



Leadership: Adapting to Change

By Ed Staehr, Communications Director, NYFarmNet / NYFarmLink (Class 11)

LEAD NY's recent session in Manhattan and Long Island presented a microcosm of food system issues in downstate New York. "Take home" messages vary among class members, and a consistent theme throughout the session I noticed was how successful leaders viewed change. For example, one farm operating near a large urban population may view increased car traffic as a nuisance, while another farm would consider more cars driving by as potential customers and develop a retail marketing plan to reach them.

A trip to Hunt's Point illustrated the volume of food required to meet the demands of consumers in a large metropolitan community. Produce seemed to be of high quality at the market, and some upstate grown fruits and vegetables were on the loading docks. USDA inspectors were on site to ensure product quality, and we were given a tour by a senior inspector, who discussed some of the reforms within his organization that were beneficial to growers. Another encouraging part of our visit was listening to a presentation by market leadership, who spoke of changes to make the market a viable option for growers to consider into the future.



Marketing large volumes of food was impressive logistically; however, discussing adapting from wholesale marketing to retail marketing with a grower at the Brooklyn Hall Green Market was equally interesting. There are many barriers to overcome in the Metro NY food market, which many would view as an insurmountable obstacle. A grower we talked to saw retail marketing as an opportunity to expand a family owned business by finding out what consumers demand and developing a plan to meet those demands. His business is faced with similar challenges present in the industry, but changes in business strategy have resulted in an interest from the next generation to take an active role in the farm and become encouraged about the future.

Another example of leadership successfully adapting to change was found at John Bowne High School in Queens. Steve Perry, director of agricultural education programs, has built a program that attracts hundreds of youth from urban backgrounds. Students decide on a concentration that is either plant based or animal based. Moreover, students gain "hands on" experience in such areas. Perry's program is continually changing to meet industry demands and he is able to attract talented and passionate teachers to educate students who may become agricultural industry leaders in the future. One may be surprised that the largest FFA chapter membership in New York State is at John Bowne High School. While many upstate FFA programs find challenges to attract students, Perry's continued enthusiasm has resulted in an agricultural educational program of excellence.

A trip to Metro NY would not be complete without meeting leadership in the finance industry. Rabobank leaders

hosted a meeting at their headquarters to discuss their global operations and potential for expanding agricultural lending in the United States. While no specific strategic details were shared, our group heard about opportunities to work with borrowers in different ways than competitors operate.

Reflecting on messages from the recent trip further illustrate the importance of one's attitude toward the future. Change is a constant, and those willing to create opportunities in the context of a dynamic industry exude optimism for the future. It makes one wonder: are leaders' positive attitudes the result of success, or is success a result of their positive attitude?



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Perspectives

By Larry Van De Valk, Director

Listening to Your Stakeholders – A Good Leadership Practice

Attend the 2007 NYS Ag Society Forum, so we can listen to you!

Listening to your customers is good business practice. Retailers do it on a regular basis, for example, when they assemble consumer panels or feedback groups. The idea is to get customer feedback on a new product line, packaging, labeling, merchandising, etc., and then to make modifications based on the feedback received. It's a way for the business to "check-in" with their customers; to make sure they are providing the goods and services their customers want. That's not rocket science, and most of us already know that.

Listening to stakeholders is just as important for organizations beyond the retail sector. We certainly do it in LEAD New York. In addition to surveys and questionnaires, we have invited alumni and class members to curriculum planning meetings on a regular basis, and we went through an extensive set of "focus group meetings" just a few years ago. All of the input received has helped guide us as we have made program improvements in recent years.

As most of you are aware, we are also actively involved in planning the NYS Agricultural Society Annual Forum as well. We listen to that feedback, too. While forum evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive and speakers have generally been well-received, a consistent comment in recent years has been "...we wish we had more time to talk, interact, and offer suggestions..." Well, you asked for it, this year you'll get it!

We're calling the January 11, 2007 Annual Forum a "listening session". Rather than have a panel of experts and keynote speaker address a specific topic at the forum, we're providing you, the audience, an opportunity to offer your suggestions and ideas on issues of

importance to you – and the "experts" will be there to listen! Of course, to make the day productive and keep things moving, the forum will follow a somewhat organized, structured format.

Following some opening comments and instructions by our lead facilitator, the audience will break up into approximately 25 discussion groups, organized around a fairly specific topic. A current LEAD class member will be present at each table to facilitate the discussion, and a recorder will keep notes of the major items discussed. Most importantly, we are making arrangements to have the right "listeners" present at each table to listen to you, their stakeholders. It's not practical to list them all here, but we will have listeners representing a broad cross-section of food and agricultural organizations around the state.

