

Watershed Farm & Forest

Winter 2009

Stewardship Programs of the Watershed Agricultural Council

International Visitors Learn From Watershed Farmsteads

Last month, members of Rio De Janiero's Sustainable Rural Development Program visited four watershed farms to see, firsthand, best management practices in action. The organization works within Brazil's watershed sub-basins at the municipal and village level to address water quality concerns impacting Rio De Janiero's water supply for six million people. Group members were intrigued by the Council's approach to water quality: working one-on-one with farmers and providing a team of experts to design, plan and construct on-farm practices that benefit water quality.

During their stay, the group visited DEP's Kingston office, the Ashokan Reservoir and Boiceville's wastewater treatment plant with Catskill Watershed Corporation. The Council's Forestry and Agricultural Programs guided the group through the Frost Valley model forest, provided a local foods' story-ala-luncheon compliments of Amy's Takeaway, and toured four participating farms: Gerald Hull/Ray & Karl Gockel of Grand Gorge, Scott Tuttle in Windham, Ginny Sheer of Roxbury's Manhattan Country School, and Chris DiBenedetto in Halcott.

The Hull farm provided a classic scenario showcasing the Council's watershed work. Dairy farmer Gerald Hull and his two nephews, Ray and Karl Gockel, milk 45 mixed breed cows and raise an additional 40 heifers, all grass fed on this 350-acre farm located in the hills of Grand Gorge. The family farm holds 52 acres in crop, 50 acres in hay, 100 acres in pasture, and another 148 acres in woods. Nestled in the northeastern corner of the New York City watershed, the farm hosts four different water courses that feed into the 17.6-billion-gallon Schoharie Reservoir about three miles away. Schoharie is one of six reservoirs in the Catskill/Delaware Watershed which provides New York residents with 90% of water used each day.



Members of the Watershed Agricultural Program, Delaware County Soil & Water Technicians Gideon Frisbee and Larry Underwood (at left), explain to Brazilian watershed representatives the construction underway at the Hull/Gockel Farm, Delaware County.

Before construction started, the farm historically stockpiled manure uncovered in a clearing downhill from the dairy barn. A stream (see photo foreground) zigzags through the same area.



The farm is steep and seasonally wet – a combination that makes daily manure spreading difficult. Before construction started, the farm historically stockpiled manure uncovered in a clearing downhill from the dairy barn (see photo). When it came time to spread, wet manure was difficult to pick up and stones from the pile area made it even harder to apply to neighboring crop fields.

To address this water quality issue, the Agricultural Program's design team recommended a roofed manure storage building with concrete floor and walls, timber trusses and sheet metal roofing. The structure stores 6-8 months of manure, protected from the elements. The covered manure storage area measured 50 feet wide by 100 feet long; the concrete pour totaled 174 cubic yards. The semi-solid/solid manure containment area allowed bedding and manure brought from the barn, to be spread out under the roof and dried out over time. In the spring, the Gockel nephews now have easy access to the covered pile, scooping drier material into a dump trailer which takes it to the fields. A drier manure pile ultimately allows the farmer to distribute it in accordance with a prescribed Nutrient Management plan.

The multi-agency design team members were: Resource Conservationist Leonard Prezorski (NRCS), Technician Gideon Frisbee and Civil Engineering Technicians Brian Danforth and Larry Underwood (Delaware County Soil & Water), Engineering Specialist Nate Townsend (Watershed Agricultural Council), Professional Engineer Jason Skinner (JESS Engineering), and Field Crop Specialist Dale Dewing (CCE-Delaware County). The Watershed Agricultural Council served as lead agency with construction funding provided by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and technical funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.



International Visitors Continued...



Liquid manure storage usually requires structures with four walls to contain it, and a pump to process it. Since the farm's manure system was more solid in nature, the team designed a three-sided structure with a 30-foot sloping floor leading into a drying pit. The structure's remaining 20 feet is flat-bottomed which allows for manure stacking. The slope holds manure in and keeps it from leaching out into the nearby water courses. Eight-foot-high walls line the flat section, with wall heights shortening progressively to five feet at the slope's high-end. An access road and alleyway at the slope top allows a manure spreader to gain access, drive-in-drive-out style. Roof truss-rafters stand 14 feet above the access road, high enough to avoid hitting them with the tractor loading bucket. A five-foot fence tops the three sides to keep people from falling into the pit on the backside. Shade cloth allows for ventilation which helps manure dry out. TC Briggs Inc. of Prattsville, NY performed the construction work.



