

Aloha greetings for the winter

Saying farewell to our retiring Member-at-Large and Chairman of the Board for 35 years John Rieger and saying hello, welcome aboard to Sherri Slater our new Member-at-Large appointment.

John Rieger has served on the Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District Board for a total of 38 years. His dedication to this task has been extraordinary and far reaching. John has helped to pioneer programs, facilitate creation of watershed organizations, support natural resources conservation and economic development within the county all the way to an international scale through his involvement of the Greater Adirondack RC&D of which the Districts were a driving force. John supported efforts to improve farmland through Best Management Practices and installed many conservation practices on his own farm. The District cannot thank you enough for the countless hours you have served over the years. We will miss his respectful guidance and sage wisdom at our meetings but realize that he will always be just down the road apiece and still interested in what we are doing. John, we hope you enjoy your well-deserved retirement time with Millie and the grandkids.

Sherri Slater is joining us as her “retirement” gig after teaching the Environmental Conservation class for many years at the Southern Adirondack BOCES program in Hudson Falls. Sherri comes to us with a wonderful knowledge of forestry conservation practices and places high value on conservation education. Teams from her BOCES class have participated successfully in the local Envirothon events. Sherri is no stranger to agriculture either, having grown up on a dairy farm in Salem, NY. We look forward to helping her learn the ropes of SWCD programs and becoming an active member of our Board of Directors. Sherri will bring fresh ideas and insight from a different perspective which will help the District to continue moving forward in a positive direction. Thank you, Sherri for being willing to serve on our Board of Directors. ■



John Rieger



Sherri Slater

Agriculture Environmental Management

By Amber Luke, District Technician

Over the past two years the Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District has been hard at work implementing a variety of projects through the Agriculture Environmental Management Program (AEM). The AEM program is a voluntary 5-Tiered program that helps farmers make cost effective decisions while meeting goals of the farm and protecting natural resources. SWCD staff members work closely with farms to work through the 5-Tiered program all the way through inventorying current benchmark conditions through implementation of Best Management Practices and Evaluation of how those practices are working. Recently the State added a cost-share line of funding to the Tier 4 Implementation Phase of the program creating a pot of funds that the Soil and Water Conservation Districts could use to help implement smaller projects on farms that have worked through Tiers 1 - 3.

Over the past 2 years SWCD staff have worked to implement Soil Health Systems and a Petroleum and Oil Products Storage System on four different farms. Three farms implemented Soil Health Systems which involved the farms planting a variety of cover crops on numerous acres of farmland. Over the past two years SWCD was able to facilitate the planting of 395 acres of cover crops. The Cover Crop BMP has a purpose of reducing erosion due to wind or water, maintain or increase organic matter, reducing water quality degradation by allowing plants to utilize more soil nutrients, suppress weed pressure, improve soil moisture, and minimize compaction. Improving the overall health of the soil in farm fields leading to a reduction of leaching and runoff of excess nutrients, improved water quality and the potential for improved yields. The last farm implemented a Petroleum and Oil Products Storage System, including the best management practice of an On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility designed to store and provide secondary containment of oil products used on a farm. This BMP's purpose was to help the farm prevent the contamination of surface and groundwater from on farm oil product storage facility leaks and spills and protect downstream drinking water sources from contamination.

The current AEM program runs on a two-year cycle which means all projects selected for funding need to be able to be completed within that two-year cycle. If you are interested in conservation or participating in the AEM program, feel free to reach out to the Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District. Staff will be able to assist you in going over the AEM program and how to get started with conservation planning on your farm. Please contact amber.luke@ny.nacdn.net.



Rye Cover Crop planted on a corn field



On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility



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See Insert for Tree Order Form



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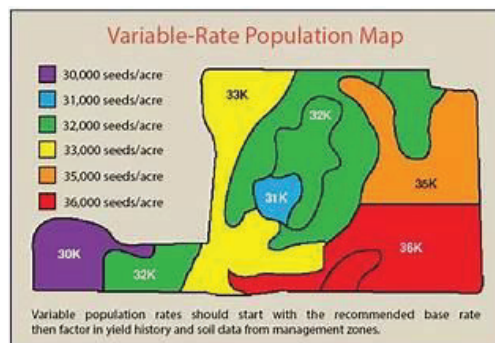
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Welcome Korey Evarts, District Intern