Keep an eye out for the forum registration materials from the Ag Society; they will list the topics and ask you to indicate your preferences. As one of the forum planners, I urge you to pre-register for the forum well in advance, and indicate which small group discussion topics you want to participate in! This will be very helpful as we put finishing touches on the table rosters, listener and facilitator assignments. Please pre-register!

At the end of the day, we will invite several key listeners to offer a synopsis of what they heard that day. We also hope to compile the notes from each of the small group discussions, and present them in report form to the key organizations represented at the forum. Then, it will be up to each organization to act on, and perhaps respond to, the recommendations presented in the summary report.

There are several keys to making

this event a success: First, your participation. We need you to show up, ready to offer your thoughts and constructive criticism. It is important to note that a "gripe session" will not be a productive use of anyone's time, and our facilitators will try to ensure that doesn't happen. Second, we need good representation on the part of the listening organizations. This is their opportunity to hear from a large, powerful cross section of industry stakeholders that the Ag Society membership represents. (By the way, it's the 175th Anniversary of the Society, so we are expecting nearly 500 people to attend!) Third, we need everyone to embrace this event for what it is: an opportunity for a large audience, with common agricultural roots, to share ideas and suggest possible directions for the future.

So, come celebrate the 175th anniversary of the NYS Agricultural Society, see the members of LEAD Class 11 put their facilitation skills into practice, network with hundreds of other industry professionals, and help us make this first-ever "listening session" a huge success!

News You Can Use...

Events, People, Ideas

Beyond Growing - Strategies and Technologies that Transform Your Products to Meet Market Demands
SAVE THESE DATES!!!
November 14-15th, 2006

The 2006 Cornell Strategic Marketing Conference for members of the agriculture industry will be held on November 14 and 15th, at the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center at the FDR Presidential Library and Home, Hyde Park, New York.

Listening From the Field

By Robert Rich, Organizational Consultant

This year, the New York State Agricultural Society is taking a bold new step in its leadership role in representing the broad agricultural interests across the state. At our annual forum, instead of listening to the policymakers and experts who have something to tell us that they think we should know (our typical pattern), we are going to reverse the tables—quite literally—and tell them some of the things we think they should know.

Policy, research, teaching, and support programs are all formed on the basis of an understanding of the needs of the agricultural community. Often the interpretation of those needs gets

filtered through many levels before it makes its way into implementation. At the annual forum, we have a chance to have face-to-face, unfiltered discussions about the critical issues of our times; topics that will shape our futures. And this year, those discussions won't just happen during coffee breaks or meal times, but will be the main part of our program.

We have identified approximately 25 primary issue areas around which to have small group discussions (see the list in the fall *Cultivator* or your forum registration packet). Each discussion group will address the same two basic questions: “What are the

challenges we face related to this issue area?” and “What are some possible solutions?” These will be structured, facilitated discussions, and will have “listeners” from relevant agencies and organizations assigned to them to hear first-hand what you have to say. The contents of the discussions will be recorded, briefly discussed at the meeting and summarized in written form after the meeting.

When you want to know what is going on out in your fields, you go out and do some scouting. Well, this will be the biggest day of scouting out the needs of agriculture that New York has ever seen. **Come join us!!**

News You Can Use... Events, People, Ideas

Determining how to transform crops in the fields to products desired by different markets is often a challenge for many local and regional agricultural producers. At this year's conference buyers from retail, foodservice distribution and restaurant sectors will share their insights, and growers will discuss their experiences on what the markets want beyond quality products, including packaging, varieties, volume, delivery schedule, and methods of doing business. Dan Barber, Executive Chef/Co-owner of Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns will present a keynote address on food and marketing trends, and how they are expected to impact farmers. Dr. Chris Watkins, a post harvesting specialist and the Associate Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension, and other experts from Cornell University will discuss practical strategies and post harvesting technologies that local and regional agricultural producers can adopt to meet those demands and be profitable.

For more information, contact:

Bob Weybright, Extension Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension - Dutchess County, at 845-677-8223, ext 122, e-mail: RW74@cornell.edu.

Wen-fei Uva, Senior Extension

Associate, Dept. of Applied Economics and Management, Warren Hall, Cornell University, at 607-255-3688, e-mail: WL32@CORNELL.EDU.

Renewable Fuels Standard - EPA has issued a proposed rule about renewable fuels. Portions of the preamble that discusses the definition of cellulosic ethanol via the use of renewable fuels displacing 90% of fossil fuels at ethanol plants can be found on the website at <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/renewablefuels?> EPA is taking comments.

