



CCE of Chenango County continues to grow programs beyond agriculture

KELLI MILLER
EVENING SUN STAFF WRITER

NORWICH — Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Chenango County is a local source for farm, home, and environmental education. The Cornell University supports CCE with research in real-world guidance that sustains rural lifestyles and more.

“The organization is so much more than just a local source for farm education,” said CCE of Chenango County Executive Director Craig Brown. “We are a local source for farm, home, and environmental education.”

“CCE-Chenango is deeply rooted in the land and the people it serves,” Brown said.

“The organization provides workshops on gardening, farm management, food budgeting, nutrition, and more, offering practical, trusted resources to strengthen local farms and families,” Brown said.

“Our funding from the county is exclusively for agriculture and livestock and all of the additional programs are grant programs we bring into the extension,” he said.

Brown noted that central to its mission is food security and community well-being and said through federally funded programs like EFNEP (Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program), CCE-

Chenango empowers limited-resource youth, families, and expecting mothers with essential skills in food planning, budgeting, preparation, and safety, helping them stretch every food dollar while staying healthy.

Complementing this, SNAP-Ed programs and community events extend nutrition education to broader audiences, reinforcing capacity-building and resilience.

“Above all, CCE-Chenango is fueled by dedication to farmers, parents, and residents of Chenango County,” Brown continued. “Whether it’s fostering the next generation of 4-H youth, guiding home gardeners, or delivering nutrition workshops, the organization remains steadfast in nurturing a vibrant, food-secure, and agriculturally rich community.”

Contributing to Making Chenango County a Beautiful Place to Live

Brown and CCE employees all agree, “a beautiful place to live” means a community where people feel connected, supported, and able to thrive.

He said Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chenango County contributes to that vision by strengthening the foundations of rural life, agriculture, food security, and education.

“We help local farms remain viable through



Chenango County 4-H leaders shared an engaging session of Ag in the Classroom when they visited students in a Greene Intermediate class and taught Goat Digestive System. The students had the opportunity to meet and hold Hannah the Nigerian Dwarf. (Submitted photo from CCE Facebook page)

research-based guidance and training, ensuring agriculture continues to be a cornerstone of our economy and culture,” said Brown.

He said their regional Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team provide expert support to farmers, helping

them improve herd health, crop yields, and sustainability practices, which in turn strengthens the agricultural backbone of Chenango County.

“Our nutrition programs, like SNAP-Ed and EFNEP, empower families to make

healthy, affordable food choices, reducing hunger and improving well-being,” Brown continued. “Through 4-H youth development, we invest in the next generation, teaching leadership, respon-

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Did you know?

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture there were 656 farms in Chenango County at an average size of 230 acres.

Livestock Inventory as of Dec 31, 2022 Included:

- 6,492 broilers and other meat-type chickens
- 30,208 cattle and calves
- 724 goats
- 364 hogs and pigs
- 516 horses and ponies
- 4,545 layers
- 505 pullets
- 1,280 sheep and lambs
- 381 turkeys

The Historic Sherburne Inn reopens for business

JESSICA BENSON
EVENING SUN STAFF WRITER

SHERBURNE – In 2013, a group of individuals came together to form a non-profit organization with the goal of saving the Historic Sherburne Inn.

Kathleen Yargas explained that she received a phone call from a friend informing her that the landmark on the corner of West State Street and North Main Street in Sherburne was going to be torn down to make way for a convenience shop.

Yargas said the group secured a down payment for the building and were given six months to get the money to purchase the structure.

The Save the Sherburne Inn Restoration Project (SSIRP)



The Sherburne Inn was non-operational for many years, but eight months ago, a business moved into the facility and prepared to breathe new life into the 109-year-old structure. In April, Gina Gardner opened The Sherburne Inn Coffee Shop, which is open Tuesday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. (Photo by Jessica Benson)

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sibility, and skills that keep young people engaged in their community.

“In practical terms, this means fewer families go hungry, more farms succeed, and more youth see a future here, creating a county that is not only scenic, but vibrant, resilient, and full of opportunity,” Brown added.