Currently under construction, this laneway will provide a suitable stream crossing for the farm's dairy herd. Stable footing reduces wear-and-tear on stream banks and improves traction when animals ford the waterway; both, in turn, decrease muddy waters. The pre-cast concrete, cattle slats weigh 2,500 pounds each and are secured in place with large rocks (see photo foreground). Here, eight slabs lie atop an excavated gravel bed which is backfilled at completion. Additional fencing will keep cows out of the remaining stream. The recently built, covered manure storage building stands in the background, at right.

Council Volunteers Honored at Participant Events

Much of the Council's behind-the-scenes decision-making is orchestrated by a 15-member board of directors, 11 committees and 2 working groups. Over our 17-year history, many dedicated farmers, foresters and program participants have served our organization. With their vision and dedication, our programs have developed and flourished. To these volunteers who guided us, both past and present, we thank you. In less than 20 years, the Watershed Agricultural Council is an internationally recognized model for watershed management and a benchmark in the "Payment for Eco-Services" paradigm. At this year's participant events, the Council recognized six people who have contributed to the success, growth and prosperity of the Council, farming, forestry and natural resource conservation.

At the Agricultural Program's Farmer Appreciation dinner held on October 2, Board Chairman Fred Huneke presented Gail Hillriegel with a glass plaque in honor of her 13 years of service. "Gail served on the Council board since 1995," noted Huneke. "As a former schoolteacher, you could always count on Gail to cross the 't's' and dot the 'i's.' She was a true asset to the Council as Board Secretary and member of the Executive Committee." Hillriegel owns a dairy farm in Margaretville where her family currently raises heifers.

At the East of Hudson (EoH) Program Farm Tour & Luncheon held on September 25, Huneke recognized four individuals for their contributions: Annie Farrell, Peter Kamenstein, William Murphy and Barbara Wilkens. Farrell, a vegetable grower in the Croton watershed, served on the EoH Committee from 2005 to 2006. "Although Annie's time on the committee was short, her passion for farming, whole farm plans and clean water was infectious," said Huneke. "Her enthusiasm and boundless energy were limitless and have certainly made an impact on suburban farming."

Peter Kamenstein, a beef farmer and equine enthusiast, served on the board from 2001 to 2005.



Nearly 50 people attended the East of Hudson Farm Tour & Luncheon honoring four former board members last September. Pictured (l-r) are: Board member Barbara Howard, Council Chairman Fred Huneke, Bill Murphy, Barbara Wilkens, EoH Agricultural Program Coordinator Carrie Davis and Peter Kamenstein. (Not pictured: Annie Farrell). Attendees also toured three participating farms: Snow Hill Farm, Ryder Farm and Chase Meadows Farm which hosted the event.



In October, 90 farm families met for a roast pork dinner at the 4th Annual Farmer Appreciation Picnic held at Maple Shade Farm, Delhi. Over 250 people enjoyed the festivities, historical exhibits and music by the Tremperskill Boys. Council Chairman Fred Huneke (right) presented Gail Hillriegel of Regal Hill Farm (left) with a plaque marking her 13 years of service.

"Peter was instrumental in introducing the Council to the Croton Watershed equine community," said Huneke. "Peter stepped forward, put a whole farm plan on his farm, showed people how it worked, and established trust within the community. He helped us bridge the gap in getting small farms involved by introducing many equine landowners to the Council and its work. His confidence in our programs is what attracted people and allowed them to see the value in what we had to offer."

In 1990, William Murphy served on the Ad-Hoc Task Force on Agriculture and New York City Watershed Regulations, which laid the groundwork for the Council. As a member of the Policy Group, and owner of a 500-cow registered Holstein dairy and bottling plant in Stamford (Delaware County), Bill brought extensive farming experience to this 14-member group which later voted on the Council's formation. "Bill understood what regulations would mean to the farmer," said Huneke. "In December 1991, when the Policy and Technical Groups offered up the Brown Book, those recommendations outlined the whole program on which the Council is based. It was a plan farmers could work with to stay in farming."

