ITHACA, NY – The Cornell Small Farms Program announces a new development specific to the emerging industry of forest mushroom cultivation, where work between Small Farms, New York Farm Bureau, and Nationwide Insurance has confirmed that insurance policies are available immediately to outdoor, forest mushroom farmers in temperate regions of the United States.

Forest mushroom cultivation has recently been growing in popularity in these regions, due to the abundance of forest resources and the relative low-cost of startup operations. Forest cultivated mushrooms offer an excellent quality and high nutritional value food crop and are gaining popularity around the temperate regions of the US.

Growers interested in cultivation have sometimes found one major hurdle; insurance companies would deny or drop coverage upon learning the farm was planning on mushroom cultivation, mostly over fears of the liability incurred with wrongful identification of a mushroom species or with the sanitary conditions associated with cultivation.

Steve Gabriel, Agroforestry specialist for Cornell Small Farms, began conversations with Lindsay Wickham, who is area field supervisor for New York Farm Bureau. Wickham and Gabriel then approached Michael Reisinger, with Nationwide Insurance, to discuss the issue. In conversations it became apparent that the major hurdle was simply that insurance carriers were unfamiliar with the crop, and once informed of the process could see that forest mushroom cultivation is no more risky than any other vegetable or fruit crop. Further, any concerns about incorrect identification of a species can be easily alleviated with a simple test, called spore printing.

“We are very appreciative of the willingness of NY Farm Bureau, Michael, and Nationwide in their work to understand the specifics of the operation,” says Gabriel. “Their support is a valuable asset to the development of this niche crop. Growers around the Eastern and Midwestern US are breathing a collective sign of relief as they are now better able to develop this sustainable farming operation.”
This effort offers an example of how industry, extension, advocacy organizations, and private business can come together in the spirit of supporting the development of small diversified farming and niche crops. Growers interested in obtaining insurance for forest mushroom cultivation are encouraged to contact Michael directly, who services much of the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states. Michael is able to meet any producers on their farm to assess their needs and insurability or refer growers to an agent locally if necessary.

The Cornell Small Farms Program offers research and outreach on cultivation strategies and policy work. The program plans to offer an online tutorial in 2015 to train growers in the basics of mushroom identification and sanitary cultivation. Like a defensive driving course, this training will offer more assurance that forest grown mushrooms will remain a crop safe for consumption. More information can be found at www.cornellmushrooms.org under “policy.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Steve Gabriel  
Extension Agroforestry Specialist  
Cornell Small Farms Program  
www.CornellMushrooms.org  
607.342.2825  
sfg53@cornell.edu

Michael Reisinger  
Rebecca Reisinger Insurance  
Nationwide, Grove F&A  
2233 Shermans Valley Rd  
Elliotsburg, PA 17024  
(717) 582-7457  
877-397-3138  
Michael.Reisinger@rarinsurance.com

Lindsay Wickham  
Area Field Supervisor  
New York Farm Bureau  
3348 Coykendall Rd.  
Watkins Glen, NY 14891  
607-535-3072  
www.nyfb.org  
LWickham@NYFB.org