Major Developments in 2025

In February, 2025, CCE partnered with Morrisville State College to launch the inaugural CCE Winter Farmers’ Market at the Norwich campus.

Brown said the market ran bi-weekly for six afternoons through April, offering residents the opportunity to purchase fresh locally grown produce during the winter months.

“Vendors included Davejen Farm with grass-fed beef, Schmidt Farm with Maple products, True Nature Farm, with fresh greens, and Fox Trail Farm with baked goods,” he said.

The market drew several hundred visitors and created new opportunities for Chenango County producers to connect with the community.

“In September, CCE hosted its first-ever Open Farm Day to celebrate local agriculture and community,”



4-H youth prepared to show their animals at the New York State Fair. They also showed exhibits and demonstrations in the 4-H building and barns. (Submitted photo)

said Brown. “Six incredible farms and businesses welcomed visitors from across the region, bringing the best of Chenango County’s heritage and innovation.”

Participants included Schmidt’s Scattered Maples and Dairy Farm, Berry Brae Sheep Farm, The Greco Homestead and Winery, Kutik’s Honeybees, The Chenango County Historical Society, and CCE Chenango.

Brown said the inaugural event was strong and they’ve already started planning for the next Open Farm Day on July 18, 2026.

One-Year Reflection

“If I could go back one year and give myself advice heading into 2025, it would be simple: hold on tight,” said Brown.

Brown said the past year brought challenges they could not have fully anticipated.

“The loss of federal funding for the SNAP-Ed program, cuts to partner agencies that support critical areas of our mission, and unexpected building failures requiring substantial investment, tested our resilience,

but they also reminded us of the strength of our community,” said Brown.

“We are never alone,” Brown continued. “Together with incredible partners like the Chenango County Board of Supervisors, Chenango County Farm Bureau, the Historical Society, United Way, Norwich Meadows, the South Central Community Foundation, Commerce Chenango, the Planning Department, USDA, Soil and Water, local food pantries, Chobani, NBT Bank, and so many more, we found ways to adapt and keep serving.”

“My advice would be to trust in those partnerships, lean into collaboration, and remember that even in the hardest moments, our shared commitment to Chenango County makes us stronger,” he added.

Major Plans and Challenges for 2026

Brown said their focus for 2026 is on resilience and growth.

“This is the final year of our SNAP-Ed education funding, so we are committed to maximizing its impact while preparing for a future without this critical resource,” he said.

“At the same time, our building requires major investment, and our roof and produce storage areas are in urgent need of replacement to ensure safe and efficient operations,” Brown added.

He said these challenges are significant, but they come with opportunities to innovate and strengthen their role in the community and is excited to expand programs that connect people to agriculture and healthy living.

“Open Farm Day will continue to showcase local farms and foster community pride,” Brown continued. “Ag in the Classroom will bring agricultural education to students, building awareness and appreciation for farming.”

“Our Grow Cook Serve initiative will increase fresh

produce distribution and introduce canning and preservation workshops to help families stretch their food resources. Additionally, we plan to launch a robust series of new educational programs for farmers and producers, focusing on sustainability, profitability, and emerging practices,” he said.

“A major new initiative, Social Care Navigation, will begin as part of the Care Compass program, helping eligible Medicaid residents access housing, food, transportation, and other essential services,” Brown explained.

He said 2026 will be a year of transition, but also of possibility.

“By leaning into partnerships and creativity, we aim to strengthen quality of life for every resident of Chenango County,” said Brown.

Milestones and Growth

Brown said their organization has always evolved to meet Chenango County’s changing needs. From its agricultural roots, they’ve grown to include nutrition education, youth development, and community health initiatives.

He said milestones like expanding 4-H programs, introducing food security efforts, and creating events that connect residents with local farms reflect their adaptability. Each step shows

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their commitment to listening, responding, and delivering programs that strengthen quality of life.

2025 Highlights

Brown said 2025 was hard for many. Two families in the area lost their home or barn to fire along with their entire livelihood, pets and livestock.

