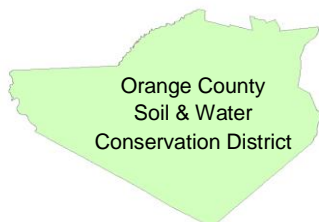


Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District



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We're on the Web!

www.ocsoilny.org



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We hope these articles describing projects started or completed in 2020, along with ongoing and new programs, will give readers a good overview of the activities of your local Conservation District. Please see our 'Meet the Directors' feature. One of the unique aspects of conservation districts is their governance by local and knowledgeable members of the community. While conservation districts must operate within the parameters of NYS Soil and Water Conservation District Law and procedures, the local Board has a great deal of latitude to shape local programming. We are fortunate to have a balanced, thoughtful Board who have a genuine interest in helping Orange County farmers.

Conservation District Board Approves local 'Soil Health Practices' Incentive Program

At their April, 2021 monthly meeting, the Board of Directors approved a new program to provide financial incentives to Orange County farmers who agree to implement agronomic practices that improve soil health. The most common practices included in these programs are cover crop, conservation tillage and residue management. Incentive payments are acreage-based, ranging from about \$20 to \$50/acre.

Practices like this have been eligible for cost-share assistance through various federal and NYS programs. The big difference with this new local program is that applications for assistance will be collected and acted on using funding made available to the Conservation District through the NYS Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program. This program, which has provided staff time funding to conservations districts for many years, now provides up to \$100,000.00 per county for conservation project funding over a two-year period which can be assigned to projects selected by the local conservation district. This approach will provide us with a much more predictable and timely means of supporting the implementation of soil health practices.

(Continued on Page 2)



Ideally, a winter cover crop will look something like this before winter sets in. Good fall establishment not only maximizes soil health benefits but better ensures erosion control and associated water quality protection benefits. Tillage and residue management practices offer similar benefits.

To sign up for our future newsletters you can send your email address to chris.hopmayer@ocsoil.org, call our office at (845) 343-1873 or use the sign up form on our website at www.ocsoilny.org/contact-us

Soil Health Practices' Incentive Program cont.

Because soil health practices like those mentioned above are generally recognized to have a high cost/benefit ratio and offer multiple benefits beyond just soil health, the decision was made to allocate ½ - \$50,000 – of the available AEM practice implementation funding to this pilot Incentive Program.

We will be accepting applications from eligible farms in Orange County for this program until August 20, 2021. Funding Agreements will be developed with approved applicants for practice implementation in 2022 and 2023.

We expect to be able to approve most of the expected applications, but may be required to cap acreages/funding of larger applications depending on the number of applications received.

Interested farmers can find the full program application form on our website (ocsoilny.org) or request it by calling the office.

Wright Receives Award for Service to Orange County Agriculture

On March 9, 2021, John Wright of Warwick, NY was recognized by the New York State Conservation District Employee's Association (NYSCDEA) for 18 years of service assisting farmers and protecting the environment in Orange County.

Wright is the owner of Wright Family Farm where he and his family raise beef, hay, pumpkins and offer other 'agritainment' activities such as corn mazes and hosting school groups for educational field trips.

NYSCDEA represents the 57 County Conservation Districts of New York State. Each year, they recognize through an annual awards program outstanding individuals and projects in a number of categories. Mr. Wright was recognized in the Conservation District Director category. He has served on the Board of Directors of Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWCD) since 2003, and has led the District as Chairman since 2013. Over this time period, he has worked to improve employee salaries and benefits, advocated vigorously for programs and funding that directly assists farmers, and as Chairman has ensured that Board meetings are professional, cordial and effective.

Significant accomplishments of the District since Wright took over as Chairman include a multi-million dollar flood mitigation initiative in the County's Black Dirt farming region, and the collection of over 30,000 waste tires from Orange County farms at no cost to the farmers.



The Conservation District is pleased to announce that our Technician, Travis Ferry, has passed both the international and northeast region Certified Crop Advisor exams, making him eligible to apply for this important certification program. Once he is fully certified, the Conservation District will be eligible to request a higher level of funding through NYS's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program.

This additional funding will allow us to deliver more assistance to Orange County farmers and provide us with greater flexibility assigning limited resources to various natural resource management programs.

