Good afternoon ... and thanks for joining us ... I'm Judy Simpson. With just a few days remaining in 2011 we’re taking time this week to reflect on the past year. Throughout the year we saw a variety of ways in which University of Vermont Extension supports Vermonters. When Tropical Storm Irene wiped out farmland and crops, Extension was there to provide key information to those who needed it most. Keith Silva tells us more:

We’ve gone through floods in the past, but never to this magnitude across such a large area. Even before this flood, we were in really tight forage crop supplies. Those farmers that often times have to buy additional forage were seeing that those supplies were tight, prices were going up, and now this flood has exacerbated this issue, so I think that combination, it’s almost a perfect storm.
Pastures didn’t fare any better than forage crops ... which made it almost impossible for horse owners to graze their animals after the storm which only adds to an already tight market for feed.
Betsey Greene//UVM Extension: “If the pasture was underwater and you can see the dirt and silt, don’t use it don’t put your horses in it, it’s just too high a risk because the horses are not adapted to dealing with toxins or dirt or things like that and they could easily colic and then you have a much higher cost when you lose the horse. You have to actually look at what you have as quality, and how many horses you have and calculate what you will need. And if you’ve lost hay if you’ve lost pasture that you were depending on, you need to talk to the people now, you need to figure it out, you need to go to your banker if you might need to get a short-term loan or something like that, because it’s much easier to forewarn them and to find the feed now than it will in February and March, it’s
probably going to be high now, because there is a shortage, but it’s going to be much higher and much less available middle of winter.
The take home message at this meeting is one that’s being repeated all over Vermont: don’t hesitate to act or to ask for help.
Bosworth: “Pull in as many resources as you can to help in making decisions, you know, it’s not an easy situation by any means, but I’ve been really inspired in seeing how many people want to help, citizens, farmers, agencies, you know, and I think there’s been a strong concerted effort in this state to try to work together across agencies and I think if farmers can take advantage of that and of their veterinarians, and feed nutritionists and their bankers and just try to pull in as many resources to get ideas it always helps.”
Senesac: “I don’t really have the means to give advice to people because I only know what I deal with with my crops, but if you think you’re going to have a problem, contact your Extension service, your farm service agency. Have them come and inspect your crop, document it, at least get it in the works so that they know you had a problem because a lot of time, timely reporting of problems makes a lot of difference, for myself, you know, it’s going to be a wait and see. I may lose half my crop. Those beans may not be any good, but I’m not going to count ‘em out until I absolutely have to.
And nobody’s going to count out Vermont’s farmers or the service agencies like Extension that support farmers. In Colchester, I’m Keith Silva with Across the Fence.

[Judy] While Extension experts were on the ground during Irene, they were also helping Vermonters prepare for other potential disasters and emergencies. A key Extension program helped communities across the state prepare for a possible animal disease emergency:

Ellen.: An animal disease emergency would affect Vermont Communities and not just the dairy industry as Julie indicated. The solution to the problem should also be an open discussion and involve community members. So the public issue forum allows is to provide information and well balanced presentation on the issue. Then we have trained facilitators who follow up and guide that discussion and make it a safe place for all sides of that issue to be shared so there's a lot of learning that goes on. For me participating in public issues forum it's the a-ha moments that work for me. I hear someone share their perspective from their experience and I get a new idea a new perspective on that issue so it's very enlightening.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about how you prepared for this? You are saying you had conversations that really shocked you to the core basically.
Ellen.: I did. I did in depth interviews 14 of them and we used for scenarios. The first scenario covered 10 days so day one was a confirmed case of foot and mouth in California. Day 10 included two confirmed cases in New York on our Vermont border. So after each scenario I asked the same question. Who would you call for information? What would you do? What would you expect the dairy industry to do to protect the supply? After each of those interviews I would run to find somebody in the office and said you're not going to believe this this is really important. Some folks don't have a clue there going to who do they trust? Are they going to wait for somebody to come up with the answers for them? It shook me.

Judy.: And it's beyond what a farmer would do if he were to discover the disease it really has widespread implications for the community at large. You're talking police department's fire departments school departments.