“I think the thing thats most important is, every single person on our CCE team shows up for those people and all of the staff organized how to get tons of horse feed and additional needs items delivered,” said Brown.

He also noted 4-H held bake sales to raise money for the families and many community members brought in tack and food supplies for the farm animals.

“These individuals now are doing well, striving” he said. “I was very pleased to hear our team and one of our CCE excavators will help the family design and rebuild a new barn.”

Brown said there is a continued connection and collaboration all the way through, that even though they had this incident, they’re going to come out in the future, moving toward a positive direction.

“Thats what success looks like to us,” he added.

SNAP-Ed Team Leader Whitney Kmetz is devoted to her job and team and said, “What we do is not only offer programs, but we come



In December 2025, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) held their annual meeting and luncheon at the SUNY Morrisville College campus in Norwich. (Submitted photo form CCE Facebook page)

together as a team and the work we do has meaning and value.”

Chenango County Advantages and Limits

Brown said he is blessed to work in Chenango County and believes the county offers incredible benefits.

“We are part of a strong agricultural community with deep roots in farming, which creates natural opportunities for education, collaboration, and local food initiatives,” Brown said.

He said the county’s sense of community and willingness to partner, whether through local government, businesses, or nonprofits, makes it possible to accomplish far more together than they could alone.

He also noted the rural setting also provides a unique environment for programs

like Open Farm Day and agricultural education that connect people to the land.

“However, rural life also brings challenges,” said Brown. “Limited public transportation, broadband access, and economic constraints can make it harder for residents to access resources and for organizations to deliver services efficiently.”

Brown mentioned funding is often competitive and unpredictable, especially for programs that address food security and health equity.

“These limitations require creativity and strong partnerships to overcome, and we are committed to finding solutions that keep Chenango County vibrant and resilient,” he added.

Workforce and Talent

Brown said recruiting and retaining employees can be

challenging, but they work hard to set themselves apart.

“We offer competitive salaries and a strong benefits package that includes free dental insurance, affordable healthcare, and eligibility for the New York State retirement system. Our staff also receive paid holidays, paid vacation, and access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources,” said Brown.

“These benefits are designed to promote work-life balance and support the well-being of our team,” he continued. “By investing in our employees and creating a positive workplace culture, we aim to attract and retain talented individuals who are committed to serving Chenango County.”

Perspective to Improve Quality of Life in the County

“From our perspective, improving quality of life in Chenango County requires addressing several interconnected needs,” Brown said. “Access to affordable, healthy food remains a top priority, as food insecurity continues to impact families.”

He said transportation is another critical issue, limited options make it difficult for residents to reach jobs, healthcare, and essential services.

Brown noted expanding broadband access is equally important to support education, business, and health opportunities.

“Housing stability and workforce development also need attention, ensuring residents have safe homes and pathways to sustainable employment,” said Brown.

“Also, continued investment in youth programs and

community health initiatives will help build resilience and keep families engaged. By focusing on these areas, we can create a stronger, healthier, and more connected Chenango County,” he added.

Key Community Partners

“Our work would not be possible without the incredible partnerships we have built across Chenango County,” Brown said.

Key partners include the Chenango County Board of Supervisors, the Historical Society, United Way, the South Central Community Foundation, Commerce Chenango, the Planning Department, USDA, Soil and Water Conservation District, local food pantries, Chobani, NBT Bank, Cornell University, Morrisville State College, the Chenango County Agricultural Society, Farm Bureau, The Place, and of course all our local farm families and agribusinesses.

He said these organizations help amplify their impact by sharing resources, expertise, and support for programs that strengthen agriculture, food security, and community well-being.

“Partnerships allow us to accomplish far more than we could alone, whether it’s hosting Open Farm Day, expanding nutrition education, or launching new initiatives like Social Care Navigation,” Brown continued,

“At the same time, we

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remain committed to working with anyone who shares our goal of serving those in need."

He said collaboration is at the heart of their mission, and they welcome every opportunity to join forces to make Chenango County a stronger, healthier, and more connected place to live.

