

## Lott Family Hosts Empire Farm Days

**CHRIS TORRES**  
Regional Editor

SENECA FALLS, N.Y. — When Ralph Lott thought about hosting Empire Farm Days on his vast corn and soybean farm in Seneca Falls in 1986, he was excited at possibly getting some free equipment out of the deal.

“When we first talked to them, everybody said you’d get tractors for nothing, you’ll get this for nothing, that for nothing. That never materialized,” Lott said with a laugh.

Still, 25 years later, he has no regrets over hosting one of the nation’s largest outdoor agricultural equipment shows.

“We always attended shows and thought this was a chance to have it on our farm. So we said, ‘Why not?’ It’s been great.”

The 80th Empire Farm Days was held Tuesday through Thursday on 325 acres of the Rodman Lott and Son Farm. The annual show is sponsored by Empire State Potato Growers Inc.

More than 65,000 people turned out for the show, which featured field demonstrations of equipment, informational sessions put on by Cornell Cooperative Extension and other state ag organizations, “ride-and-drive” demonstrations, animal husbandry exhibits, and more than 600 exhibitors showing off everything from precision ag technology to the latest in crop management tools.



Photo by Chris Torres

The “old iron” antique tractor parade was a site to be seen at Empire Farm Days, which was held this week at Rodman Lott and Sons Farm in Seneca Falls, N.Y.

Melanie Wickham, Empire Farm Days manager, said the show has evolved from its original focus on dairy farming.

This year’s show featured larger exhibits on corn and soybeans, new equine-related seminars, and more animal exhibits, including a new one focusing on alpacas.

“We try to watch what’s going on in the Northeast. And you’re seeing

an increase in equine farms. You’re seeing an increase in corn and soybean acreage. And so we’ve really kind of focused on the changes that you see in Northeast agriculture. We hope to reflect it here,” Wickham said.

Producers had plenty of educational presentations and exhibits to choose from.

Several dairy profit seminars

were held during the three-day show, focusing on things such as the next generation of dairy farmers, robotic milking, cow comfort and polled genetics. The seminars were sponsored by Cornell Pro-Dairy and Dairy Business.

A new Corn and Soybean Center, sponsored by the New York Corn and Soybean Growers Association, More **EMPIRE FARM DAYS**, page A2

## Conference Looks at Growing Rice in Northeast

**AMY HALLORAN**  
New York Correspondent

WESTMINSTER WEST, Vt. — Around 100 people turned out for the Fourth Annual Northeast USA Rice Conference at the Akaogi Farm last weekend.

Akaogi Farm is a small, diversified organic farm with a twist. Takeshi and Linda Akaogi have been growing a wide range of crops since 1985, selling to food co-ops, farmers markets and through a small CSA (community supported agriculture).

In 2005, Takeshi Akaogi, who had grown rice in Japan, decided to plant rice on a patch of land that was always wet. The first variety did not mature, so the couple sought the help of the McCouch Rice Laboratory at Cornell University.

“We are really grateful to have this relationship with the Akaogis,” said Susan McCouch, who has incorporated this and other rice projects in the Northeast into a National Science Foundation grant. “We have no real rice production in New York state, and we have been really fortunate to stumble into this network.”

A dozen people grow rice in the Northeast and at the beginning of the conference, the growers shared what varieties they were growing and what yields they had the previous year, along with how the crop is looking this season.

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## Saratoga Orchard Reflects Good Year for NY Apples

**PAUL POST**

New York Correspondent

SCHUYLERVILLE, N.Y. — Major crop losses limited Saratoga Apple’s “you-pick” season to three weekends last fall. Now, owner Nate Darrow has already begun harvesting early varieties, and customers should start picking their own fruit by Labor Day weekend and continue right into early November.

It’s a huge turnaround for one of Saratoga County’s largest orchards, which had to borrow apples just to keep its retail stand open for the Christmas holiday last year.

“This year we have a bumper crop,” Darrow said. “It’s one of the best crops I’ve seen. The apples are going to be big and fully flavored this season.”

In 2012, a late spring frost devas-

tated his orchard, the same as many upstate New York fruit growers. Saratoga Apple suffered a nearly 70 percent loss.

Fortunately, Darrow had a backup supply to draw from, his brothers’ Green Mountain Orchards in Putney, Vt., where Darrow grew up.

Having weathered that storm, he’s looking forward to a bountiful fall season. Saratoga Apple is on Route 29, a heavily-traveled corridor between Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and Vermont, which gets even busier in autumn from weekend leaf peepers.

Darrow gives them plenty of reasons to stop with attractions ranging from live music to hay-wagon rides.

However, the farm’s success is based on sound management and years of experience.

For the past few years, the apple trees have benefited from Darrow

paying more attention to what’s going on in the soil beneath them.