Ellen.: All.

[Judy] While UVM Extension helps with the ‘unexpected’, Across the Fence showed you other ways that Extension helps Vermonter's. At harvest time, Extension personnel organized “crop mobs”. For more on that, here’s Rebecca Gollin:

Spending a Saturday morning weeding in the hot sun is hard work. So why would anyone volunteer to do it?  
Joel Tilley, Crop mob volunteer - “I like trees and I like dirt and I heard about this....”
‘This’ is a crop mob, which is a new term for an old idea.
Dawn Fuller-Ball, crop mob volunteer - “we have a yahoo group for beginning women farmers and someone had suggested when someone was looking for help to try the crop mob and we were like, hey, what is a crop mob? And we looked it up, and sure enough here we are...”
A crop mob is a group of volunteers who show up at a farm to help with projects that can generally be completed in a single day.
Jessica Longobardo, UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture – “we're working on a bunch of different projects with the conservation nursery,... right now, mostly weeding. We were going to work on an irrigation system potentially, and maybe some transplanting as well....”
Rachel Schattman, UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture – “Crop mobs have been a way for people to get work done together in different parts of the world for centuries, maybe as long as agriculture has been around...”
Rachel Schattman started the Green Mountain crop mob group with a friend after an article in the New York Times introduced them to the idea.
Schattman - “...last year we skinned a greenhouse for Adams berry farm, we cut seed potatoes for Jericho settlers farm, we do a lot of odds and ends, and I think it's especially useful for a farm that doesn't necessarily maintain a large crew, but they have a couple of jobs a year where they need a group of 10 or 12 people to show up and just do something really quickly,”
Lynn Wolfe, interval conservation nursery – “We have a really small staff, there's just two of us, and there's about four acres of trees to take care of, so any time we can get extra hands we're absolutely thrilled.”
This crop mob is taking place at the Intervale conservation nursery in Burlington.
Wolfe – “what we do is grow native riparian trees and shrubs for conservation projects. Our trees and shrubs are planted all over the state of Vermont and also in some areas in the state along shorelines like Rivers and streams, and they're used for shoreline's stabilization, habitat restoration, erosion control, to filter out nutrients that are flowing into our waterways.”
Wolfe says she only heard about crop mobs within the last year, but was eager to host one.
Wolfe – “…to get extra people that are excited to be down here on a beautiful Saturday morning, it's just wonderful, I mean they will do over a week's worth of work than I could do alone, just by having some extra hands...”
Those extra hands come in all forms.
Schattman – “The mobsters who show up, I think are pretty diverse ....some younger people, some older people, and I think it was just really great for anybody who is kind of interested in food and wanting to get involved in farming but in a really low commitment kind of way...”
Rebecca Gollin, Across the Fence – “No experience is necessary to join a crop mob, and many participants are interested in learning about farming. Some volunteers do have quite a bit of experience; and some may even be farmers themselves...”
Fuller-Ball - “we have a small fiber farm, we have several alpacas, several merino sheep, black merino sheep, about three angora goats,”
Dawn Fuller-Ball and her husband came from their farm in Randolph to help out. They hope to host a crop mob in the fall.
Fuller-ball – “...we love the idea of a crop mob, we love the idea that there's a bunch of people that can... Basically descend on someone's farm, whatever that may mean, and help out for the day, a few hours or the day, and we love the idea of having people come and help us as well. We could use help with fencing, we could use help with digging a ditch to put in a line for our winter area for animals, we could use help with a lot of stuff, and instead of counting on your friends all the time to show up, and basically work for nothing, I think it's a really great idea to have a bunch of different people who have an interest in farming, and know how difficult it can be, how time consuming, how much
energy it takes, they can come and show up for a few hours and help each other out. It’s just a fabulous idea.”

With an ever-expanding list of willing volunteers and farmers who would like help, crop mobs are here to stay.

Jessica Longobardo- “I think people love to see what is actually going on on the farm, and to learn more about how their food is grown, where it’s grown, to meet the farmer that is growing their food…”

Tilley - “… we’re a part of the community,… And there are benefits besides the things that you can count or put on paper. It's just a great way of doing things…”

Giving back to communities by giving time to farmers, the green mountain crop mob is ready to lend a hand. In Burlington, I’m rg with atf…..