CCE Programs and Events

Grow Cook Serve, funded by the United Way of Mid-Rural NY, has transformed food education, access, and community engagement for families across Chenango.

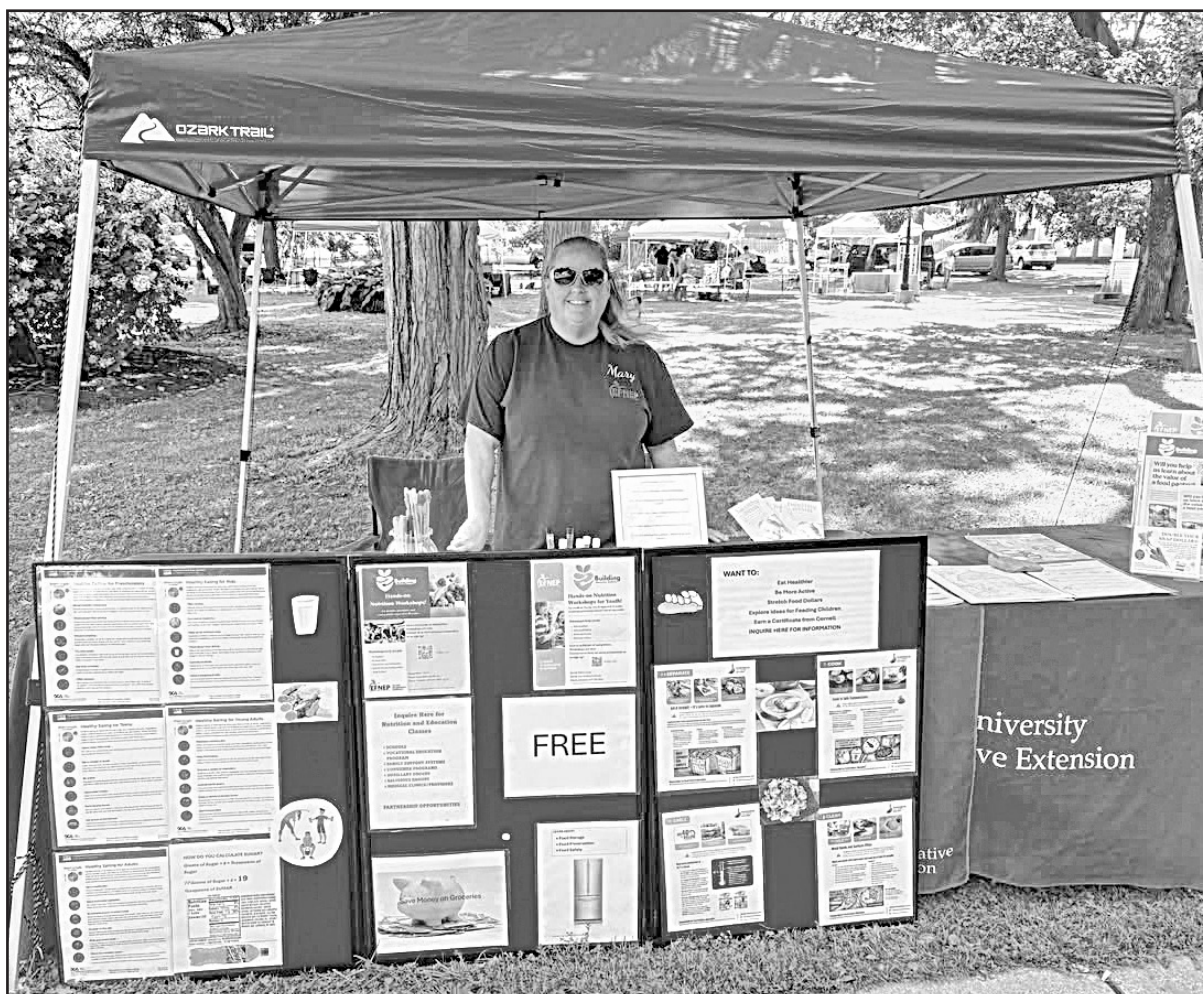
Through its ninth year, Grow Cook Serve has built strong relationships with 4-H, SNAP-Ed, HeadStart, WIC, and local schools.