Hi, my name is Korey Evarts. I am the new District Technician Intern here at Washington County Soil and Water. I will be working here while I am on summer and winter break from college. During high school, I attended SAEC BOCES for Environmental Conservation and Forestry where I discovered a HUGE interest in becoming an environmental steward. I competed at the New York State FFA convention where I placed 1st in the forestry competition individually and team. The team and I then went to represent New York at the National FFA convention in Indianapolis. I am now currently a Junior at SUNY Cobleskill. I am majoring in Environmental Management (BT) and minoring in Precision Agriculture. In between classes, I serve as the Vice President of the SUNY Cobleskill Woodsmen Club. My favorite events are underhand chop, standing block chop, stock saw and pole climb. I love anything to do with soil, crops and the forest. Lately, my classes have been geared towards improving soil health and crop yield. I have learned a lot about this in my Precision Ag classes. For those who don't know, Precision Ag is the use of technology to gather data to decrease inputs and increase outputs. A good example of this would be variable rate planting and section control. Based on the soil composition of a field, you will be able to control your seed population. This will increase your yield by planting the correct amount of seed population that the soil properties can handle. Sometimes more is not always better. Section control allows the planter to plant multiple rates at the same time when for instance, you are planting on the border of different soil properties. Also, overlaps and gaps will be reduced so that way you will not be overplanting in an area. I look forward to working with you! ■



Attention!!! Washington County Schools Saratoga Regional Envirothon

By Amber Luke, District Technician

The Saratoga Regional Envirothon is a one-day competition for high school students in grades 9 -12 in Fulton, Saratoga, and Washington Counties. This competition tests student's knowledge in five categories of environmental sciences. These categories include aquatic ecology, forestry, soils, wildlife, and a current environmental issue. Teams comprised of five students work together to answer multiple choice questions at each station. The students must also present an oral presentation on the current Environmental issue topic. The 2024 Envirothon Current Issue will be Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future. The Envirothon competition is a great way to boost students' interest in the environmental sciences as well as teach them valuable skills to take with them into the future. Through this competition students will learn valuable skills such as public speaking and effective teamwork while learning how they can be involved in protecting our natural resources.

The Regional event is usually held on the first Wednesday in May with a registration deadline in the end of March. This is a good time to start thinking about getting your teams together and getting signed up, so you are ready for the competition. The winner from each county will earn a chance to participate in the New York State Envirothon Competition on May 22 & 23, 2024 at SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY.

If you have a student who is interested in this event or are interested in becoming involved in this event as a competing school or as a sponsor, please contact the Washington County SWCD office to sign up or for more information. You can find study guides for the competition at www.nysenvirothon.net. For more information, please contact amber.luke@ny.nacdnet.net. ■

Farm Service Agency Report

By Tina Williams, County Executive Director

Washington/Warren/Saratoga Counties

Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) – On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

2024 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

The Deadline to enroll in the ARC/PLC Program is March 15, 2024, please stop in the office to enroll asap! ■

Minimizing Soil Compaction – A Quick Reminder

By Robert Kalbfliesh, District Technician

As everyone gears up for the spring field work and tries to navigate the unpredictable weather keep in mind the effect soil compaction can have on crop yields. Is it going to be a wet spring? That's the million-dollar question. Compacted soils can cut crop yields by as much as 50% due to reduced aeration, increased resistance to root penetration, poor internal drainage, and limited availability of plant nutrients. Modern agricultural practices such as larger operations and equipment have made soil compaction more common. This problem is increasing for several reasons. Earlier planting, larger equipment, increase use of duals or flotation tires are encouraging field operations on wetter soils. Remember only wet soil can be compacted. Wheel traffic is the major cause of soil compaction. We are trying to work fields when they are wet, but how do we minimize the damage to the soil?

Here are some quick reminders for minimizing soil compaction:

- Avoid working the fields when the soil is wet.
- Properly balance tractor with weights.
- Avoid using over-sized equipment.
- Limit vehicle loads.
- Manage vehicle traffic.
- Add organic materials to help build soil structure and increase soil strength.
- Rotate crops.
- Use conventional tillage to remove compaction in plow layer.

The absolute best way to minimize soil completion is to give that field some time to dry out. Remember only wet soil can be compacted, and when you're looking at a 50% reduction in yield it certainly is worth waiting even half a day for that field to dry out. ■



Soil Compaction

Ideal Dairy Vegetated Treatment Area AgNPS Round 25 Funding

By Corrina Aldrich, District Manager

Ideal Dairy had a previously designed total collection system for both the low flow and high flow silage leachate from their feeding complex. This system directed this effluent into the liquid waste storage to augment the needed liquids to efficiently operate the sand separation system to recapture sand for reuse as bedding material.

However, after experiencing a couple of very wet years and adding surface area to their feed storage areas they experienced a marked decrease in the storage capacity of their manure storage systems and decided that they needed more flexibility in management of the high flow effluent from the feed storage system. The decision was made to install an improved Silage Leachate Control and Treatment System by adding a 1.75-acre Vegetated Treatment Area and options for pumping the high flow leachate to either the VTA or the manure storages. Funding was secured through AgNPS Round 25, and the project was completed in the summer of 2023. This has given Ideal Dairy more flexibility in how they manage the high flow effluent from their feeding area and also to properly follow their Nutrient Management Plan by not having lost capacity in the waste storages during times of continually wet weather. The increased flexibility in managing both the silage effluent and nutrient management is working very well for the farm. ■





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