

New England Feeding New England with Legumes and Cattle: an exploration of expanding legume and grazing livestock production in the Northeastern United States

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Abstract

The six states of the New England region, in the far northeastern part of the United States, have a long history of indigenous and colonial agriculture. As a region with two large metropolitan areas, a cold and wet north-temperate climate with short growing seasons, and shallow, rocky soils, the region has been a net importer of food for many decades. Recent collaborative efforts across the region have striven to identify steps to increase regional food self-sufficiency. We have found particular constraints on production of plant-based proteins. Furthermore, in a region where much of the rural landscape has returned to secondary forest after a period of maximum agricultural utilization in the 1860s. Shifts in land use in Northern New England, particular in Vermont, have led to over 80% forest cover and limited the area available for grazing livestock. This presentation will examine efforts to breed culturally relevant legumes adapted to the wet and cool New England landscape, and the ecological and social context of livestock production. We have found that developing diverse legume crops can meet the increasingly diverse food preferences of New Englanders. We also find that there are many constraints on the production of livestock through grazing, from ecological limitations to policy constraints. We look forward to approaches that allow our mostly forested landscape to be used effectively and sustainably for regional food production.

Keywords: Bioeconomy, Circularity, Agriculture, Forestry, Grazing