Northeast Cooperative Council

AgChoice Farm Credit, ACA
Agri-Mark, Inc.
CHS, Inc.
CoBank, ACB
Dairy Farmers of America
Dairy One
Farm Credit East, ACA
Genex Cooperative, Inc.
Land O’Lakes, Inc.
Lowville Farmers Cooperative, Inc.
National Grape Cooperative Association, Inc.
Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.
O-AT-KA Milk Products Cooperative, Inc.
St. Albans Cooperative Creamery
Stamford Farmers Cooperative
New York State Rural Electric Association
Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc.
Yankee Farm Credit, ACA

Northeast Cooperative Council Associate Members

Bond, Schoeneck and King, PLLC—Charles Sullivan
Cooperative Development Institute—Lynda Brushett
Dopkins and Co., LLP—Jay McWatters
FCC Services—Bill Wilson
Hale Group—Bob Ludwig
Herbein + Company, Inc.—Robert F. Firely
Scolaro, Shulman, Cohen, Fetter, & Burstein PC—Jeffrey Fetter
Council Profile

The Northeast Cooperative Council is a professional organization of cooperative-owned businesses and their advisors headquartered or doing business throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic United States. Member organizations represent a variety of cooperative businesses associated with the farm and food sector including: rural electric, supply, service, marketing, finance, purchasing and processing. Associate members include legal, accounting, consulting, and international development professionals working with cooperatives throughout the region. The Council operates for the benefit of member cooperatives and Associate members. There are 25 similar organizations throughout the United States. State and regional cooperative councils strive to meet the needs of their members providing education and leadership development for cooperative leaders.

NECC was incorporated in New York State in 1949 as the New York State Council of Farmer Cooperatives. Through time the service area has expanded as the number of state cooperative councils decreased and cooperative businesses consolidated. In 1991, the name was changed to the Northeast Cooperative Council and in 1997 the Council instituted an Associate membership program open to professionals working with cooperatives. The Council is guided by a board of directors composed of representatives from member organizations. The board is a blend of cooperative directors and managers.

A key relationship for the Council is a partnership between NECC and the Cooperative Enterprise Program (CEP) at the Cornell University, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management. The Council along with faculty and staff at the Department of Applied Economics and Management in the Dyson School endeavors to provide the highest quality educational programs to benefit cooperative businesses, members, management, and employees. The Council sponsors conferences and workshops for directors and senior management and programs for future cooperative leaders.

The mission of the Northeast Cooperative Council is to stimulate the overall effectiveness of member organizations by increasing the understanding and power of the dynamic cooperative business model among directors, members, employees, advisors, future leaders, and educators through a working partnership of cooperative leaders and faculty at Cornell University as well as offer leadership to members in leveraging their own educational resources through collaboration; and to provide an ongoing forum fostering the exchange of ideas among cooperatives here and around the world.

Northeast Cooperative Council Officers

President:
Rob Smith
National Grape Cooperative Association
Westfield, NY

Vice President:
Bill Banker
Agri-Mark, Inc.
Lawrence, MA

Treasurer:
Anna Smith
Farm Credit East, ACA, Batavia, NY

Executive Secretary:
Roberta Severson
Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
President’s Report

On behalf of the Northeast Cooperative Council Board of Directors I would like to welcome you to the 67th Annual Meeting and Leaders Forum. I always look forward to this meeting as it offers all of us the opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues and the opportunity to develop new relationships. The theme for this year’s meeting is “Rewards and Risks for Northeast Cooperatives”. We have a great lineup of speakers and are confident the sessions will be informative and engaging as we look at risk, its impact at our cooperatives and in our everyday lives decision making. We are also very grateful to be holding this meeting in conjunction with CoBank’s Annual Northeast Customer meetings. The group of speakers and topics that CoBank brings to the meeting receives high marks from the event’s participants. Our relationship with CoBank is very important to us.

Cooperatives have an excellent story to tell in the marketplace and their principles continue to gain favor with the public. They focus on the needs of their membership both short and long term. In addition of their day-to-day activities, many cooperatives are involved in other activities including sustainability efforts and learning how to tell the story from the farm to the table. Sustainability is one of the best kept secrets that our cooperative memberships have practiced successfully at the farm level for many years and it is important for the consumer to hear our story.

