

equipment after use. These rates apply to both the seeder and the corn planter. We also have ditch bank mowers and the rate for those are \$25/hour. For more information on the equipment, contact our office.

As in the past, the District must have, prior to the delivery of the seeder and/or corn planter, a signed rental agreement and evidence of property insurance that lists the District as an additional insured/lessor on the policy and the insured value of the equipment you are renting— remember we have one corn planter but two seeders. The rental agreement can be obtained by (1) going on our website: Go to “Our Work,” click on “Ag Conservation” and you’ll see the Rental Agreement or (2) calling the District office. It’s your responsibility to contact your insurance agent to get the necessary insurance forms sent/faxed to us. The rental agreement contains much more information so give our office a call if you are interested in renting the seeder or corn planter.

### USDA NATURAL RESOURCE SERVICE (NRCS) PROGRAM OVERVIEW

NRCS has several programs which it uses to help our farmers & forestland owners conserve natural resources on their property. Information on all programs can be found at the NYS NRCS website under the ‘Programs’ tab: [www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/programs). Some of our available programs are:

**Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA):** Provides financial assistance to eligible agricultural producers who are willing to address priority environmental issues by implementing conservation practices. AMA has 2 focus areas: improving irrigation efficiency through practices such as installation of pumps, pipes or microirrigation, & a new pilot program testing the viability & functionality of seasonal hightunnel systems. A hightunnel is a greenhouse like structure covered with polyethylene.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** Provides technical & financial assistance to implement practices to address priority resource concerns. Statewide focus areas include Air Quality, Energy, Forestry, and Organic initiatives. In addition producers can apply to one ‘local’ focus area. These include Cropland, Grazing, Livestock Waste.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** A conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities & improving, maintaining, & managing existing conservation activities. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forest lands, & grassland.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP):** Provides financial & technical assistance to help participants develop wildlife habitat on agricultural land & forest land. WHIP in NY has 2 focus areas: enhancing early successional wildlife habitat with shrubland & establishing & enhancing grassland habitat for declining bird species, pollinators, & other grassland wildlife species.

**Wetland Reserve Program (WRP):** Purpose is to preserve, protect & restore the nation’s valuable wetlands. Under WRP landowners can establish permanent or 30-year easements or enter into 10-year restoration cost share agreements with no easement involved.

**Grassland Reserve Program (GRP):** Program for landowners & operators to protect grazing uses of land by conserving grassland including pastureland & shrubland. Applications may be filed for a rental contract (10, 15, or 20 yrs.) or a permanent easement. Participants voluntarily limit future development & cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices & operations related to the production of forage & seeding.

For more in-depth information on these programs and others that might be available, contact District Conservationist Larry Larson or Soil Conservationist Bob Merrill at (845) 343-1873 or check out the website.

### WELL TESTING

As many of you know, as part of various ag grants, the District has done well testing. While most of the grants are complete, we still have a couple of wells to test. So we are offering others a chance to have their well(s) tested for a fee. We will come out and collect the water sample(s) and take them to the lab but you will have to **PAY** for the tests. The water will be tested for: nitrate (\$25), pH (\$20), coliform (\$5), and lead (\$16). The amounts in parenthesis are the costs of each test. For more information or to sign up to have your well(s) tested, contact Kristen at (845) 343-1873 by **AUGUST 13th**.

Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District’s

# AG CONSERVATION “ROUNDUP”

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME ON-GOING FARM PRACTICES

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### RESPONSIBLE FARMERS PROTECTING LOCAL RESOURCES

**NOTE:** It’s been awhile since the District has put together any ag newsletters— figured it was about time!! This newsletter will cover agriculture throughout Orange County. Hopefully it won’t be two years in between this and the next issue.

### Walkkill River Flood Control Update

Most Orange County residents, and farmers in particular, are aware of Walkkill River flooding issues. The Pine Island Black Dirt Region is hit especially hard – including both cropland damage and threats to roadway infrastructure and passage of vehicles. While flooding is a natural occurrence along streams and rivers, projects to reduce flooding impacts on these human activities have wide support.

Efforts to ‘tame’ and contain the Walkkill go back to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) days and before. Much of the Walkkill as we know it today in southern Orange County is actually an arrow-straight ‘Canal’ dug with the express purpose of providing flood relief to the productive and valuable Black Dirt lands. Historic records tell us how the ‘Muskrats’ (farmers) finally won out over the ‘Beavers’ (mill operators) to set the course for future River management. But that’s a story for another day.

