

Cornell Cross-Class Collaboration Combines Cloud Computing, Cows

By Melanie Lefkowitz
Cornell CALS

In a new collaboration, students from Dairy Herd Management teamed up with students in Topics in Cloud Computing to learn how to work together to develop the kinds of digital tools that could reshape farming. Above, a dairy cow. Photo by Justin James Muir.

Colby Castle, an animal science major who grew up on a cattle ranch, had heard of facial recognition for cows but never imagined how close the technology was to being widely used – or that he could have a role in developing it.

“Instead of having to go out and walk the entire pen looking for a certain cow, a mobile phone could tell you where to find her. I thought that’d be pretty cool,” said Castle. “It would be a very useful app, especially on larger dairies.”

It’s the kind of solution that

might not occur to computer scientists, who don’t know much about farming, or to farmers, who generally lack expertise in machine learning and cloud computing.

But in a new collaboration, students from Dairy Herd Management, a spring 2019 class in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, teamed up with students in Topics in Cloud Computing, in Computing and Information Science, to learn how to work together to develop the kinds of digital tools that could reshape farming.

Castle and his classmates took around 10,000 photos of cows for the computer science students, who created software that would allow farmers to use smartphones to find specific cows, guided by cameras in the barn.

Other ideas included using cameras in milking stations to monitor cows for injured hoofs or dirty udders, to anticipate and treat potential problems before they become serious.

“I never thought about agriculture and animal science before, but I think now that [computing] is changing the industry,” said Tian Ren, M.Eng., a computer science student whose team project aimed to predict cow pregnancies.

“I’ve heard farmers say these kinds of tools really help them and they really appreciate them, so I think we’re doing something meaningful.”

The classes – along with doctoral students working with Abraham Stroock, the William C. Hoey Director and Gordon L. Dibble ’50 Professor in the Smith School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering – are collaborating as part of the Cornell Initiative

for Digital Agriculture, an effort partially funded by Microsoft. Microsoft provided the students access to its Azure cloud computing service, as well as training to understand some of its features. For the computer science students, the dairy projects offered hands-on experience with the “internet of things” – an interconnected web of devices such as cameras, sensors and smartphones – as well as an opportunity to see a real-world impact.

“It gives the students a very concrete way to think about the applications, and it really helps them think through the entire sequence, from the sensors collecting data to the knowledge they’re trying to give back to the farmer,” said Ken Birman, the N. Rama Rao Professor of Computer Science and instructor of Topics in Cloud Computing.

Field

Continued from page 29

On Wednesday, July 17 the county Farm Bureau is hosting its annual summer barbecue at Noblewood Park in Willsboro beginning at 6:30 p.m. The county Farm Bureau will provide a main dish, but requests that members bring a dish to pass and their beverage of choice. Before the picnic at 5:30 p.m., members are welcome to tour Ben Wever Farm at 444 S Mountain View Dr in Willsboro. Please RSVP to the Eastern New York Regional Office at 866-995-7300 or eny@nyfb.org. The county Farm Bureau also increased

its sponsorship of the Essex County Fair and increased their sponsorship of the 4H show prizes. It is also planning a legislative reception for the County Board of Supervisors scheduled for Mon., July 29 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Elizabethtown. The county Farm Bureau wants to showcase the diverse and innovative agriculture in the county to highlight the importance of agriculture to the board of supervisors. If you wish to be involved in this event, please contact Carly Summers at cfs82@cornell.edu. Please “like” the Facebook page for up-to-date information on Essex County Farm Bureau.

Washington County

Earlier this spring, Washington County Farm Bureau awarded over 10 scholarships to State FFA

Convention with funds raised by Trivia Night 2019. Their annual post-secondary scholarship for graduating seniors and current college students was due at the beginning of May and will be awarded later this year. Washington County Farm Bureau has also maintained its community support by sponsoring various groups and organizations including the Washington County Fair, Salem 4th of July Parade, the Ag Stewardship Society and the Lunch, Learn, and Play program in Salem. Please watch your email and mailbox for more information on this event or “like” the Facebook page for up-to-date information on Washington County Farm Bureau. Washington County Farm Bureau is also on Instagram @

WashingtonCountyNYFarmBureau

Saratoga County

Saratoga County has stayed active during the spring. The county Farm Bureau sponsored the Saratoga County Horse Symposium. It also awarded their post-secondary scholarship in June with the winner to be announced soon. Looking forward, the county Farm Bureau is again sponsoring awards for the Saratoga County Fair and has ordered a new display for the Saratoga County Fair. The booth will no longer be in the Farm Bureau Building, but rather in the Townley Building. Please stop in to visit the new booth. Please “like” the Facebook page for up-to-date information on Saratoga County Farm Bureau.

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