New England Green Pastures Program Overview
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It all started over 70 years ago when the New Hampshire governor said, “I challenge the other New England states to produce better pastures than New Hampshire, and I bet a hat that they can’t do it.” With that challenge in 1947, New Hampshire Governor Charles Dale laid the foundation for one of New England dairying’s most successful projects – the New England Green Pastures Program.

Over the years the New England Green Pastures has modified its recognition program to keep pace with the changes occurring in the dairy industry. The program started after World War II. Many farm leaders in the region worried that a post-war depression would hurt agriculture as had been the case following earlier major conflicts. These same leaders also felt that if some way were found to help the region’s dairymen more rapidly adopt research and new technologies, such rapid adoption would help New England dairymen remain cost-competitive and lessen the impact of economic downturns. Governor Dale’s challenge offered a dramatic springboard to promote innovation in dairying – particularly through better pasture management. So in 1948, the first New England Green Pastures Program began – and Governor Dale lost his wager. In the 70 plus years since, the program has broadened its scope – but still stresses top-flight New England dairying.

Great rivalry stemmed from Dale’s challenge. The Extension services in the six New England states fostered the competition which, in its first year, saw three thousand dairymen enroll to have their farms judged. To narrow down the field, judges chose winners from each county and then finally decided on three statewide representatives.

Today the Green Pastures Program recognizes one winner from each of the New England states annually. With more emphasis today on confined housing and total mixed rations, the judging criteria has been broadened to recognize outstanding accomplishments in business management, crop production, herd performance, environmental practices, and community leadership; however, the renewed interest in pasturing has brought the program back to its roots. The Eastern States Exposition has hosted the Dairy Farmer of the Year recognition program for many years at the Eastern States Fairgrounds in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Each year the winners show slides of their farm and are presented a silver pitcher by their state’s commissioner of agriculture.

In New Hampshire nominations for Dairy Farm of the Year are sought from various agricultural agencies, and then it is narrowed down to the two or three which had the most votes and met the criteria. A group of judges made up of the winning farms from the last three years goes out on a farm tour to visit each farm and select a winner. An extension Educator works with the winning farm to prepare a talk for the Green Pastures recognition banquet held at the Big-E. The farm is also honored at the NH Farm and Forest Expo. The New England Dairy and Food Council does a lot of publicity with all of the New England winners to get positive stories about agriculture in local papers and news outlets.