This past year was the second year for our Cooperative Internship Recognition Award (CIRA). The award recognizes successful internship completions with NECC member cooperatives. These internship opportunities are available to students enrolled in colleges located in the Northeast. After a successful program launch, it is expanding and the NECC is proud to recognize three outstanding students at this year’s meeting. The Cooperative Leadership Fund provides a $1000 cash award to each student honored.

◆ The 2017 Future Cooperative Leadership conference will be held July 11-13 in Mt. Morris, New York. Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) will be the host cooperative and we are working with them to put together a strong program. Think about the young cooperators in your cooperative who you would like to nominate and support their attendance at this event.
◆ In closing, I would like to thank our member cooperatives and associate members for their continued loyalty and support of the council. I also want to recognize Bobbie Severson and Todd Schmidt at Cornell for all they do on behalf of NECC. The council looks forward to continuing to deliver relevant programming and benefits to our members.

◆ Rob Smith
   President
◆
Cooperative leadership has not been for the faint of heart over the past couple of years. Cooperatives throughout the United States report information to the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business-Cooperative Services. Data calculated by the USDA in 2014, a year of strong prices, indicates that Northeast cooperatives had slightly over $9 billion in gross business volume. Gross business volume had dropped to $6.6 billion in 2015, down a little over 25 percent. This decrease can be attributed to the decline in dairy and grain prices. Some sectors did see increases, including the sales of fruits and vegetables that increased from $713 million to $941 million, an increase of 32 percent.

Decline in prices at the farm gate lead to producers questioning whether or not the cooperative is ‘doing all that it can for its members’ and directors and managers questioning, ‘how can we meet the needs and remain relevant to our diverse membership?’ These themes are experienced by all cooperatives regardless of their size, the commodities they market, the products they supply, the services they provide, or the financing they offer. Cooperatives today are as important as they were in the past. As investor-owned businesses expand, cooperatives build size, scale and collaborations to meet the demands of their customers. As world markets change, cooperatives are a means by which individual farmers can collectively access the global market place. As government leadership and the regulatory environment change, cooperatives are present to represent the interests of their members. Cooperatives will be critical to the future success of the U.S. and the Northeast farm and food sector as a means to address consumer concerns related to traceability, impact climate change through sustainability initiatives, and foster trade through international collaborations.

This complex economic and social environment requires cooperative leaders with the desire to learn about the world around them, with the ability to communicate effectively with their members and with each other. The Northeast Cooperative Council is the only agricultural organization in the northeast where cooperative leaders regardless of the commodities they market or services they provide can come together to learn about issues confronting their organizations in the context of the cooperative business structure. The NECC Leaders Forum provides a mechanism to hone ones skill as a cooperative leader. The Future Cooperative Leaders Conference is an opportunity for cooperatives to sponsor young members to advance their knowledge of cooperatives, build their networks, and inspire future cooperative leadership. As a member organization, the NECC strives to make “membership mean more.” Your input as members is critical to the success of the organization. Please feel free to contact me or any NECC board member with your ideas on how the organization can be of greater benefit to you.

Cooperatively,

Robert M. Severino

Executive Secretary
Congratulations to the NECC for another productive year in increasing the understanding and power of the cooperative business model! The Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management (DYSON), along with its two supporting colleges (the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business) truly appreciate the collaborative relationships we have developed with you. In particular, the relationship between the NECC and the Cornell Cooperative Program (CEP) makes both of our organizations stronger, providing increased access to cooperative industry data and information, an improved understanding on contemporary cooperative issues, and enhanced communication channels for transmitting research-informed educational products and services. DYSON and CEP greatly appreciate the continuing financial support the NECC provides to cooperative education, extension, and research at Cornell. Without your support, the cooperative ‘presence’ at Cornell would surely be more limited, reducing access to Cornell’s leading research and extension capabilities, and exposure to our truly amazing students. I am excited about our future work together! Along with Roberta (Bobbie) Severson (Director, CEP; Executive Secretary, NECC) were are expanding the CEP at Cornell through increased industry interactions, innovative and timely research projects, and student cooperative involvement inside the classroom and out.

