



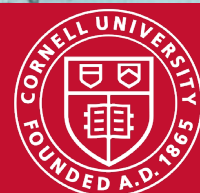
## LERGP 2025 Fourth Quarter Impacts

**Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
Lake Erie Regional Grape Program



**PennState Extension**

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## **Jennifer Phillips Russo- LERGP Team Leader and Viticulturalist**

### **Meeting with State Senator, George Borrello**

Team Leader, Jennifer Phillips Russo, was asked to join other agricultural specialists and Executive Director of Chautauqua County, Emily Reynolds, to a fact learning lunch with NYS Senator, George Borrello, to help bring awareness of the successes and challenges of our regions agricultural sector. The meeting was successful as building relationships, filling the gaps of knowledge, and brainstorming on how we can work together to support our agricultural communities in Western New York.

### **2025 NVEELC Presentation**

National Viticulture Enology Extension Leadership Conference (NVEELC) regularly gathers viticulture and enology extension and industry (non-sales) outreach specialists for professional development, best-practice sharing, research and regional reports, collaboration and dialogue on the unique challenges in V&E extension. The goal? To lift up, connect and support the important extension function for the American grape and wine industry. The Lake Erie Regional Grape Team was asked to present on the Spotted Lanternfly Mechanization Research that we have been working on and also give an update on our region.

### **Field Representative Meetings**

The Lake Erie Regional Grape Program meets monthly with our grape industry processor group to discuss how, collectively, we can provide support to our grower stakeholders. During these meetings we discuss timely needs for viticulture, integrated pest management, research needs, and business management to support the industry. Our October meeting expressed concerns over the declining market and ways to garner support.

### **Campus Connections Lunch and Learn: Ag and Food Systems**

Jennifer Phillips Russo was invited by Judson Reid, Cornell's Critical Issues Lead and Vegetable Specialist/Team Leader, to present at the first Campus Connection Lunch and Learn zoom meeting to keep campus faculty and CCE up-to-date on what is happening in the world of ag extension. This first meeting, highlighted regional teams, and their role in supporting the various ag sectors presented by Peter Landre, and then highlighted a specific commodity/team and LERGP was selected out of the 10 Regional Teams. Jennifer presented on the Lake Erie/NYS grape industry, the LERGP team, our industry needs, and how LERGP interacts and supports growers. It was a great opportunity to showcase the great industry and work that happens in our region.

### **2025 Fall Advisory Committee**

The Lake Erie Regional Grape Program held an advisory committee meeting in November 2025 to help guide their winter programming. The meeting gathered growers, processors, research and extension staff to identify critical challenges facing the grape industry and to guide future extension programming, research priorities, and outreach efforts. Below is a summary of the discussion points:

#### **1. Mechanized Pruning & Vineyard Management**

- Transitioning from hand pruning to mechanized pruning increases dead wood, disease pressure, and reliance on sprays—especially in the first few years.
- Growers reported success with rotational pruning systems that alternate between cane pruning, modified mechanical pruning, and minimal follow-up to manage wood health and labor.
- There is strong demand for peer-to-peer learning, particularly panels featuring growers with long-term experience using mechanized systems.

#### **2. Labor Constraints & Input Tradeoffs**

- Labor shortages are forcing operational changes, often increasing spray needs and disease



risk.

- Multi-row sprayers and integrated mechanization can offset labor costs.
- Growers are interested in reevaluating economic thresholds for sprays and inputs, accepting limited losses to reduce costs.

### 3. Vineyard Economics & Market Reality

- The traditional strategy of increasing yield to maintain profitability no longer works due to:
  - Shrinking juice and wine markets
  - Processor delivery limits
  - Rising input and equipment costs
- Consensus emerged that industry oversupply is structural, not cyclical.
- Many participants believe long-term viability requires:
  - Acreage reduction
  - Increased efficiency
  - Diversification and shared services
- Comparisons to the dairy industry highlight the need for innovation, consolidation, and new product development.

### 4. Need for Paradigm Shifts & Market Development

- Incremental efficiency gains are insufficient; the industry needs new markets and uses for grapes and byproducts (e.g., health, cosmetics, nutraceuticals).
- Health-benefit research and marketing were repeatedly identified as potential levers to stimulate demand.
- Meaningful progress likely requires coordinated industry, research, and policy efforts.

### 5. Extension Tools, Technology & Decision Support

- Strong interest in practical tools rather than theory, including:
  - Cost-of-production and enterprise budgeting tools
  - Input price benchmarking
  - Increased training on digital tools (e.g., myEV, NDVI, variable-rate applications)
- Growers emphasized customization, usability, and farm-level applicability.

### 6. Business Continuity & Succession

- Succession planning is becoming urgent, with many growers seeking guidance on contracts, timelines, and financial planning.
- This topic is increasingly relevant and time-sensitive.