Brown said the program has brought hands-on learning in cooking, nutrition, and gardening directly to the community.

This year, the gleaning program supported several food pantries and expanded its reach.

"We especially want to thank Maggie Johnson, from the Community Cupboard, for helping distribute produce to additional sites," Brown said. "We also extend our gratitude to Afton Agricultural teacher Cat Reeder. She helped distribute fresh produce to families in the area."

Kids in the Kitchen is a hands-on nutrition and



Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Educator Mary Close traveled to many events in 2025, teaching participants how to cut grocery bills, how to feed families with healthy choices, new menu ideas and more. (Submitted photo)

cooking education program through the 4-H youth program. The program empowers youth with essential life skills by teaching them to prepare healthy meals, understand nutrition labels, and make informed food choices.

EFNEP educators connect with local families to build skills and confidence around healthy living. In 2025 there were 47 adult hands-on nutrition workshops with 19 graduates that completed the full series. 183 family members were impacted by healthier

habits at home.

Brown said Ag in the Classroom is another dynamic educational initiative that encourages curiosity and respect for local agriculture. The program is coordinated by CCE of Chenango County and led by the 4-H Youth Development team.

He said the program aims to connect youth with agriculture and students engage in a wide variety of Ag topics such as Chickens, Mushrooms, Cows, Cranberries, Edible plants, and more.

Chenango County 4-H

Youth Development is another great program under the CCE umbrella. Brown said it empowers young people to learn, lead, and thrive.

"What makes Chenango County 4-H unique is its blend of tradition and innovation, offering a diverse array of opportunities," he said.

The program honors its agricultural roots with hands-on learning in areas such as animal science, gardening, fishing, camping, hiking, and home economics plus brings on future inno-

vative programs in STEM, including robotics, coding, and environmental sciences.

Brown said 4-H also offers leadership development, public speaking, and community service projects.

"With inclusive opportunities, Chenango County 4-H ensures that every young person can find a place to belong and grow," he added.

Hippology offers a wide variety of topics and at the end of 2025, one of the topics taught young people about the tradition and practice of fox hunting.

The program continued every Friday through the beginning of 2026, leading up to the March competition. Brown said over the 11 sessions, there were 18 participants and 10 advanced to regional competitions. Five earned a seat at the State competition.

Each year, Brown said they explore a wide range of subjects including breeds, colors, marking, bones, body parts, diseases, parasites, tack, equipment, carriages, and more.

Brown said the 2025 Chenango County fair was an incredible success with 4-H youth showcasing their skills through animal exhibits and creative building displays.

"This year's numbers were outstanding with 132 total exhibitors, 214 animal exhibits, and 102 building exhibits," Brown said. "Plus dozens of projects were selected to represent Chenango County

at the New York State Fair."

The 2025 4-H Learn to Sew Program reached a record 47 youth participants and continues to grow in popularity Brown said.

"The program was supported by 19 dedicated volunteers and culminated in a Sewing Spectacular at the Chenango Arts Council," he said.

The Bug Club, Outdoor Cooking Program, and Chenango County 4-H Shooting Sports offered a wide variety of fun filled activities from insect investigation to outdoor cast iron cooking to rigorous archery, air rifle, air pistol, and .22 caliber rifle training.

Brown said the programs drew enthusiastic participation from youth and parents alike and helped build confidence and fostered community spirit.

"We want to thank everyone of our incredible CCE Chenango volunteers and generous donors," Brown added. "Their unwavering dedication, countless hours of service, and heartfelt contributions make every program event and success story possible."

"Your commitment not only empowers youth and strengthens families, but also builds a thriving resilient community where learning, leadership, and opportunity flourish," said Brown. "Thank you for making a lasting difference that touches lives every single day."

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is a non-profit organization with a nine-member board of volunteers. The members of the board worked to raise money for the project and kicked in funds of their own as well in order to come up with the funds to save the structure. “The building has been here since 1917,” Yasas said. “And something has been on that corner since 1804, whether it was a tavern or a boarding house. The building is important to the village. This is our anchor corner.”