Cornell EDA University Center Request for Proposals Cornell University has been selected as the New York State U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) University Center for a second year. The key aspect of this three year designation is project funding to assist communities in fostering higher-skill, higher-wage jobs and attracting private capital investment to the economic regions of New York State. The mission of the EDA is to help partners across the Nation create wealth and minimize poverty by promoting a favorable business involvement.

The University EDA Center is soliciting Requests for Proposals from economically

distressed communities and regions within New York State. Visit the Community, Food and Agriculture Program on -line at <http://www.cfap.org>

CONGRATULATIONS! Shawn Bossard and Kristen Stockin (Class 11 members) were married on September 23, 2006.

HTML will soon stand for High-Tech Marketing Line for New York's agricultural producers and processors. With funding from the New York Farm Viability Institute, Inc., Morrisville State Colleges Computing and Information Technologies Professor Kim Mills, Agricultural Business Assistant Professor **Sheila Marshman (Class 11)** and 20 producers and processors are developing a model for farmer-to-consumer selling via the Internet. The new online farmers market aims to increase the profitability of each participating farm by at least ten percent in the first year with a four-year cumulative profit in excess of \$4 million for more than 500 participating farmers from across New York state. Marshman says “online selling helps producers reach higher income audiences outside the rural economy. Through the use of the online farmers’ market, producers will increase sales and bring new money into their local economy.”

The following businesses and individuals have made financial contributions to the Class 11 operating budget:

Represents donations received from July 1, 2005 through October 1, 2006. If you have made a donation since then or we have inadvertently omitted your name, please accept our apologies.

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This statement does not reflect donations given to the Lowell Smith Circle of Courage Fund. Please see their roster for a list of donors. We thank those individuals who have donated to this fund and continue to support LEAD New York.

We also wish to thank the following businesses and individuals, which have established **Endowment Accounts** for the benefit of the LEAD New York Program: The Agway Foundation, The American Agriculturist Foundation, George and Diane K. Conneman, Farm Credit (Western NY and First Pioneer), Monsanto, Inc., National Grape Cooperative, Seneca Foods Foundation.

Finally, we also wish to express our gratitude to all of our **speakers, session facilitators and tour hosts**, too numerous to mention here, for their donation of time and talent to our program. **Thank You!**

News You Can Use... Events, People, Ideas

Martha Goodsell (Class 10) of NY Farms! helped recruit producers for the E-Commerce Storefront for NY Ag Producers project. She says, "Many of the producers initially interested already have websites and want to increase their online sales potential. This project will take them to a larger marketplace with national and international reach." She says one of the market's future features that will attract producers is the option to have the Morrisville State students handle packing and shipping as a centralized order fulfillment service.

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Director of Communications **Jessica A. Chittenden (Class 10)** was honored by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) for her excellence in media relations and public communications.

Chittenden, who has served as the Director of Communications since 2000, was presented with NASDA's Honor Award for Communications, during the organization's annual meeting in Norfolk, Virginia. NASDA is a nonpartisan association comprised of the top agriculture officials of the 50 states.

Robert Bishop (Class 6) of Larsen Farms Hamden, NY, has been elected to the National Forage Testing Association (NFTA) Board of Directors. The NFTA was founded in 1984 as a joint effort of the American Forage and Grassland Council, the National Hay Association and forage testing laboratories in a concentrated effort to improve the accuracy of forage testing and build grower confidence in testing animal feeds.

NFTA is governed by a 12-member Board of Directors. Six directors represent laboratories, three represent the National Hay Association, and three represent the American Forage and Grassland Council.

Jen Beckman (Class 11) started a new job on September 19, at Miller Spraying, which is one of two crop spraying businesses in Lewis County. She will dedicate 50% of her time as an office manager while the rest of the time is billed to a local crop consultant. **Good Luck Jen!**

Ted Miller (Class 11)- Gardner's Greenhouses on West Henrietta Road,

a long time greenhouse business, is not closing, just moving farther back on its 10-acre plot and is still selling flowering plants to the public. "There's been an undue amount of alarm," said Ted Miller, who now leads the fourth-generation family business. "I tell people we're not moving, we're improving," he said as crews worked around the property to take down 50,000 square feet of glass greenhouses. A temporary greenhouse will be going up soon, and the new, more efficient, glass greenhouses should be ready by spring. When the entire project is finished, expected in June, customers can expect about 12,000 square feet of greenhouses and 8,000 square feet of shopping space and garden displays.

