

Guide to the **Tompkins County Agriculture Collection**

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Accession numbers: 1971.48; 1978.30.433; 1985.109; 1980.80; 1979.171; 1996.70; 1983.117; 1979.171; 1980.14; 2021.30

See also:

GLF Collection V-65-1-2
Mary Raddant Tomlan Collection V-64-4-3
General Photo File A1, Agriculture
Verne Morton Photograph Collection
Curt Foerster Photograph Collection
A.A. Farm Directory – 1914 – R974.78 A 51
Soil Survey of Tompkins Count, NY (Issued 1965) 631.47
And several other titles in library collection

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Agriculture was Tompkins County's first major industry; in its earliest days it was mostly subsistence farming, with local farmers growing just enough to feed their families. Gradually local markets opened and by 1824 Ithaca had its first public farmers' market, with a few stalls where vegetables and apple cider were sold. In 1825 with the opening of the Erie Canal, commercial farming opportunities arose, and Tompkins County farmers sold grain to distant markets, mostly wheat and corn. Beef cattle were moved to markets on the hoof, and eventually the local dairy industry started to grow, presaging future dominance of the local market. In the 1860s a cheese factory in McLean in the town of Groton was one of the largest and most successful in New York State.

The presence of the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell (established as the College of Agriculture in 1888) has had a significant impact on Tompkins County agriculture. Local farmers have been able to consult with experts in the field and have often been at the forefront of innovative agricultural practices. In 1939, the first calf bred artificially in the state was born on a farm in Trumansburg.

The Grange League Federation (GLF), an early farmers' cooperative, was founded in Ithaca in 1920. It later merged with another farmers' cooperative and formed Agway in 1964.

The amount of farmland in the county has declined from our agrarian past; even as recently as the mid-20th century more than 200,000 acres were farmed. In 2012 that figure was down to just over 90,000 acres. In that year the largest total market value in sales was in dairy farming, with grain, vegetable, soybean, and poultry just behind.

The Ithaca Farmers Market was founded in 1973 and in the 21st century continues to serve as an important venue for farmers to sell their goods to the local public.

This collection contains disparate materials on a wide range of topics which concern agriculture in Tompkins County. Advertising materials for agricultural equipment; flower, seed, and tree catalogues; government reports, information on state and county fairs are among the many items from the 19th and 20th century. The collection also contains incidental materials such as 19th weather data, and a brochure for the Rural Radio Network. Records of Ithaca's Oenological Union touch on local viniculture. Advocacy for local farmers in the 1960s can be traced in information on New York's National Farmers' Union. These seemingly random items paint a broad brush picture of Tompkins County's first significant industry from its earliest days to the 21st century.

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