies, governments, and the industry as challenges and opportunities arise. The committee will implement this plan and advise the County Executive of dairy farm matters.

**Action 2-**

Establish a meeting location for the Committee

**Intent:**

The Dairy Steering Committee will establish a location mutually agreeable by all parties.

**Action 3-**

Maintain regular communications through meetings and press releases.

**Intent:**

Committee meetings should be regularly scheduled and rely on earned media to inform the public.



## Goal II-Economic Development & Marketing

To eliminate certain barriers to the dairy farming industries economic growth and diversification.

**Objective 1-** Develop a micro-loan program that alleviates issues related to frozen credit and an inability to access funding for capital due to the highly regulated federal market.

**When:** Completion by Spring 2019.

**Who:** Oneida County, Cornell Cooperative Extension, MV EDGE and private financial institutions

### Action 1-

Create a micro-loan program.

#### Intent:

Create a high-risk economic development micro-loan program that would allow access to capital for growth.

### Action 3-

Create an application process for start-up funding.

#### Intent:

Create an application process for dairy farmers looking to access the micro-loan program through Oneida County and the partnering agencies.

### Action 2-

Identify staff and organizations that are committed to financial backing.

#### Intent:

A limit for the fund must be set and administered. Staff from the different organizations would have to be committed and financial amounts would have to be determined with start-up funding coming from Oneida County.

### Action 4-

Establish a public relations mechanism.

#### Intent:

A public information effort would be necessary on all available strategic channels to let all possible participants know about funding as well as creating a public information mechanism for transparency for those projects funded.

**Objective 2-** Establish a comprehensive marketing plan to increase sales, production and job placement in the dairy industry.

**When:** Beginning Fall of 2018.

**Who:** Oneida County, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and MV EDGE.

**Action 1-**

Create an RFP to select a marketing vendor.

**Intent:**

Marketing campaign will be developed through an RFP process. Once proposals are received a vendor will be chosen and work will begin.

**Action 2-**

Establish financing for the marketing campaign.

**Intent:**

Financing the campaign will be ongoing and will be determined through an RFP process.



**Action 3-**

Develop a marketing plan.

**Intent:**

A marketing plan will need to be created in detail but opportunities include but are not limited to: buy local campaign, social media, and traditional media, advertising campaigns, and newsletters. The plan should also expand marketing for current events such as "Taste of Central New York", Farm Fest, Career Days, Mohawk Valley Dairy Day, Oneida County Public Market, Farmer's Markets etc.

**Objective 3-** Create a Co-Op system that assists in the growth of the local dairy industry.

**When:** Ongoing

**Who:** Cornell Cooperative Extension

**Action 1-**

Create a Co-Op forum.

**Intent:**

Assisting current local Co-Op's in the process of modernizing their efforts on behalf of their farmers. The first step of this effort is a co-op forum to hear from farmers about what their local co-op could be doing in a more effective way for members. This could range from a web presence to consolidation of existing local co-ops.

**Action 2-**

Identify barriers, gaps, and opportunities for local Co-Ops

**Intent:**

Create and prioritize feedback from the Co-Op forum and then create an action plan to aid in modernizing the local Co-Op.

**Objective 4-** Identify the need for a long-term processing plant locally.

**When:** Begin by 2019 and to be completed by Spring of 2019.

**Who:** Oneida County Planning Department

**Action 1-**

Create an RFP for the feasibility study.

**Intent:**

Create an RFP to determine the feasibility of an innovative way for dairy farmers to process their product and have it brought to the market. Oneida County commits \$50,000 to commission the study.



### **Goal III-Infrastructure, Environment, and Safety**

Create a targeted effort to improve dairy farm related public infrastructure, environment, and safety that would help assist our dairy farmers.

**Objective 1-** Create an informational letter and Action Request Survey.

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County Department of Public Works

#### **Action 1-**

Create an Action Request Survey.

#### **Intent:**

Create an action request survey that will be completed by farmers and that will populate an infrastructure/maintenance database at Oneida County Department of Public Works.

#### **Action 2-**

Draft and informational letter about the Action Request Survey.

#### **Intent:**

Draft and distribute a letter and survey to all farmers in the county that highlights how to generate a work order for an infrastructure improvement/maintenance request as well as build a database of where farmers desire wider roads/bridges and tractor safety signs.