Ray Denniston (Class 11), Food Service Manager for Johnson City School district was featured in the Press & Sun Bulletin – "Students at Johnson City High School and Owego Free Academy are eating tomatoes, apples and cucumbers that were grown at a local farm not far from both schools". The two school districts are using locally grown vegetables and fruits in the cafeteria serving line and the salad bar. Frank Wiles of Our Green Acres in Owego is one of the local farmers who supplies both schools with such vegetables as tomatoes, onions, peppers, broccoli and potatoes.

Peter J. Jentsch (Class 11) was appointed Extension Associate in the department of entomology at the Hudson Valley Laboratory in Highland, NY effective June 1, 2006. His responsibilities are to facilitate and lead regional extension activities and associated applied research in tree fruits and vegetables, and to address the insect concerns of grape growers in the area.

"Peter has strong applied research skills and is capable of placing himself in a grower's shoes," said **Mike Fargione (Class 10)**, extension educator from the Hudson Valley regional fruit program. "Those are invaluable tools for this position and I am confident he will be successful."

Jentsch received a B.A. in Education from the State University of New York at New Paltz in 1982 and an M.S. in Entomology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2005."

Seth Jacobs (Class 11) will lead the Agricultural Stewardship Association board of directors as it moves forward with plans to accelerate its farmland conservation efforts in Washington and northern Rensselaer counties.

The board of directors recently elected Jacobs president to replace **Dave Horn (Class 7)**, who exhausted his term limits but will remain active as honorary president. Jacobs, a vegetable farmer from Argyle, served on the ASA board for twelve years including one year as vice president.

ASA is a member based non-profit land trust working to protect farmland in Washington and northern Rensselaer Counties. They accomplish their mission through conservation and stewardship programs and public education efforts. To date, ASA has helped landowners conserve 5,433 acres and has brought \$3.3 million dollars to area farmers through purchase of development rights programs using state and federal funds. To learn more about ASA, visit our web site at www.agstewardship.org.

New York Farm Viability Institute Names New Executive Director

Thomas N. Sleight Selected to Head Organization Promoting Agricultural Enterprise Success and Profitability

On October 16, 2006, New York Farm Viability Institute, Inc. (NYFVI) Board Chairman John Lincoln announced the appointment of Thomas N. Sleight as NYFVI Executive Director. In making the announcement, Mr. Lincoln said, "The Board is extremely pleased to have someone of Tom's caliber and experience to lead our young organization. His background in agricultural industry development and promotion, along with his skills as a manager, will serve us in good stead."

Mr. Sleight comes to New York from Virginia, where he has been Director of the Division of Marketing for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services since 1999. Prior to joining that Department, he worked for the U.S. Grains Council in Washington, D.C. for 16 years,

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News You Can Use... Events, People, Ideas

most recently as Executive Director for the Council. Tom worked in the Councils international program, directing its activities in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, as well as serving as the Councils representative in Vienna, Austria, with responsibility for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Sleight was born and raised on a Dutchess County, NY, dairy farm that has been in the family for ten generations. He graduated from Cornell University with dual specialization in agricultural economics and agronomy. Mr. Sleight will take the NYFVI reins from Dr. R. David Smith, who has served as Executive Director of the NYFVI since its foundation in 2004, on November 1.

NYFVI is a farmer-led, independent non-profit organization, with offices in Syracuse, New York. The institute is currently overseeing a portfolio of \$8.3 million in applied research and extension projects aimed at helping agricultural producers in the state capitalize on new opportunities and make their businesses more successful. Information about the institute is available on its web site www.nyfarmvialibility.org.

On Thursday, October 19, a well-attended reception was held in Skaneateles, NY to celebrate the creation of the **New York Agricultural Land Trust (NYALT)** – an organization dedicated to protecting land to support a future for farming in New York. It will help provide agricultural landowners throughout New York with land conservation options that achieve their personal and business objectives. What was not so obvious was the significant role that LEAD New York graduates played in its formation. **Karl Czymmek (Class 7)** and **Meg Schader (Class 11)** both serve on their founding board of directors. And while he probably wouldn't take credit for this himself, many of the speakers acknowledged **David Haight's (Class 9)** leadership role in getting the trust organized. Also at the reception were **Craig Schutt (Class 7)**, **Ed Staehr (Class 11)**, **Roberta "Bobby" Harrison (Class 6)**, **Mark Dennis (Class 10)** and **Larry Van De Valk (Class 6)**. "Kudos" to those LEAD alumni that played a role in the formation of this new, statewide, land trust!

www.leadny.org



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