Since the organization purchased the building more than 10 years ago, they have been raising money for restorations with the ultimate goal of reopening a restaurant and hotel in the building. 2025 saw that goal realized.

Last spring, a business moved into the facility and prepared to breathe new life into the 109-year-old structure.

Last year, Gilbertsville resident Gina Gardner heard the SSIRP was looking for someone with a vision for operating a restaurant and inn in the facility. After thinking about the project for over a month, she contacted the organization on New Year’s Eve. “I was drawn to all the different facets of the business. It’s a good way to explore my creativity,” Gardner said.

The SSIRP accepted Gardner’s proposal, which started with pop-up dinners supporting the local agri-

cultural community. “We saw this as a way to not just allow the public to support our business but also the local farmers.” On Saturdays, Gardner began offering communal dinners. “We brought in farmers who produced the local products and invited them to be part of these family-style meals.” Gardner said. The weekly communal dinners continued through the growing season. “Since we are dedicated to farm-to-table dining, we are only doing the communal dinners in the spring and summer,” Gardner said.

In April, Gardner opened The Sherburne Inn Coffee Shop, which is open Tuesday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. “Back in the day, the restaurant and hotel was a formal space. We wanted to make this more informal,” Gardner said. Like the communal dinners, the coffee shop still supports local farmers and producers by using a variety of locally sourced products. “Everything is made from scratch.” The coffee shop is offering a full breakfast and lunch menu.

Because of the restaurant’s dedication to providing farm-to-table dining and using as many local products as possible, Gardner had a list of local partners that have made the business possible. She explained that she has worked with other local businesses like Gilligan’s Ice Cream and Ambrosia



While the restaurant and hotel are the most immediate projects for the Sherburne Inn, they are not the only ones. Once upon a one time the location held a Speakeasy and they plan to bring back that aspect of the historic building, and eventually offer a roof-top event spaces as well. (Submitted photo)

Farms to secure local products. Service providers like Yacanos have come out in the middle of the night to help fix issues. “So many people are willing to put in labor to help our small business succeed,” she said.

Gardner plans to open for dinners before the end of the year. The business is working on securing their liquor license. They will be serving dinner on Valentine’s Day with a prefixed menu and have secured a temporary liquor license for the occa-

sion.

“The public has been so encouraging and supportive our growth,” Gardner said. Over the next year, work will continue to be done at the Inn to restore the guest rooms. Eventually the Inn will be a fully operation hotel with eight guest rooms on the second floor and 8 guest rooms on the third floor. The second-floor rooms are being restored over the coming year. “The renovation is in progress,” Gardner explained. “The demo is done. We are

sourcing funding at this time.” While the SSIRP still owns the building, Gardner is working with them as their tenant to achieve the vision that the organization and Gardner have for the future of the building.

“We are trying to keep a historically accurate theme for the space,” Gardner said. “The art and the décor are themed to 1917. We are leaning into that so the whole space has a cohesive element of being historically accurate.”

While the restaurant and hotel are the most immediate projects, they are not the only ones. Gardner explained that at one time, the Sherburne Inn held a Speakeasy and they plan to bring back that aspect of the historic building as well. They also plan to eventually offer a roof-top event space.

“This is a gorgeous area,” Gardner said. “Many people, myself included, move here to escape the hustle and bustle, to unwind and escape.” Gardner explained that this is what makes Sherburne a great place to do business. “There are so many little pockets of things here that it’s hard to create a tourism plan, but there is so much potential here.”

Gardner said the public has been very supportive of her efforts so far. “We are so thankful to the clientele for coming day to day to support us.”

Yasas said the SSIRP is currently raising money for the restorations to the hotel. Anyone interested in donating, can visit TheSherburneInn.com. “All of our board member volunteers are preservationists at heart. We’re dedicated to this project and our goal is to get the entire building up and running,” Yasas said.

The Sherburne Inn is located at 2 West State Street, Sherburne, NY.

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