



## *Educating Future Extension Educators*

*By Kate Birchenough*

Friendly. Intelligent. Hard working.

Three words that accurately describe Joe Lawrence, a Cornell graduate student, Jefferson County native and soon to be the field crops educator at Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Lawrence got his first taste of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) through a summer internship he completed with Mike Hunter, Jefferson County agriculture and natural resources program leader and field crops extension educator. "It was my [SUNY] Cobleskill internship with CCE of Jefferson County, where I was first able to participate in field experiments with Quirine [Ketterings] and the Cornell Nutrient Management Spear Program," said Lawrence. "It was the fact that her program is very visible in the counties and not just on campus that impressed me the most."

"I think the summer internship gave Joe an opportunity to see a lot of things within Extension and the connection with the university," said Hunter. "It was a way for Joe to interact with the folks on campus and meet a lot of different educators throughout the state. He gained experience in collaborative extension and research programs and it primed him for his graduate work at Cornell now."

While Lawrence worked with Hunter during the internship, he also worked closely with Pete Barney in St. Lawrence County and Jen Beckman formerly of Lewis County Extension.

"We're not a regional team, but do a lot of regional stuff together. Joe really got a chance to network with CCE educators in the North Country; we did a lot of farm visits together so he got a chance to see interaction with farmers," Hunter said. "During the field visits we looked at troubleshooting or worked with a farmer on an issue. He was able to give his insight, saw what was involved with extension and applied research and he really liked it."

Soon after he graduated with his bachelor's from Cobleskill, Joe applied for a graduate assistantship at Cornell University, where he requested to work with Ketterings and the Nutrient Management Spear Program.

Ketterings adds, "When Joe first approached me about possibilities for pursuing a graduate degree in my program, I did not have the funding to support him but I knew he would be my first choice if funding materialized. He had left a very good impression with Jefferson County extension. He wanted to pursue a master's degree program to gain skills in applied research in nutrient management and forage production in preparation for a position as extension educator upon graduation. It was also obvious he knew what he was looking for and was going to work hard to achieve his goals. Joe worked for Soil and Water Conservation in Onondaga County for almost a year when I learned our nitrogen for corn proposal to the New York Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI) was selected for funding. I called Joe and asked him if he was interested in joining us and he started his graduate degree program less than two weeks later."

Since he first stepped foot on campus as a masters student in soil and crop sciences in January 2006, Lawrence has been actively engaged in working with farmers and extension educators while conducting his research. He has been working on laboratory experiments, research station trials and on-farm trials focusing on improving nitrogen and manure



*Joe Lawrence a Cornell graduate student, Jefferson County native, and soon to be the field crops educator at Lewis County Cornell Cooperative Extension*

management for corn. He studied nitrogen needs of corn following sod in rotation, gathering both soil and plant samples; he worked on testing various soil and plant testing tools to determine if a field needs additional N during the regular growing season, or if the amount in the soil is sufficient to yield an adequate crop for the farmer.

Along with the New York Farm Viability Institute and Federal Formula Funds, his on-farm work in Northern New York was supported by the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program (NNYADP). "NNYADP has been an integral part to my extension experience", said Lawrence. "Not only have they provided funding for my graduate research, NNYADP funds sponsored my internship and in the past supported Cornell research projects on my families farm."

"I think that a strong connection between campus and county extension is a critical part of my graduate program. For me it has been a great opportunity to work out of campus, while still interacting with county educators on something that is relevant to the needs of farmers in New York. With this type of research I don't know how you can have a complete graduate program without interacting with extension," said Lawrence. "It has shown me how to successfully implement on farm research trials. I learned how to take someone's question and if there was no answer, turn it into a project that would both answer the question and provide relevant data for future use."

His desire and persistence to conduct relevant research during on-farm trials and to work with producers to make sure their questions and concerns were being addressed led Lawrence to land a job with the Lewis County CCE as the new field crops educator, starting in January of 2008.

"I have had an interest in that type of work for a long time," he said. "My continued interaction with CCE throughout graduate school, particularly last summer when I worked in the field and traveled around to different

counties for experiments, was when I knew for sure it was a career I wanted to pursue. I was able to see how different counties ran different projects; I was able to see it from a lot of different stand points."

When applying for the position, Frans Vokey and Peg Cook were on the search committee. "I had worked with him on the mass nutrient balance project ... when he applied at CCE he gave a presentation on his nitrogen project," said Cook, an independent consultant in Lewis Co. "He has a farm background so he realizes their struggles and what they have to go through, with the cost of feed, fuel and fertilizer going up - farmers are still trying to recover this year. Joe made himself very knowledgeable about the area and he understands the complications involved with geography as well as the impact of nutrients with the CAFO size farms. He is an approachable person, and I think farmers in the county will respond to him in a positive way."

Frans Vokey of Lewis County CCE noticed immediately that Lawrence has a good grasp of the CCE mission. "It's not easy to come into an Extension position and to figure out what role to take in helping farmers in the community," Vokey said. "Having that exposure early on was key. His graduate degree program and internship with Jefferson County extension prepared him well for the job and we think he'll hit the ground running. Joe just has a really good way about him - he knows what Extension is about and knows what his role is to be and has the skills to match."

"I'm going to enjoy being able to work in a diverse field, with a diverse group of people in the county and on campus," said Lawrence. "This field of work is always evolving, leading to new questions and spurring new and different research projects. It's never the same thing."



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension



The **Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP)** is an applied research, teaching and extension program for field crop fertilizer and manure management on dairy and livestock farms. It is a collaboration among faculty, staff and students in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Cornell Cooperative Extension and PRODAIRY. Our vision is to assess current knowledge, identify research and educational needs, facilitate new research, technology and knowledge transfer, and aid in the on-farm implementation of strategies for field crop nutrient management including timely application of organic and inorganic nutrient sources to improve farm profitability while protecting the environment. An integrated network approach is used to address research, extension and teaching priorities in nutrient management in New York State. For more information on NMSP projects and extension/teaching activities, visit the program website (<http://nmsp.css.cornell.edu>) or contact Quirine Ketterings at [gmk2@cornell.edu](mailto:gmk2@cornell.edu) or (607) 255-3061.