

Cultivating LEADership
E-NEWSLETTER

July 23, 2008

FROM THE DIRECTOR:

We hope this newsletter finds you all well and enjoying your summer. It is amazing how quickly time seems to go by, but thankfully, things are going very well for the LEAD program.

The biggest bit of news I have to share with you this month is that it is time to again ramp up for recruitment of our new class - #13! And no, I am NOT superstitious – I am sure we'll have another great group, provided we all do our part for a successful recruitment process. It begins now, with simply promoting the program to those you think might be qualified and interesting in applying. Think about potential applicants from your own business, membership organizations, customers, neighbors, or even your own family members. Start “talking up” the program now – even though applications are not due until next March – because it often takes repeated prompts to get someone off the fence to actually apply. Remember that you, our alumni and friends already familiar with the benefits of our program, are the best recruiters we could ask for. If you have a nominee, feel free to send their name and contact information to the LEAD office, and we'll add them to our mailing list. Who will YOU nominate this year?

CLASS 12 UPDATE:

Class 12 met last week for their summer “progress meeting” at Wiley Fox Farm in Cato, NY. Among other things, the class received some refreshers on their personality preferences and type development, teamwork, and how to avoid common decision-making traps and “group-think”. They also had time to discuss individual learning goals and development plans for the coming year with their classmate-coach. As one class member put it - “It’s only been two months since we last met, but I realized how much I miss you guys” – so the end of the day involved an enjoyable cookout and re-connecting. Thanks to Jamie and Maggie Edelstein for opening up their home and farm for the class.

Jonathan (class 12) and Dominica Burns welcomed daughter Karis to the world earlier this month. Congratulations, and we wish the Burns family much happiness with their new addition!

ALUMNI UPDATES:

DALE SWEETLAND FOR U.S. CONGRESS

Dale A. Sweetland (class 1) candidate for Congress in New York’s 25th Congressional District, has deep roots in Central New York. Dale is an entrepreneur, past Supervisor of the Town of Fabius and past Chairman of the Onondaga County Legislature. Dale also is a licensed property and casualty insurance agent in New York State and worked in the crop insurance industry for 10

years. In his business life, Dale owned and managed an agricultural operation for 25 years. In 1997, Dale sold this business and began a career in the insurance industry with Fireman's Fund Agribusiness. In his public life, Dale has always contributed to the betterment of the communities he has been a part of. In 1988, he was elected Town Supervisor of Fabius and served three terms. In 1994, Dale was elected to the Onondaga County Legislature where he served seven terms and represented a vast district of suburban and rural communities. During his tenure in the legislature, Dale held many leadership roles including chairing several committees such as Public Works and Social Services. He also served as Vice-Chairman of County Facilities, Transportation and the important Ways and Means Committees.

Dale exemplifies something LEAD encourages in all participants: civic engagement and a commitment to public service. We wish him well and hope that his fellow LEAD alumni will support him in any way that they can. Good luck, Dale!

WITH MIGRANT WORKERS IN SHORT SUPPLY, A FARMER LOOKS TO MACHINES By Joshua Brustein (from the NY Times) (move this one to the end of the section)

APPLETON, N.Y. — Scores of Jim Bittner's cherry trees are now just heaps of roots and sticks, piled in his fields here along Route 18. Some of the branches lying on the ground are dotted with small blossoms, the season's earliest evidence that sweet cherries were on their way. But for Mr. Bittner, having sweet cherries would have meant hiring someone to prune the trees and harvest the fruit, and he was not sure that he could do it this year. So he cut his trees down. "We always assumed we could find the labor we would need," said Mr. Bittner, who has managed Singer Farms since 1991. "We're not making that assumption anymore." Mr. Bittner said he was planning to grow blueberries, or tart cherries for use in pies, because those crops could be harvested by machine and did not require migrant workers.

Others managing the fields and dairies of western [New York State](#) are starting to make the same calculation. For the last several years, crackdowns on illegal immigrants and the lack of comprehensive [immigration](#) reform have increased anxiety among the region's farmers, many of whom rely on a migrant labor force from Latin America to work their fields. Some have begun making changes in their operations to reduce their reliance on that labor force.

For some, this has meant making temporary adjustments, like putting in less cabbage, or resisting the temptation to put in profitable, labor-intensive crops like asparagus. It can also mean making fundamental changes that cannot be easily reversed. Mr. Bittner cut down 25 acres of sweet cherry trees, some of which were 30 years old. He also dug up 20 acres of peach trees that were 12 to 15 years old. In all, he razed more than 10 percent of his fruit orchards this year, a decision that he said was a direct response to the immigration situation. There will be no harvest from the newly cleared fields until at least 2011. "We don't take it lightly to make these changes," Mr. Bittner said.

Other farms are making large capital investments in mechanical systems that will allow them to cut their work force significantly. Fewer farmers are willing to buy neighboring properties, a traditional method of expansion for agricultural businesses. At least one food-processing company claims that it is already having trouble buying produce in the quantities it needs. Great Lakes Kraut, based in Shortsville, N.Y., which relies heavily on farmers in western New York for the cabbage it ferments to make sauerkraut, has been able to buy only about 80 percent of what it needs this year, according to the company's vice president, Ben Frega. That will not lead to a shortage of sauerkraut, but Mr. Frega said it did play a role in a 10 percent price increase. "It's been more difficult to secure our crops than any year I can remember," Mr. Frega said.

