The Cornell University Forage Yield Testing Program was begun in 1984 at the request of producers who had attempted to develop and manage their own yield testing program. Yield data from New York field trials on varieties of forage crop species provide New York and Northeast producers with the necessary information to select forage varieties that perform well. Forage yield data from other states do not necessarily predict performance in New York State. As plant breeders continue to release improved varieties of forage crops, producers will continue to need forage yield data from variety trials planted in New York in order to make informed variety selection decisions.

Hundreds of commercial varieties of forage crop species are available from seed companies. Yield data from New York field trials on varieties of forage crop species provide New York and Northeast producers the necessary information to select forage varieties that perform well. Forage yield data from other states do not necessarily predict performance in New York. Forage yield data from company trials are limited in the breadth of varieties tested.

The Cornell University Forage Yield Testing Program was begun in 1984 with alfalfa, at the request of producers who had attempted to develop and manage their own yield testing program. The program has expanded to test varieties and experimental populations (experimentals) of many forage crops including red clover, birdsfoot trefoil, and annual and perennial forage grasses. In January of each year, trial application forms are sent to seed companies by mail and also are available online. Each spring, trials are planted at two New York trial sites and are managed and harvested for the seeding year through the next three production years. Trials are harvested three to five times per year after the seeding year. Trial sites are or have been on producer’s farms, SUNY campuses (Cobleskill and Cornell), and Miner Institute. In 2013, the number of varieties and experimentals harvested was 164 for alfalfa, 13 for red clover, five for birdsfoot trefoil, and 106 for forage grasses. The data are summarized and widely distributed in the fall of each year. Data summaries are sent by mail and by e-mail to seed companies and Cornell Cooperative Extension educators, and they are available on the Forage Project website (plbrgen.cals.cornell.edu/cals/pbg/programs/departmental/forage/). Yield data are also available at the University of Wisconsin Alfalfa Cultivar Database (www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/alfalfa/), the North American Alfalfa Improvement Conference (www.naaic.org/Resources/yields.html), and the Cornell Field Crops Guide (www.fieldcrops.org/).

The data from the Cornell University Forage Yield Testing Program will help New York farmers select forage varieties for replanting the 2.02 million acres of hay and haylage harvested in New York in 2013. The 5 million tons of forage produced in 2013 was fed to 610,000 milk cows and to other livestock. As plant breeders continue to release improved varieties of forage crops, producers will continue to need forage yield data from variety trials planted in New York State in order to make informed variety selection decisions.