**Objective 2-** Create a crew in DPW dedicated to maintaining the infrastructure most frequently used by dairy farmers.

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County Department of Public Works

#### **Action 1-**

Identify specialized Public Works employees.

#### **Intent:**

Create a crew familiar with the unique challenges of dairy farmers when it comes to ditching, roadways and other DPW efforts.

#### **Action 2-**

Create a maintenance priority list.

#### **Intent:**

To utilize the action request survey as a tool to establish a maintenance/repair priority list, so the most urgent dairy and farmer infrastructure issues are addressed.



**Objective 3-** Create a County-led farmer traffic safety campaign.

**When:** Fall 2018

**Who:** Oneida County and Cornell Cooperative Extension

**Action 1-**

Create a list of farmer related traffic safety recommendations.

**Intent:**

Collaborate with industry experts and traffic safety personnel to identify key traffic safety protocols to improve farmer safety on Oneida County roadways.

**Action 2-**

Create a media campaign

**Intent:**

Create a county-led campaign (similar to ones for seat-belts, speeding, etc.) that increases awareness and enforcement of farm safety signs. This will be accomplished through the utilization of advertising dollars through Public Service Announcements.



**Objective 4-** Enhance farm safety by promoting the use of unmanned aircraft systems

**When:** Fall 2019

**Who:** Cornell Cooperative Extension

**Action 1-**

Promote the use of unmanned aircraft systems for the application of pesticides.

**Intent:**

Using unmanned aircraft systems to do these types of tasks will reduce risk, liability and cost without having to put a pilot in jeopardy. These types of aerial application require extremely low flying heights putting pilots in normal aircraft at risk. Unmanned aircraft systems are very nimble and can perform these tasks with ease.

**Action 2-**

Encourage noxious weed detection and eradication using unmanned aircraft systems

**Intent:**

Weeds and noxious plants can be extremely dangerous to farm employees. Plants such as Giant Hogweed can be extremely toxic and harmful if handled. Unmanned aircraft equipped with multi-spectral sensors can find and record the location of these unsafe plants.



## Goal IV-Education and Training

To strengthen the current, potential and future workforce for the dairy industry which is currently aging and lacking. Additionally, agricultural education would enable the local dairy farmer to be at the leading edge of innovation keeping the industry efficient and effective.

**Objective 1-** Innovate and improve recruitment to existing Ag-education and develop the programs to meet and exceed national agricultural education standards.

**When:** Fall 2019

**Who:** Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES (BOCES), Cornell Cooperative Extension, Oneida County; Planning and Workforce Development; Future Farmers of America (FFA).

### Action 1-

Program Development with BOCES.

#### Intent:

Partner and collaborate with Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES to create educational programming to be replicated in educational programs throughout the County.

### Action 2-

Expand the presence of Future Farmers of America (FFA) throughout every school district in Oneida County.

#### Intent:

Create a recruitment campaign to draw in more active participants in to FFA.

## Objective 2-

Identify funding and resources to expand Ag-programming at MVCC.

**When:** Fall 2018

**Who:** Oneida County, MVCC, Cornell Cooperative Extension

### Action 1-

Identify course, curriculum, and programming opportunities at MVCC.

#### Intent:

Align our community college offerings to the needs of the farming industry in Oneida County to grow the agricultural economy.





### **Action 2-**

Identify funding and resources to expand Ag-programming at MVCC.

#### **Intent:**

Funds will be necessary to attract the appropriate personnel and equipment to provide the highest quality education in agriculture.

### **Action 3-**

Create a marketing campaign.

#### **Intent:**

Create a marketing campaign that attracts students to the new program.

### **Objective 3-**

Increase agricultural placements for internships throughout Oneida County to give students hands-on experience in dairy and all agriculture industries.

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County Workforce Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Private Industry

#### **Action 1-**

Expand Oneida County's College Student Corp Oneida County program to include agriculture.

#### **Intent:**

Establish new opportunities for college to students to intern with Ag-related businesses.

#### **Action 2-**

Attract more agricultural companies to participate in internship placement programs.

#### **Intent:**

Develop a Media/outreach plan to recruit students in agricultural programs to participate in agricultural internships in Oneida County.

**Objective 4-** Leverage existing unmanned aircraft system technology and training at MVCC into the agriculture community.