Cornell’s undergraduate course in **Cooperative Business Management (AEM 2230)** has continuing strong growth in enrollment and spanning a variety of student interests and majors. It is truly inspiring as an educator to have such an amazing group of students each year interested in learning more about the cooperative business model and where it may fit in their future career plans. The curriculum has been modified over time to improve student interest in the class, increase industry involvement, and elevate student interactions with cooperative firms. The Spring 2017 semester has 25 students, with many of them in attendance at the 2017 NECC Annual Leaders Forum. I encourage you to reach out to them and to get to know them better. Special thanks go out to all of the guest speakers in class this semester, devoting their valuable time to enriching the class environment. Cooperatives in the classroom this semester include representatives from CROPP (Organic Valley), Democracy at Work, GreenStar Cooperative Market, National Grape/Welch’s, Delaware County Electric Cooperative, Upstate Niagara, Eden Valley Growers, and CHS.

* We have added a new, exciting element into the class this year promoting the benefits of **experiential learning**. Students are working with a cooperative business addressing real-life issues the cooperative is facing. Our maiden voyage into this exciting approach is with the GreenStar Cooperative Market, a consumer food cooperative in Ithaca, NY. Working jointly with GreenStar directors, students are working on projects that include developing a new solar energy cooperative, evaluating alternative patronage refund policies, and conducting feasibility assessments for alternative cooperative expansion scenarios. The goal is for students to apply principles learned in class and for the cooperative to better evaluate the issues they are facing; i.e., a WIN-WIN. If your cooperative is interested in working with students in next year’s class please let me know! It is an exciting way for me to see students applying what they learn, and for students to ‘get their hands dirty’ on real issues. The important part is to start planning EARLY to find projects that enhance the learning objectives, are feasible to complete over a 2-3 month period, and benefit the cooperative.
On another teaching note, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the NECC for your financial support of the **International Agribusiness Study Trip (AEM/FDSC 3290)**. In December, the NECC Board approved funding from your **Cooperative Leadership Fund** to support this valuable international learning experience. Over Spring Break 2017, I, along with co-instructors Elad Tako and Alicia Orta-Ramirez (Food Science), will be taking 20 undergraduate students from a variety of majors in CALS to experience and evaluate agricultural, agribusiness, and food systems in Chile. The field study will look at the entire agricultural sector, including farm operations, agricultural cooperatives, food processors, wholesalers, retailers, government, and trade organizations. Agricultural cooperatives in Chile will be featured with discussions with leaders from Colun (the largest dairy co-op in Chile) and Ocean Spray (who has member-owners and processing operations in Chile). We are also excited to have management personnel from CoBank (Christina Zick) and Seneca Foods (Carlos Pelenur) and additional Cornell faculty (Loren Tauer and Tom Maloney from DYSON and Olga Padilla-Zakour (Food Science) join us for this enriching educational experience!

On the research front, we are currently in the final year of our work determining the economic impacts of agricultural and rural electric cooperatives in New York State. Thanks to all the cooperatives that took the time to complete our intense financial survey. We are finishing the data management and economic model development over the next few weeks, with the empirical results expected in April. We’ll be sure to let you know of our findings that should be very useful to you in communicating cooperative value to your members and your communities. Bobbie and I are also finishing our work with Franklin County that includes developing a financial feasibility template for rural broadband cooperatives. The result will be a database that allows users to enter baseline financial parameters and then provides projected pro-formal financial statements over a 10-year planning horizon. The template will also be presented in the co-ops class and useful to their consulting projects with GreenStar.

In collaboration with Andy Novakovic and Wayne Knoblauch (both in DYSON), Bobbie and I have also submitted a Hatch/Smith Lever grant proposal to better understand the economic impacts of alternative premium structures by cooperatives and milk handlers in New York State. With sharp declines in farm milk prices, renewed interest in better understanding the pricing dynamics and the nature of premiums within the dairy industry is growing. In this project, we propose to develop two-sided market experiments to better understand premium dynamics, overlaid with alternative treatments to consider the value placed on cooperative membership through member control rights and distribution of profits. If funded, the project kicks off on October 1!