### 7. Outreach & Communication

- Extension programs are valued, but many growers remain disconnected.
- Processors can play a key role in disseminating information.
- Providing ready-to-share, standardized outreach materials would improve reach and consis-

tency.

- Growers asked for SLF mitigation strategies, information on Yeast Assimilated Nitrogen, relating soil and tissue tests, how to identify specific compounds that come from vines, and biological practices.

## **2025 Virtual Spray Program – What’s Your Plan?**

December 3, 2025, the Lake Erie Regional Grape Program held our annual Virtual Spray Program for growers across PA and NY and we promoted it nationally through the National Grape Research Alliance Newsletter and other land-grant universities colleagues. The event was well attended with 73 people tuned in to learn about the latest research to help make their spray program purchasing decisions for the 2026 growing season and earn pesticide recertification credits.

The program began with Fluctuation of grape berry moth populations in Concord vineyards by Dr. Flor Acevedo, Penn State University. This presentation shared results on grape berry moth phenology collected from four vineyards over two growing seasons in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Attendees learned about the insect’s life cycle, how to recognize its damage in the field, and how populations fluctuate throughout the season in relation to temperature.

The second presentation was by Dr. Katie Gold, Cornell University, with an update on what’s new from Cornell Grape Pathology—dsRNA, next-gen biologicals, disease-resistant varieties, phenology-based scheduling, dynamic spray volume (“smart” spraying), and emerging AI decision support—and how to judge these against the *unchanged* fundamentals of pathogen biology and viticultural practice. Katie’s support specialist, Dave Combs, gave an overview of the materials and their effectiveness in the Cornell pathology vineyard field trials in 2025. Fungicides will be evaluated and compared against like modes of action as well as untreated controls and grower standard programs. This program will also suggest materials to use in the future and what pathogens they are most effective against. Followed by an update from Dr. Tim Miles, Michigan State University, on grape pathology resistance on downy, powdery and botrytis, along with a discussion on the upcoming IR4 projects in grapes and what that means for our industry.

The final presentation of the meeting was given by Megan Luke, Lake Erie Regional Grape Program PSU Viticulture Educator. Megan discussed common issues in sprayer set-up, coverage, calibration, and water quality, which may drastically affect the efficacy of your spray program. This will include a recap of issues that I observed in the past two years of sprayer calibration in NY and PA, as well as discussing simple and cost-effective solutions to overcome some common problems.

## **New York Farm Viability Institute Floor Management Cover Crop Trial**

The Lake Erie Regional Grape Program concluded data collection for the NYFVI Floor Management Cover Crop Trial for water and nutrient conservation in non-irrigated vineyards and soil/vine health. This research trial tested many different cover cropping strategies on different soil types to help develop best management practices for growers. We look forward to analyzing the data and providing management strategies in the future.

## **Between the Vine Podcast**

After preparation, meetings and discussions with both universities, podcasts continued this quarter. This content is also distributed through our YouTube channel as a video blog. The video blog has been around for a few years and views are typically just a little bit higher than the podcast. We delivered two podcasts with pertinent viticulture, integrated pest management, and business management topics, with a special guest, Alan Lakso, Cornell Emeritus, on the effects of drought-like conditions on grape production.

## Microclimate Sensor Grant

Dr. Jason Londo and Jennifer Phillips Russo collaborated on tracking grapevine phenology across the region with microclimate sensors deployed in 15 grower collaborator vineyards. We are collecting data from five locations on Lake Erie, five locations located on the bench, and five locations on the escarpment. The team collects data weekly to help achieve the objectives of this study to conduct phenological assays for Concord grapes in multiple locations, to determine the variability between vineyards, and to provide updated field phenology and hopefully begin to build phenology predictions for the New York grapevine industry. This collection continued throughout the third quarter and complemented the NASA Acres/AVIRIS data collection efforts.

## Andrew Holden, LERGP Business Management Educator

### FSA's Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP)

This program provides disaster relief payments to producers who suffered revenue, quality or production losses to crops, trees, bushes, or vines due to qualifying disaster events in calendar years 2023 and 2024. This covers the 2024 freeze that hit many growers in our region. It is being administered in 2 stages. Many growers who qualified for stage 1 has already applied and received payments.

Stage 1 is for producers with indemnified losses. Stage 1 will leverage existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments. This enrollment period is still **currently active until April 30, 2026**.

Stage 2 is for producers with uncovered losses, quality losses, and crop insurance or NAP coverage for 2023/2024 but experienced shallow losses and did not receive an indemnity. This enrollment period opened Nov. 24, 2025, **and closes April 30, 2026**.