**When:** Fall 2019

**Who:** MVCC Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems Program

### **Action 1-**

Engage MVCC staff to develop instructional seminars regarding the use of unmanned aircraft systems in agriculture

#### **Intent:**

Unmanned aircraft systems have a variety of uses in agriculture. The goal of this effort would be to inform farmers of what this technology can do for them regarding things like insect infestation detection, invasive plant detection and irrigation needs.

### **Action 2-**

Develop preparation courses to enable farmers to gain FAA licensure for the commercial operation of unmanned aircraft systems

#### **Intent:**

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires commercial operators of unmanned aircraft systems to acquire a Remote Pilot Certificate. Having local training available for the Ag community to become well versed in the knowledge necessary to gain this licensure would be of great benefit to farmers.



## Goal V-Tax Policy

Local governments can lighten the financial burden on dairy farmers by creating tax exemptions.

**Objective 1-** Increase Agriculture Tax Assessment Participation.

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County Tax and Finance

### Action 1-

Increase Participation in the Agriculture Tax Assessment Program.

#### Intent:

Oneida County will send a letter to notify them and help facilitate farmers through the process so they can attain the benefits.

### Action 2-

Hold educational seminars for farmers to learn the benefits of Agriculture Tax Assessment.

#### Intent:

It is not uncommon for farmers to not participate in government related programs out of fear that it will result in more taxes and not less. This seminar will be created to eliminate these fears and help farmers through the Agriculture Assessment process.

**Objective 2-** Creation of Dairy Farmers Tax Burden Relief Committee

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County IDA and Oneida County Government

### Action 1-

Create a Dairy Farmers Tax Burden Relief Committee.

#### Intent:

Create a committee that will assess taxes born by Dairy Farmers and find local innovative ways to bring extra tax relief. For example: Dairy Farmer exemption, Uniform Agricultural Equipment Sales Tax Exemption etc.

### Action 2-

Establish a regular quarterly meeting.

#### Intent:

These meetings will help inform local government leaders on the necessary tax measures to help dairy farmers stay competitive.

## Goal VI-Legislative Agenda

To create a legislative agenda so our representatives in Albany and Washington can have a direct understanding of the challenges facing the dairy industry with a proper local perspective.

**Objective 1-** Support The Passage of the Whole Milk Act (HR 5640).

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County Tax and Finance

### Action 1-

Advocate Congress

#### Intent:

Advocate Congress to amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow schools that participate in the school lunch program under the Act to serve whole milk. This action will increase the quality and sales of milk in schools while allowing students to obtain the health benefits associated with dairy.

### Action 2-

Inform the Public.

#### Intent:

Create a media plan that helps inform the public as to why H.R. 5640 needs to be supported.

PRESS  
ROOM

# H. R. 5640

Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow schools that participate in the school lunch program under such Act to serve whole milk.

## THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 26, 2018

Mr. THOMPSON (Pennsylvania) introduced the bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Labor Force.

## A BILL

to amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow schools that participate in the school lunch program under such Act to serve whole milk.

## **Objective 2-** Create a State Legislative Priorities Agenda

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County IDA and Oneida County Government

### **Action 1-**

Establish priorities.

#### **Intent:**

Create a comprehensive 2019 State Legislative Priorities Agenda working with our Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension and other local partners.

### **Action 2-**

Submit Agenda to the State

#### **Intent:**

Submit the Priorities Agenda to the state to encourage them to create a regulatory and legislative environment in NY that assists in sustaining dairy farmers and helps them grow and develop into the future.

## **Objective 3-** Create a Federal Legislative Priorities Agenda

**When:** Immediately

**Who:** Oneida County IDA and Oneida County Government

### **Action 1-**

Establish priorities.

#### **Intent:**

Create a comprehensive 2019 Federal Legislative Priorities Agenda working with our Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension and other local partners.

### **Action 2-**

Submit Agenda to the State

#### **Intent:**

Submit the Priorities Agenda to federal legislators to encourage them to create a regulatory and legislative environment in the USA that assists in sustaining dairy farmers and helps them grow and develop into the future.



## Conclusion

This plan looks to accomplish 6 goals, 19 objectives and 44 concrete actions that will address the concerns of local dairy farmers and create the structure necessary to ensure their voices are heard at every level of their government. This plan addresses the future of the industry in a number of ways. This includes the future of the workforce, tax relief, state and federal priorities, public input as well as infrastructure and economic development needs.

Over the next 12 months, this plan will be executed by a variety of agencies and industry partners committed to dairy sustainability in Oneida County.