[Judy] Thank you, Rebecca. Our final segment this afternoon explores Extension’s involvement in farm safety. While agriculture is one of the world’s most dangerous occupations, teaching farm safety to kids can prevent serious accidents down the road. For that story Across the Fence travelled to the Peacham Elementary School:

‘Safety Day’ at Peacham School lets students learn hands-on how to stay out of harm’s way.

Donnie Moore/6th Grade Peacham School: “Have a safety route to get out of your house if it’s on fire.”

Emily Grant/6th Grade Peacham School: “It’s fascinating how much equipment is on a fire truck like how many hoses and how long they are.”

In addition to meeting emergency personnel and seeing safety equipment close up … organizers made sure that these students also got to learn about places and vehicles that they see every day.

Ruth Vaal RN/Peacham School Nurse: “Many of these students here at Peacham come from farms. The farm is, especially to a child, very inviting, you know, children are very curious by nature and they’re drawn to a farm to the animals to the equipment the tractors and often my fear is that often especially if they’ve grown up around a farm they may be a little too comfortable around it so I really wanted to make sure that they were aware of some of the dangers around a farm.

Vaal contacted Kristen Mullins … UVM Extension’s 4-H youth farm safety coordinator.

Kristen Mullins/UVM Extension 4-H Youth Farm Safety Coordinator: “I think most children have had some discussions about safety at home, at school, in their doctor’s office. So safety is not a new concept to them and many of the children, for example, many of the children here at Peacham School do live on farms. Almost of them have visited farms and certainly all of them have seen
farms. So they have a concept of what safety on a farm might be. They’re going to be able to relate to at least one thing we include in our presentation and our activities and then we try to build from there.

Using a model, Mullins shows students how and why they should keep their distance around farm animals and how tractors are just as dangerous off the farm as on.

Mycah King/6th Grade Peacham School: “Farms are everywhere in Peacham pretty much, there’s a farm down there and like if you’re crossing the road and there’s a big tractor that’s blocking you and there’s a car coming and the car doesn’t see you you can get hit and injured.

Moore: “You can be safe on a farm by never going in front or in back of a tractor and in front of animals.”

Moving from the model to the real thing … Mullins points out the dangerous parts of a tractor, but she also makes sure students learn about the built-in safety measures as well.

Grant: “You have to have the roll bar on the back of it and you have to have a seatbelt. I didn’t know you had to have a seatbelt.”

‘Safety Day’ at the Peacham School is designed as a way for students to learn life skills that are as important as ABC’s and 123’s … to do that requires resources and teachers.

Vaal: “We really look so much at curriculum in the schools […] every student that comes through every grade there are grade expectations of things that they need to be taught within that specific grade. So we really wanted to make sure that we had something that was of the right substance. I mean I could fly by the seat of my pants and say, “oh, I would like a tractor here and I think I want you to touch on animal safety, but Kristen knew everything. She had that all in place.

The take-away message of Mullins’s demonstration is that farm safety is about awareness and respect.

Moore: “A farm can be a dangerous place, but sometimes it’s just fine.”

Grant: “I’m going to think about how dangerous the equipment is and how hurt I could get if I was fooling around around it. I would say I’m safe around that stuff now. KS: “And maybe less scared?” EG: “Yeah, definitely less scared.”

Mullins: “The farm is a wonderful place to work, it’s a wonderful place to live and we really want to underscore that. We want children to be excited to go into farming because we want to keep our farming going in Vermont and the Northeast. So I’m really excited to bring that excitement to the children and for children who are around farms to share that excitement with the groups. 4-H education is all about experiential learning so clearly we’re going to have our safety program be experiential and hands-on and interactive as well.
For the student’s at the Peacham school being safe at school, at home, and on the farm is all in a day’s work. In Peacham, I’m Keith Silva with Across the Fence.

[Judy] Thank you, Keith ... and thank you for joining us. That’s our program for today. I’m Judy Simpson ... I’ll see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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