Finally, as you know, the faculty and staff in DYSON have been working through the growing pains and dynamics involved in being one of the three units that comprise the new Cornell SC College of Business. There exist clear benefits in terms of integration of business education at Cornell and enhanced collaboration of faculty across these units. In addition, DYSON remains an important unit within CALS and continues our focus on our Land Grant and Extension missions. Applications to DYSON have increased over 130% in the last year demonstrating growing demand for the teaching, research, and extension resources we have. While it is a learning process in forming a new college, it is important to remember that all three units in the new college will maintain and enhance their individual brand identity, while increasing our collective reputation as a leading university for business education in the world. Please feel free to reach out me further as these developments continue.

Finally, as always, we include below a brief description of some of this past year’s educational and research accomplishments. Numerous developments are on the horizon in 2017, and I look forward to seeing how we can work together... **cooperatively**!

Thanks!

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Todd M. Schmit, PhD
Cornell University Faculty Liaison to the NECC
**Agricultural Cooperative Leadership Education:** The 2017 NECC *Future Cooperative Leaders Conference* will be held in Mount Morris, NY and hosted by Dairy Farmers of America. Look for more information as the agenda and details are developed. The biennial conference is geared towards cooperative members and employees who will lead cooperatives in the future. Bobbie and the NECC are developing an exciting program with increasing focus on strategic decision making and member participation.

**Emerging Cooperatives and Farmer-owned Enterprises:** Bobbie continues to work with emerging organizations, communities, and agencies considering the cooperative business model. In the last year, these have included working with groups surrounding rural broadband services, Christmas tree growers, medicinal Chinese herb growers, greenhouse operators, sustainability initiatives, organic farming, and worker cooperatives. Continuing interest centers on the development of cooperatively structured food hubs (aggregation, marketing, and distribution organizations that preserve source identification of local/regionally produced foods).

**Agricultural Markets and Community Economic Development Program Work Team (PWT):** Todd serves as faculty co-chair of the PWT. The goal of the PWT is to develop a coordinated effort aimed at strengthening communities and regions through agriculture and food systems-based development. Efforts include research, outreach, public discussion and education, and professional development, all aimed at increasing awareness and opportunities related to the role vibrant agriculture and food systems can play in achieving broader development goals.

**Cooperative Business Management (AEM 2230):** We are well into our Spring 2017 class, with a great mix of students from a variety of disciplines. The course provides an evaluation of the fundamental principles, structure, finance, management and governance associated with the cooperative organization, with a focus on agricultural cooperatives. Analyses of the cooperative business organization within the modern economy are emphasized through a mix of lectures, guest speakers, and cooperative business case study discussions. Experiential learning projects are developed with a cooperative each year that the students work on and present the results to the cooperative by the end of the semester.

**International Agribusiness Study Trip (AEM/FDSC 3290):** Cornell’s Agribusiness Fellows Program provides undergraduate students the opportunity to travel abroad to observe and interact one-on-one with agribusiness leaders in different countries. The course gives students direct exposure to the managerial practices essential to the success of agriculture, agribusiness, and food companies competing in the global marketplace. The 2017 field study focuses on agricultural and food systems in Chile, with special attention to leading cooperatives in the country. Thanks to NECC for providing funding this year to support the trip!

**National Cooperative Research Committee.** Schmit and Severson are members of a national committee of University and industry participants titled NCERA-210. The NCERA-210 committee is a regional research project focusing on cooperatives. A primary objective of the committee is to promote and coordinate research and educational activities focusing on cooperatively owned businesses. For more information, see ncera.aae.wisc.edu. Schmit and Severson attended the meeting last November just prior to the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s annual Farmer Cooperatives Conference.

**Other Educational Outreach Efforts:** Both Schmit and Severson presented results of their research and educational efforts at numerous academic and industry conferences.
Recent Publications


Recent publications cont.


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<td><strong>Total products marketed</strong></td>
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<td>297.0</td>
<td>428.5</td>
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<td>59.5</td>
<td>32.8</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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<td>6.8</td>
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<td><strong>Gross business volume</strong></td>
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<td>203.1</td>
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<td>1,827.0</td>
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Cooperative Leadership Fund

The purpose of the Cooperative Leadership Fund is to create knowledge about the cooperative business model and to build cooperative leaders through:

♦ Offering quality educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to study and conduct research on cooperative businesses,

♦ Developing world-class outreach programs that deliver a high level of expertise to further the growth and performance of cooperative businesses, and

♦ Creating a superior learning environment that inspires the development of cooperative leaders.