While on the Council, Bill and Barbara Wilkens advocated for the formation of an East of Hudson Committee, which was established March 2000. Wilkens owns Wilkens Fruit and Fir Farm, an orchard and Christmas tree farm in Yorktown Heights (Westchester County). Barbara served on the board from 1994 to 2008. "You could always count on Barbara to advocate for the East of Hudson interest," said Huneke. "She knew that the Croton watershed was important even though it was already a filtered water source. Her influence and work with the Westchester Farmland Protection board have been key to the Council's success in working with equine landowners and protecting water quality within this watershed."

The Forestry Program recognized Paul Trotta for his contributions to forest stewardship in the Catskills. At the November forestry dinner and silent auction, Trotta received the Karl Connell Award, which recognizes an individual for their wisdom, guidance, and leadership in promoting forest stewardship and protecting water quality. Paul worked for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation for 33 years, spending 20 years in the Bureau of Private Lands in the Catskill region. During his time with the DEC, he assisted landowners in developing forest stewardship plans and he educated the public about the sustainable use of forest resources.



NYS Ag & Markets Commissioner Patrick Hooker (center) had witnesses at his Challenge: (l-r) Farm to Market Manager Challey Comer, Barb Hanselmann of The Farmer's Wife pies, and Maple Shade Farm owners Abby and Jay Wilson with children John, McKenzie and Ryan.



NYS Assemblyman Pete Lopez of the 127th District (center) signs his pledge while visiting with Cindy Barber (left) of Schoharie County's Barber Farm and Farm to Market Manager Challey Comer (right).

"He translated complex and often confusing concepts like silviculture and sustainability, helping landowners and forestry professionals better understand their impact on our natural resources," noted Tom Pavlesich, Forestry program Manager (*pictured above at left with Trotta*). "His quiet, thoughtful demeanor has helped countless landowners recognize the true value of their forestland; be it in board feet or bird watching. Paul's true legacy is the example and inspiration he has provided and continues to provide to young resource professionals, forest landowners and the general public."



"Buy Local Month" a Success!

In just four weeks, the Pure Catskills Buy Local campaign -- in collaboration with Farm Catskills and the newly formed Food Routes chapter -- collected 286 pledges totaling \$207,452 through the "Buy Local Challenge."

The Challenge raised awareness of local food purchases and the impact of people's food dollar choices. The campaign encouraged people to choose "local first" when grocery shopping.

Among the many Challenge takers were food and farm policy leaders such as New York State Assemblymember Cliff Crouch of the 107th District.





Watershed Agricultural Council

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Walton, NY 13856

SAVE THE DATE:

**1/14: Catskill Regional Dairy,
Livestock & Grazing Conference**
SUNY-Delhi

Download the Winter Agricultural
Seminar Series poster and find upcoming
events at www.nycwatershed.org.



Watershed Farm & Forest is a semi-annual newsletter of the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to support the economic viability of agriculture and forestry through the protection of water quality and the promotion of land conservation in the New York City Watershed region. The WAC is funded by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service and other federal, foundation and private sources. The WAC is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer. This issue is printed on 100% post-consumer paper, certified Ecologo. Processed Chlorine Free, FSC Recycled and manufactured by Cascades using biogas energy.

Welcome Our New Executive Director

Craig J. Cashman joined the Watershed Agricultural Council as Executive Director on October 26. Cashman will oversee the organization's day-to-day operations and coordinate 43 staff members in three offices. "I look forward to working with everyone here at the Council – the staff, Board, program participants and the community," noted Craig. "Using my skills in relationship building and communications, I plan to further the Council's effectiveness, both inside and outside the watershed region. Our programming is strong and well respected worldwide; working from that solid foundation, I look to strengthen our relationships with local and regional policy makers to further the Council's mission related to clean drinking water and regional economic viability." His experience is based in the health and social services fields; however, Craig's expertise lies within administrative transitions, fiscal challenges and programmatic growth. Craig holds a M.S.W. in Administration-Social Work from the University of Albany, School of Social Welfare and received his B.A. in Sociology from SUNY-Plattsburgh. Craig can be reached at (607) 865-7790, ext. 103 or by email at ccashman@nycwatershed.org.



Craig J. Cashman

The Easement Program is developing policies and guidelines for both acquisition and stewardship of its conservation easements. Those already approved by Committee and Council are available on our home page under "WAC Policies, Agendas and Minutes."



*Help protect the Catskill watershed, viewshed and foodshed.
Make your year-end, tax-deductible donation to the Conservation Easement
Stewardship Fund quickly and easily at www.nycwatershed.org.
Simply click on the Donate Now icon.*