This certification will also qualify Travis to 'sign-off' on completed agronomic conservation practices, which will facilitate our ability to provide funding incentives to our farmers.

Congratulations to Travis, and thanks for your hard work preparing for these exams.



Meet Our Directors

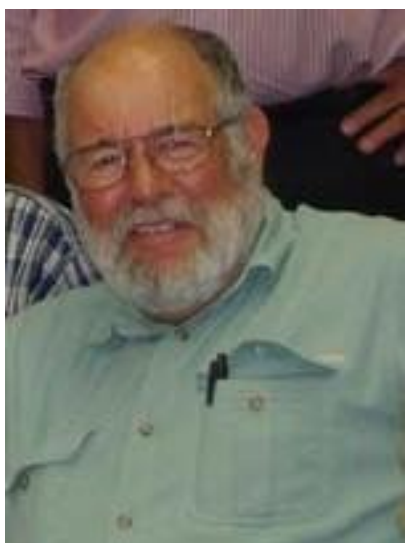
John Wright, life-long Warwick resident and current Chairman of the Conservation District, was a dairy farmer until the 1980's when the farm began transitioning to a diversified agricultural operation that now includes beef cows, hay, pumpkins, Christmas Trees and related 'agri-tainment' such as corn mazes and pumpkin-picking hay rides. John is assisted in operation of the farm by several members of his family.

He has been a District Director since 2003, and has held the Chairman seat since 2013. He previously held the Farm Bureau-nominated position on the Board and is now the 'at-large' member. As a District Director, he has aggressively promoted improved employee benefits as well as enhanced programming targeting Orange County farmers.

John has always been active in the County and Town, having served on the Warwick School Board and Conservation Commission as well as the County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board.

John was recently awarded the District Director award by the NYS Conservation District Employees Association.

John and his wife Roberta have three children, Brendan, Justin and Kerri, and numerous grandchildren who all watch out for John to make sure he doesn't work too hard.



The Wallkill River Black Dirt Flood Mitigation Benching Project

The Wallkill River Black Dirt Flood Mitigation Benching project is moving forward. Last year, the District was still able to complete a scaled down portion. Phase 3 was split into two areas. This phase is located on the south side of the river, just upstream from the confluence of the Pochuck Creek and the Cheechunk Canal. Area 1 excavation was completed last summer. The tree planting portion is expected to be completed in May, 2021.

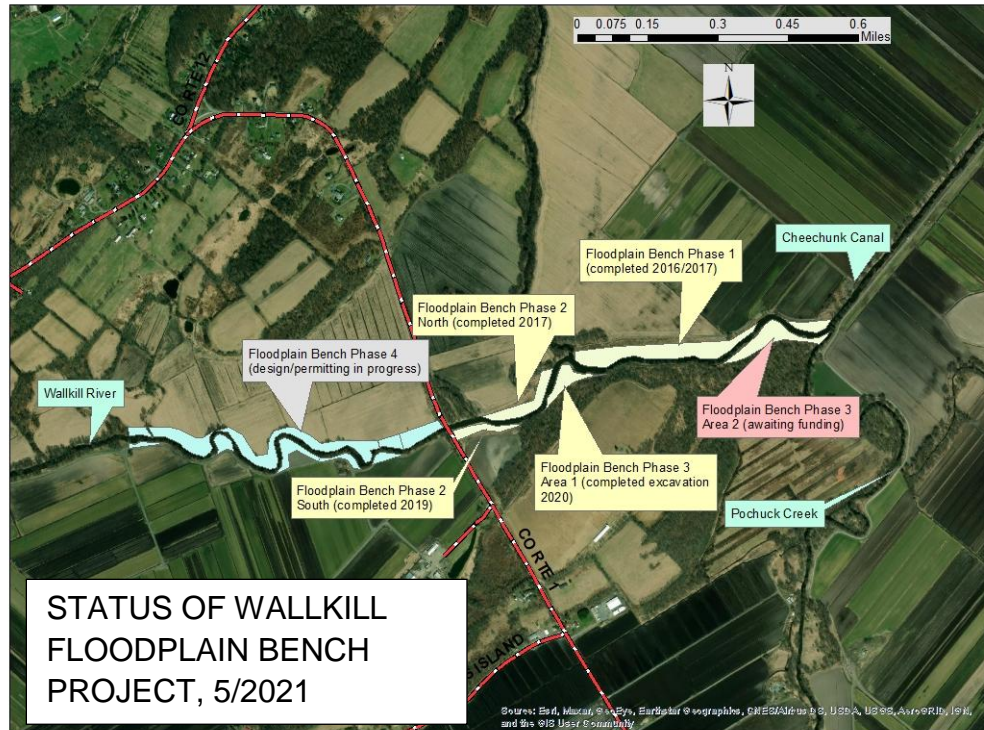
Phase 2 south was planted in the Fall of 2019. Survival throughout 2020 was good. All of the large 2" caliper trees survived their first year. Smaller containerized tree stock survival wasn't as high, but still overall favorable.