### Resilient Food Systems - Equipment Grant

The NY State grant was awarded in November with 5 total recipients in our region. No grape or wine businesses received an award in our region. More info can be found here: [State Agriculture Commissioner Announces Nearly \\$1.7 Awarded to Farm and Food Organizations to Upgrade Equipment](#)

### Niagara County Winery Visits

Jennifer and I visited two wineries in Niagara County on November 5<sup>th</sup> to see how the LERGP could better serve the industry in that county. We had great conversations with those owners and look forward to future collaboration.

### State of the Industry Meeting

The Lake Erie Regional Grape Program facilitated and participated in a grape industry meeting with various regional grape processors and the New York Wine and Grape Foundation. The meeting was held to see what the NYWGF could potentially do to assist the Lake Erie grape industry now and in the future. Executive Director, Sam Filler conducted the meeting. Processors shared the current industry struggles and concerns for the future. Promotion of concords and finding new markets was a main theme that was discussed. Labor demand, farm size, and chemical availability were also discussed by those in attendance.

### Between the Vines Podcasts

The LERGP podcast has reached over 10,000 downloads and over 400 YouTube subscribers. The podcast is available in most places, including Apple and Spotify. In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of this year, we released 2 new episodes covering the harvest season and grants.



## **Wine and Grape Classifieds**

I continue to manage the classifieds for New York and Erie, PA. Listings are updated on a regular basis.

The NY Grapes & Wine Classifieds is a website for grape growers, winery owners, and other industry professionals to post and view ads for industry specific items and jobs. The site is run like a classified as page in a paper, but at no cost to run an ad. Item often posted include Bulk Juice/ Wine, Equipment, Grapes, Help Wanted, Services, Vines, and Vineyards. Both ads selling and ads looking for items are allowed.

The New York Grape & Wine Classifieds website can be found [Here](#).

Learn how to create an account and/or post an ad [Here](#).

### **Meetings/Webinars:**

- Field Rep Meeting – 11/6
- PSU Grape Team Meeting – 12/9
- Cornell Farm Management Meeting –
- Cornell Workforce Labor Road Show – 12/18

## **Megan Luke- LERGP Penn State Extension, Viticulture & Tree Fruit Educator**

### **Pesticide Sprayer Calibration**

Calibration services and coverage demonstrations to growers in both NY and PA have continued. I have not completed any calibrations in Q4, but have continued to present on the topics of upcoming pesticide label changes and the current status of EPA dockets relevant to the grape and wine industry. I have nominated myself for a position on the EPA's public policy listening committee for pesticide registration and labeling with the support of a dozen colleagues and industry collaborators. I presented my observations on common issues in pesticide sprayer calibration in our region and water quality concerns during drought in the "What's Your Plan" webinar program in December.

### **Spotted Lanternfly Research**

I have continued to participate in SLF research with the Penn State Urban Lab, contributing to the recent SCRI grant proposal and other block grant proposals submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. I am supporting the work with pesticide recommendations and participating in spray trials at two sites in PA, as well as with grid search organization in Erie County, PA. This work began in late September (Q3) and continued into October with two multi-day trips to a vineyard that is comprised of concord, Niagara, and Catawba grapes with an active SLF infestation. Preliminary observations suggest that more research is needed to determine the effective harvest window between the pesticide label's mandatory pre-harvest interval expiry and re-infiltration by SLF post-application. I continue to support response efforts in PA in collaboration with the PDA's SLF regional task force team.



## **NERME Award: Creating Active-Learning, Grab n' Go Pesticide Safety Education Modules and Toolkits**

This grant was awarded to a group of Cornell Extension Specialists, including the LERGP. We are working collaboratively to develop short, hands-on, active-learning lesson plans and toolkits to teach pesticide safety and risk reduction practices to undertrained applicators in the Finger Lakes, western NY, and northwest PA for growers of multiple commodities. These Grab n' Go lesson plans will be taught as stand-alone topics at established annual grower meetings. The lesson plans will be designed to be stacked together to create workshop-length modules around four themes: Personal Protective Equipment, Non-applicator & Environmental Safety, Math and Mixing, and Calibration & Sprayer Troubleshooting. We will teach each themed workshop twice. We anticipate reaching 235 people. Two hundred growers will increase their understanding of pesticide safety practices, and at least 100 applicators will adopt new practices that reduce their health, legal, environmental, regulatory, and production risks. Since last quarter, we have completed nearly all of the lesson plans and assessment strategies across each deliverable category and scheduled grower meetings throughout the state and across multiple commodities to assess the efficacy of the plans.

### **Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (LERGP)**

Cornell Cooperative Extension's Lake Erie Regional Grape Program (LERGP) is a membership program for growers in NY and PA. Crop Updates were weekly, beginning in April. I contributed four articles regarding new Environmental Protection Agency guidelines, label changes, and pesticide best practices in Q4.