Efforts supported by the fund include students from four universities attending the Northeast Cooperative Council Annual Meeting and Leaders Forum and college presentations about cooperative-structured businesses and the role they play in the farm and food sector. Activities such as these are supported through the Cooperative Development Institute, Shelburne Falls, MA in conjunction with the Northeast Cooperative Council.

The Cooperative Leadership Fund is a donor-advised fund through the Cornell University Foundation, which is managed as part of Cornell University’s endowment. Contributions are tax deductible.

The Northeast Cooperative Council invites you to make a contribution to the fund in honor of a cooperative leader.

Eric Zuber, Chairman
Jean Angelini
Bill Banker
Craig Pollock
Robert Ludwig
Todd Schmit
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Craig Pollock
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Rob Smith

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Will Baildon
Jay McWatters

Director and Officer Nominating Committee
Gordon Hoover, Chair
Celeste Kane-Stebbins
Rob Smith
Cynthia Van Lieshout

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Cornell University
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Ithaca, NY 14853

NORTHEAST COOPERATIVE COUNCIL
A recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2015) indicates there are over 200 cooperatives doing business in New England, New York and Pennsylvania with gross sales volume of $6.63 billion and net business volume of $7.94 billion. In addition, the Farm Credit system has over $5.85 billion in loan volume in a similar geographical area. Agricultural cooperatives and Farm Credit Associations play an important role in the success of the farm and food sector in the northeastern United States.

The CEP is appreciative of the support provided by the Northeast Cooperative Council. Over the past year the CEP has developed programs at the request of the Northeast Cooperative Council, created and published the organization’s newsletter—Cooperative Notes, and provided the staffing support for the organization.

The Cooperative Enterprise Program has worked to raise awareness of agricultural cooperative businesses by:

- Guest presentations before the Cornell Cooperative Management class (AEM 2230), Farm Management class (AEM 3020), and Traditional Agriculture in Developing Countries (IARD 7830).
- Coordinating professional development for Cornell University Cooperative Extension educators through their annual In-service programs. Focal topics this year included supply chain management, milk marketing, climate change, agricultural labor, farm business analysis, rented farm land and leasing arrangements, and accessing retail market outlets.
- Assisting the Cornell Small Farms Program’s Baskets to Pallets education guide as a resource for direct marketing farmers to successfully scale up meet wholesale market demands.
- Developed a series of modules and pod casts for persons interested in developing a food hub business to aggregate local, source-identified products from small and mid-sized farms to be marketed and distributed into wholesale market channels.
- Collaborated with the Cooperative Development Institute and Keystone Development Center to present information about food hub development at the 25th Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture Conference, the 3rd biennial National Food Hub Conference, and the Empire State Fruit and Vegetable Expo.
- Consulted with several groups on forming a cooperative.
- Received position announcements from NECC member organizations that were then forwarded to teaching faculty and student placement offices at land grant universities throughout the northeast and select State University of New York colleges.

To learn more about how the Cornell University Cooperative Enterprise Program could benefit you or more about the Northeast Cooperative Council, please contact:

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Email: rmh27@cornell.edu

Visit the CEP website at:
www.cooperatives.aem.cornell.edu
SAVE THE DATE!!!

37TH NECC FUTURE COOPERATIVE LEADERS CONFERENCE

July 11-13, 2017
Mt. Morris, NY

Conference facility: Genesee River Restaurant & Reception Center
Accommodations: Country Inn & Suites

For persons aspiring to enhance leadership skills while expanding knowledge of directing and managing a co-op business.

“The conference provided a good balance of leadership and Co-ops 101.”
“I learned I need to adapt, innovate and be willing to take more risks.”
“I hope to see the people I met this week in the future.”
“I was amazed to learn about the differences between cooperatives doing business here in the Northeast.”

Tour Western NY farms and visit Craigs Station Creamery and learn about the joint venture between 8 farms and DFA and efforts towards traceability, sustainability, and environmental responsibility.

Interact with Northeast cooperative leaders.

Hosted by Dairy Farmers of America
in collaboration with the
Northeast Cooperative Council
and Cornell University
Cooperative Enterprise Program
For more information, contact:
Bobbie Severson
Email: rmh27@cornell.edu
Phone: 607.255.1987