There are no data on the number of farmers changing crops because of the labor problem. Farmers' organizations and state officials said that only small numbers of farmers were making major changes and that there was no immediate threat of major disruptions in local agricultural markets. But experts monitoring New York's agricultural industry said that the shift away from labor-intensive crops would accelerate if the uncertainty over migrant labor and immigration policies remained unresolved. (On May 20, an attempt by Senator Diane Feinstein of California

to attach a guest worker program to an Iraq spending bill failed.). “I don’t believe that we are seeing those numbers right yet, but I do think that this is a serious conversation that farmers are having,” said *Jessica Chittenden (class 10)*, a spokeswoman for the state’s Department of Agriculture. “One of the things that will change is the fresh market crops that need to be handpicked. They’re fresh, they’re fragile and they need that special personal harvest.” Last fall, the Farm Credit Associations of New York, which finance farmers in the area, issued a projection, using federal Department of Agriculture data, showing that 800 farms in the state with total sales estimated in excess of \$700 million were “highly vulnerable to going out of business or forced to severely cut back their farm operations.”

Farms in New York and elsewhere in the Northeast may be particularly sensitive to the effects of an uncertain labor market. Because of the climate, the proximity to large urban markets and the relatively high cost of land, many farms in the state focus on fresh market vegetables that bring in high price-per-acre yields. Unlike row crops, like corn and soybeans, most fresh produce must be handpicked to avoid bruising.

Dale Hemminger (LEAD Board member), the owner of Hemdale Farms in Seneca Castle, N.Y., for one, said he was adjusting his planting. Great Lakes Kraut pleaded with him to grow more cabbage, he said, but he declined. “They begged me and bugged me and bugged me to plant more acres,” Mr. Hemminger said. “I just backed away because I was so unsettled about getting this stuff grown and harvested.” He cut his cabbage crop by 15 percent this year. What keeps him in the cabbage business at all, he said, are technological advances that have allowed him to cut his labor force significantly. His farm includes a 700-cow dairy, which is undergoing a bigger change to reduce its need for workers. Mr. Hemminger recently bought four robotic milkers, each of which can milk 70 cows a day. He had been considering the move for years, but the cost had scared him away — the total investment was \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million. But the transition to the robotic system, with lasers guiding the machines to the teats and computers keeping track of when each cow is milked, has been smooth, and Mr. Hemminger said he was thinking about adding machines next year. For Mr. Hemminger, farmers’ labor troubles have been a generation in the making. The labor force that worked for his father when he started farming on his return from World War II dried up long ago, he said. He found that fewer and fewer local people would work the odd and dirty hours that these jobs required.

The last local milker, a single mother, left in 2005 to take a lower-paying job at a factory because she could not find a baby sitter willing to arrive at 5 o’clock in the morning. The shift toward Hispanic immigrants has been gradual and tacitly accepted, Mr. Hemminger said, adding that it was frustrating to watch those workers, who have become mainstays for his industry, being pulled away. “It’s not like we said one day, ‘Hey, let’s hire all these Mexicans,’ ” he said.

Farmers near the Canadian border say they and their workers are facing increasing scrutiny by federal immigration agencies. Last summer, Mr. Bittner said, he set up a workshop for his employees at which the director of the Cornell Farmworker Program answered their legal questions. There were about 20 immigrants working on the farm at the time, he said; 60 people showed up for the session.

COMMISSIONER APPOINTS DAIRY PROMOTION ADVISORY BOARD

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Patrick Hooker today announced the appointment of the 13th New York State Dairy Promotion Advisory Board. The New York State Dairy Promotion Advisory Board consists of *John Mueller (class 4)* of Clifton Springs, endorsed by Rochester Cooperative Milk Producers’ Bargaining Agency, Inc., *David “Skip” Hardie (class 1)* of Lansing, endorsed by New York Farm Bureau and others.

The ten-member Dairy Promotion Advisory Board advises the Commissioner on the disposition of approximately \$12 million a year in funds collected from milk producers under the producer-approved New York Dairy Promotion Order.

The Board also recommends promotion programs, nutrition education programs, program information and other supporting services, as well as various dairy product quality research proposals, and advertising effectiveness research proposals. Each board member serves for three years. Nominations were submitted by milk producers under the New York Dairy Promotion Order.

The first New York State Dairy Promotion Advisory Board was appointed in May 1972 at the request of dairy producers. New York State has 6,200 dairy farms that produce over 12 billion pounds of milk annually, making New York the nation's third largest dairy state. The dairy industry is the State's largest agricultural sector, contributing significantly to the State's economy by generating \$2.4 billion at the farmgate, over half of the State's total agricultural receipts, and providing some of the highest economic multipliers in the State.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Empire Farm Days

August 5th – 7th, 2008

Empire Farm Days 08 (the 75th event) will be held at traditional site of Rodman Lott and Son Farms in Seneca Falls, New York August 5, 6 & 7, 2008. Hours are from 9-5 Tuesday and Wednesday and 9-4 Thursday. Parking is \$5.00 but show entrance is free. Visit the website, www.empirefarmdays.com for all the details, maps, lists and downloadable information.