I presented at one webinar meeting in Q4, the aforementioned "What's Your Plan" annual spray program webinar. At this point, I am averaging 5-7 grower calls per week to discuss such topics as spray programs, pest and disease management, business strategies (usually referred to Andrew Holden), and opportunities for pesticide applicator recertification credits.

## **Kim Knappenberger- Viticulture and IPM Extension Support Specialist**

### **NEWA**

In October 2025 the team was able to make the trek to both Long Island and Hudson Valley regions to set up some new KestrelMet weather stations to be added to the NEWA network in order to expand the network across the regions. We were able to meet with Alice Wise and Amanda Gardner and their technicians at LIHREC to both set up and instruct them about how to onboard, operate and troubleshoot problems with the stations. In Long Island we replaced an aging station in Riverhead and added a station in Peconic. These are now accessible on the NEWA network. We also met with Jeremy Schuster in the Hudson Valley and did the same to set up a station in Cambridge with the site host. Jeremy was then able to take the fourth station and set it up in Westport with my remote assistance. A fifth station was assigned a site in the Lake Erie Region, but preparations had not been completed by the end of the year.

### **SLF**

October was another busy month for the LERGP in relation to Spotted Lanternfly research and extension. Information about Spotted Lanternfly, including our Pocket Guides, was distributed



*Figure 1 New KestrelMet 6000 set up at Riverhead RGNV*

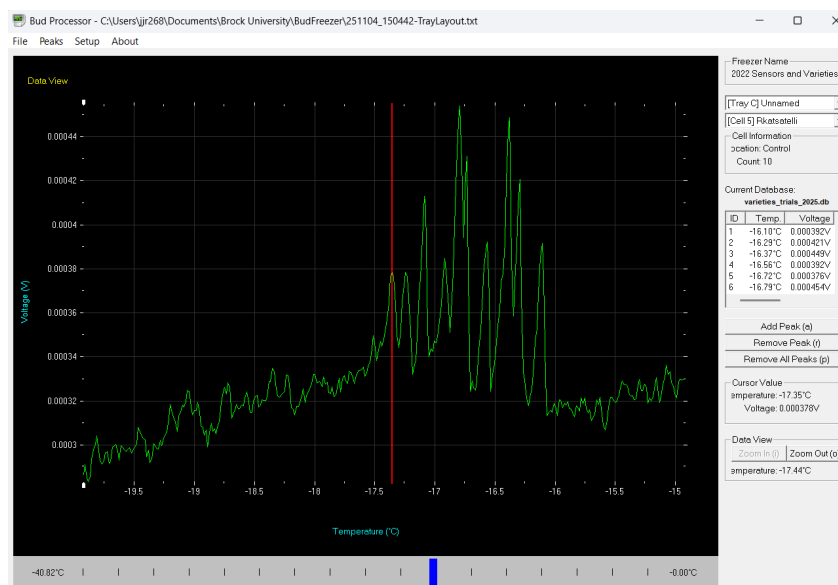


to some local processing plants so that employees would be familiar with and able to make positive identification of this pest if it is present in grapes as they arrived at the plants. We continued our cooperation in research trials with a trip to Pittsburgh, PA so we could do some pre- and post- spray counts of SLF in an infested vineyard.

In addition we continued our pest survey with 9 traps set across the region. These were removed early November when the daily temperatures began to fall and the temperatures during the night fell to freezing and below. We did not find any Spotted Lanternfly in the traps or at those sights during the season.

## Bud Cold Hardiness

Thanks again for funding from the New York Wine and Grape Foundation we have begun the testing under the direction of Dr. Jason Londo and Jennifer Phillips Russo. This year we have switched to some different varieties to continue to solidify the models for grape bud hardiness through the dormant season. In addition we continue to collect Concord buds from Jennifer's microsensor sites across the belt from east to west and in the three zones – lake, bench and escarpment. The trials began a week earlier this year in an effort to capture more of the decline going into the winter. Below is an image of the data from the bud freezer. Once the cycle in the freezer is complete the data is accessed and the peaks “called” to determine the temperature that each of the buds in the freezer “dies”. At this time the bud has an exothermic reaction and gives off a bit of heat that is recorded as a peak.





# Lake Erie Regional Grape Program Specialists



Jennifer Phillips Russo-  
LERGP Viticulture Specialist,  
Team Lead



Andrew Holden-  
LERGP Penn State Extension Business  
Management Educator



Megan Luke-  
LERGP Penn State Extension  
Viticulture & Tree Fruit Educator



Kim Knappenberger- Viticulture and  
IPM Extension Support Specialist

## Fourth Quarter 2025 totals:

Publications - LERGP Crop Updates (6) Newsletters(2) Podcasts (3)w/ 222 downloads on Buzzsprout/63 views on YouTube

Web resources - <http://lergp.cce.cornell.edu>, <http://lergp.com> and <https://www.efficientvineyard.com>  
<http://lergp.com/podcasts>

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