“We’ve made a drastic change in how we manage the orchard floor,” Darrow said.

Previously, he would spray herbicide on the rows between trees to keep grass down. Rows are now mowed periodically. It requires more time and labor expense, but it produces a healthier, more long-lasting apple, which is important for winter storage, he said.

“There’s a lot of beneficial activity that happens in the sod layer, a lot of good micro-organisms that help the tree’s root system,” Darrow said. “There’s this whole world underground making it happen. We have to do everything we can to encourage better biology.”

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Photos by Paul Post

Nate Darrow, owner of Saratoga Apples, said this year’s crop looks significantly better than his 2012 crop.

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# Hudson Grazing Workshop Set

The Hudson Mohawk Resource Conservation and Development Council and the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District are hosting a grazing workshop in Albany County this summer. The workshop will take place at Helder-Herdwyck Farm, 450 Long Road, East Berne, on Aug. 28 from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Helder-Herdwyck Farm is a holistically-managed small farm operation. Ray and Erin Bradt are breeding a rare breed of sheep new to the U.S. called Herdwick. Their fleeces are primarily used for rug-making, outerwear and even home insulation in their native country of England. Helder-Herdwyck Farm has the fiber processed into yarn, specially spun for needle-punch or hooked rug making. Additionally, the Bradts pasture hens for fresh eggs.

Troy Bischoff, grazing specialist with the Madison County Soil and

Water Conservation District, will be leading the workshop session along with Joseph Slezak, field manager with the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The workshop will cover lessons learned by Erin Bradt from participating in the Beginning Women Farmers Program; learning ways to utilize a planned grazing chart and biological monitoring to create the farm you want; using portable fencing and chargers to reclaim land and manage livestock; developing low-cost watering systems; and estimating pasture dry matter.

The workshop is free and includes lunch and ice cream.

To register for the workshop, contact Susan Lewis from the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District at 518-765-7923 or susan.lewis@ny.nacdn.net.

# Rice

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It's the kind of exchange that facilitates conversations and relationships.

"You've joined the National Science Foundation as innovators," McCouch told those assembled. "You have accomplished something as a group, trying varieties and developing equipment."

The current round of National Science Foundation funding has supported the last three conferences, and will support next year's proceedings as well. It also supports a website, ricenortheasternus.org, a spot for gaining information on growing rice in the area, as well as for viewing videotaped proceedings from previous conferences.

Most rice research centers are found in more tropical areas. A great deal of rice research occurs at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, and many people from the Asia Rice Foundation USA, which planned a meeting to coincide with the Northeast Rice Conference, have worked there, as has Susan McCouch.

"These rice paddies in Westminster are living proof that with a bit of

careful attention to detail in terms of genetics of the plant and the environment you're working in, you can work with rice," McCouch said.

"It is a new crop that's not traditionally grown in this area," Linda Akaogi said at a presentation the prior week at the Kneading Conference in Maine. "This means we have a clean slate. People can experiment and do what they want. We don't have thousand of years of agronomic tradition telling us what to do. We can adapt rice growing to our local community."

The downside, she noted, is there's no infrastructure and no support from Cooperative Extension.

"I joke that Vermont is the leading rice growing state in the Northeast," she said. "I'm not sure that's true, but we grew about 3,000 pounds of rice last year."

Akaogi Farm experiments with many varieties. The paddy system they use is flooded by a reservoir constructed for this purpose.

"The basic elements needed for rice growing are soil, water, heat, seed, same as any other plant," Takesi Akaogi said at the Kneading Conference in Maine. "Either wet- or dry-condition rice can survive and produce seed."

The Great Lakes, as well as the region spanning from Montreal to the Champlain and Hudson Valleys, have potential for growing rice since clay and hardpan soils are good bases for

the crop. Any farm might have a one- to three-acre spot of this type of soil, Takesi Akaogi said.

"Rice is a good candidate to use marginal land," he said. "The good thing is rice is very, very productive, on average, twice as productive as wheat."

A Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Farmer Grant helped Akaogi Farm do outreach and education on the project.

Attendees at the conference also included people who are ready to plant rice on their own. Interest in the crop is not only limited to its agronomic value, but also exploring rice paddies in conservation terms. Part of the work at Akaogi Farm has been looking at the impact the rice paddy has on multiple animal species utilizing the wetlands, such as tree frogs and birds.

Niki Clark and Ian Curry of Nikian Farm came to Vermont from Nova Scotia.

"We've been following their progress for a few years," Curry said, noting that he and Clark had just received a grant from the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture to look at rice production as an innovative crop. So far, just one other farmer in their area is growing rice, for sake.

"We can use marginal agricultural land, and add wetlands instead of subtracting them," Curry said.

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