NY Ag Leadership Luncheon

Wednesday, August 6th, 2008 at Empire Farms Days

This 15th annual honoring is cosponsored by NYS Department of Ag and Markets, Empire State Potato Growers and *American Agriculturist*. The event's "main dessert" will be Commissioner Pat Hooker's presentation of the NYS Ag Environmental Management Awards.

Registration opens at 11:15 a.m. in the Special Events Center. The picnic buffet convenes **earlier than in the past** – at 11:45. Due to limited seating of 100 persons, reservations must be taken on a **first come, first reserved** basis. Sorry, no walk-ins. E-mail your RSVP to jvogel@farmprogress.com or fax it to 717-359-0250 with your name(s) and organization you represent for the name tag – **by Aug. 1** – so we have an accurate head count (meaning enough food for everyone!) and name tags for all. We must charge \$8 per person for the buffet. Send a check payable to the *American Agriculturist* or pay via cash or check when you pick up your name tag at the registration table.

The **2008 NE Renewable Energy Conference** will be held **August 26-28** at the Penn State Conference Center in State College, Pennsylvania. The conference will showcase regional renewable energy and energy efficiency research, demonstration, and university-industry-government partnerships for sustainable economic development. The audience will be drawn from across the northeastern U.S. and the states of Michigan and Ohio. We are anticipating 300 - 400 attendees from the 14 states in the region as well as Washington, D.C. Sponsors include the Northeast Sun Grant Initiative, the Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, NE SARE, and several other companies and organizations. Attached is an outline of the conference program. The conference program will include four plenary sessions, six multiple track structured break-outs to encourage interaction and conversation, and a poster session. Each 90 minute break-out session will include 3 panelists, speaking approximately 20 minutes each including responses to specific questions from the audience. A moderator will then facilitate a discussion to identify three critical roadblocks or emerging opportunities, while a recorder takes notes. The "Energy Basics" mini-courses will be in lecture format, typically with one or two speakers. A set of final break-out sessions will be planning sessions to integrate the previously identified opportunities and develop renewable

energy roadmaps for the region. Products of the conference will include regional roadmaps for various sustainable energy strategies, and a book of abstracts, while non-confidential versions of conference presentations will be posted on the web.

We are currently soliciting posters. Titles and abstracts can be submitted through the website indicated below. Posters will be prominently featured at breaks and receptions.

Conference registration and additional information is available at:

<http://guest.event.com/i.aspx?5S,M3,fadbc930-c7ca-411d-a097-99f0ec8d564f>

RESOURCES:

What will a President McCain or President Obama mean for agriculture and energy policies? How will Congress respond to skyrocketing fuel and commodity prices? Will there be changes in our nation's renewable energy policies? These are some of the issues covered in every issue of Agri-Pulse.

Please review our website see why so many people say our e-newsletter is their best source for farm and rural policy information. Then sign up for our four-week free trial at <http://agri-pulse.com/AgriTrial.asp>

There's no risk or obligation. Just go to www.Agri-Pulse.com and your free issues will start arriving next week.

JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS:

POSITION: NYS Farm Service Agency – County Operations Trainee

LOCATION: 4 vacancies – throughout New York State

GRADE: CO - 5/7/9

PREFERRED HIRING RANGE: \$29,726 - \$58,557

SUMMARY OF POSITION:

The [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) is the U. S. Department of Agriculture's principle agency charged with providing a stable and abundant American food supply. This objective is best met by supporting America's production agriculture community and helping protect the nation's food and natural resources.

A County Operations Trainee is an entry level management position designed to prepare an employee for promotion to a career as a County Executive Director. The County Operations Trainee experiences a supervised training period to acquire knowledge of FSA policies, programs, and management to successfully supervise an FSA field office. As a County Executive Director, the employee will be responsible for directing an office staff and administering federal farm programs.

Please contact Linda Collins (see contact info below) to obtain an application and a full copy of the job description and application.

Linda Collins, Administrative Specialist
USDA Farm Service Agency, Attn: Linda Collins
441 S. Salina Street, Room 536
The Galleries, 5th floor
Syracuse, NY 13202
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Phone: 315-477-6355
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The job is also posted on the USAJOBS website at: www.usajobs.gov It is vacancy announcement number NY-08-017.

All information must be postmarked by July 25, 2008 to be considered for the position

Cultivating LEADership E-newsletter is distributed via email by LEAD New York. If you have news to share, please contact Kristen Ciferri, at klc43@cornell.edu or 607-255-7907.

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You may also view the LEAD New York web site at www.leadny.org .

Please feel free to contact our office at any time with questions or comments!

Have news to share? We encourage you to email us LEAD News to consider for publication. Send news items to klc43@cornell.edu.

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