Us old-timers remember the Army Corps of Engineer’s (ACoE) 1980’s ‘clearing and snagging’ (C&S) project in the Black Dirt area. The study leading up to this project looked at numerous alternatives – including such ambitious measures as flood control dams in the upper watershed and a system of dikes and pumps within the Black Dirt farming area. Since the ACoE was required to choose the alternative to be implemented based on cost-benefit considerations, these measures were not pursued. By most accounts, the C&S project had significant benefits, perhaps the most significant being the institution of a perpetual maintenance program funded by the four Towns bordering the Project area (Minisink, Wawayanda, Goshen and Warwick) and the County of Orange. Despite the lasting benefits of the Maintenance Program, the ACoE recognized and noted in their 1980’s study that the benefits of the C&S work would be largely negated in about twenty years by the subsidence of the ground surface known to occur in organic soil areas.

So here we are some TWENTY-FIVE years out from the 1980’s project. And flooding events seem to be getting more and more frequent. Whether a result of soil subsidence, increased development in the watershed, or climate change (probably a combination), most everyone agrees, we need an updated flood control project more ambitious than removing dead and down trees. While requests for assistance have been made to numerous State and federal agencies, the agency that seems to be the best bet for a comprehensive project is once again the ACoE. Discussions have been ongoing with them for a couple of years at least. And while locals are understandably anxious for quick action, the reality is that the Corps has a very methodical process they are required to follow starting with an initial



'reconnaissance' study to determine if there is a 'federal interest' in the project followed by a feasibility study, then detailed project plans, and finally project construction assuming all previous steps have favorable outcomes. The initial study is done exclusively with federal funding, but all subsequent steps require some level of local funding match.

Currently, we are somewhere between steps 1 and 2. The 'recon' study did determine a federal interest existed, and efforts are underway to develop a Project Management Plan (PMP) that would define the scope of the feasibility study including where the required local match would come from. As you might imagine, getting commitments for the local match – which will be a substantial sum – is very challenging in our current economic conditions. No less challenging are the time frames which must be accepted for a project of this scope. As noted, we are several years into the process with at least several more to go before we can expect a final approved plan ready for actual implementation activities. As much as many local farmers and planners may believe that enough studies have been done and the time for action is now, the Corps has its process to follow. With this concern in mind, though, most of the 'partners' in this overall effort have agreed that even as the larger, long-term plan is being developed, we should try to undertake some short term projects to provide at least some more immediate level of relief. An example of this is a current proposal to remove dense tree growth from the channel of the Wallkill downstream from Pellets Island bridge. This area is downstream from the limits of the Maintenance Program mentioned above so has seen no real flood control maintenance for many years. Even this more focused project has turned out to present more challenges than many expected, not the least of which is addressing potential impacts on Indiana Bat habitat. There is still hope that this project can begin by year's end or sooner, but its scope may be dictated by Bat and other environmental concerns.

On a brighter note, the County asked the Soil and Water Conservation District last year to help out with the administration of the Wallkill Flood Control Maintenance Program including hiring out the required work to a private contractor (previously, Orange County DPW performed the work). By most accounts, this approach is working well so far. The specialized equipment used by our current contractor allowed for many of the large trees slated for removal to be snipped and removed by a single operator.



**Excavator-mounted tree shear**



**Tree shear at work**

Many local agencies, including OC Legislature and Executive's office, OC Planning Department, Soil and Water Conservation District and Wallkill Valley Drainage Improvement District, are working vigorously with State and federal officials to move along both short and long-term Wallkill flood control measures. History and experience suggest that considerable patience will be required, despite the dire consequences that can be expected when the next 'perfect storm' arrives – which is likely to be sooner rather than later.



Welcome summer! For most of us this means the corn is growing and the hay is being cut. Busy times lie ahead but just in case today is a rainy day where you are sitting inside or simply sitting down to enjoy a cold drink, here is some information that you may want to know.

Agricultural Environmental Management is a plan developed between the local Soil & Water Conservation District and the farm management. Through the use of various worksheets we are able to identify areas of improvement. Once Tiers 1, 2 and 3A are developed, we may be able to apply for cost sharing assistance or offer technical assistance with projects. To date 91 Tier 1, 72 Tier 2, 21 Tier 3A, 1 Tier 3B, 10 Tier 4, and 5 Tier 5A plans have been developed since the AEM program started. Below are pictures showing various practices implemented after working through the AEM program.



**With the use of this stream crossing, equipment & animals can safely cross without disturbing the stream banks.**



**This is a picture of secondary containment installed around a fuel tank. Over the years tanks can degrade, with increased potential for holes to form. Fuel spills can become costly quickly! The best way of avoiding this is to install secondary containment around all old tanks.**



**Liquids and solids from a barnyard are captured and properly treated.**



**An excellent picture of ditch bank seeding on the muck land.**

These are just a few of the practices we have installed with the use of the AEM program. If you are interested in completing an AEM plan for your farm, please contact Kristen at 845-343-1873.

### **RENTAL EQUIPMENT UPDATE**

While the basic rental program has stayed pretty much the same, there have been a couple of changes. First, there has been a change in the Rental Rates: \$175.00 minimum charge– this covers the cost of delivery and the first five acres; then it's \$15/acre after that, and your bill can be reduced by \$50 if you thoroughly clean the