The District is also excited to announce that we are the recipients of a New York State Climate Resilient Farming Round 5 Grant. This grant will allow the District to begin Phase 4. The grant will fund permitting, design and implementation of our flood mitigation work another ¾ of a mile upstream beginning at County Route 1. The District is currently working with our consultants on design and permitting.

(Continued on Page 4)



Tree survival on Phase 2 South of the Wallkill Floodplain bench was excellent. This phase exhibited sandy soil conditions throughout at the final bench elevation, in contrast to other phases of the project. This photo is looking south (upstream) – the County Route 1 bridge over the Wallkill is in the background.



Meet our Directors

Paula DeBlock is the Grange Representative on the OCSWCD Board of Directors, replacing her dad, David Hulle, who served as the Grange Representative for many years.

She was born and raised on a dairy farm in the Town of Hamptonburgh, Orange County and graduated from Goshen Central School District. She dairy farmed in New Hampton, NY, grew up in 4-H learning to cook and sew and showed cows at the Orange County Fair. She has been a Grange Member for over 50 years, starting in Junior Grange. She is currently employed as a Program Technician for USDA Farm Service Agency, helping deliver Federal USDA programs to Orange County agricultural producers.

Paula has 2 living children, 3 living grandchildren and enjoys camping, reading and the outdoors.



Meet our Directors



Paul, along with Dad, has his farmer hat on this particular day.

Paul Ruszkiewicz holds one of the two County Legislator seats on the Soil and Water Board. He has been a director since 2014. He grew up and still resides in Pine Island where he raises around 150 acres of onions, soybeans, corn and squash on Pine Island's rich organic (Black Dirt) soils in partnership with his father, John.

Paul is a SUNY Cobleskill and Cornell graduate, earning a Masters Degree in 2000.

His community service includes the Orange County Vegetable Growers Association (president), and Wallkill Valley Drainage Improvement Association (Chairman).

He is the County Legislature representative on the Orange County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board.

Paul is married to Jennifer, and has two children – John and Ashley. He enjoys hunting, fishing and outdoor activities.

Meet our Directors



George Constable is a lifelong resident of the Town of Minisink where he has lived and worked on the family dairy farm started by his parents in 1951.

After shipping milk for 67 years, his family made the decision to exit the dairy business. They now grow hay to feed a small beef herd with the remaining acres rented to a corn/soybean grower.

George has been an active volunteer with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Orange County and Orange County Farm Bureau and is currently the FB representative to the OCSWCD board.

In his free time, George has taken up hiking in the Hudson Valley/Catskills/Adirondacks and hopes to soon begin backpacking/camping.

Meet our Directors

Kathy Stegenga is the newest member of the Conservation District Board of Directors, having been officially appointed by the County in 2020. She holds one of the two County Legislator seats on the Board.

Kathy is a life-long resident of Orange County. She has an extensive resume of business experience and community service, including Town of Blooming Grove Town Council, executive Board member of the Blooming Grove/Washingtonville Chamber of Commerce, and partner, Woodcock Home Improvement, LLC., to name just a few.

She serves on several statutory and special committees as part of her County Legislator position including the Green Committee.

Kathy has a college degree in Criminal Justice, and is a graduate of Leadership Orange. She is married, has two children and two grandchildren.



The **Spotted Lanternfly**, also known as Chinese blistering cicada, is a planthopper native to China and Southeastern Asia. Discovered in Pennsylvania in 2014, the spotted lanternfly presents a threat to both woody and non-woody hosts that are present throughout the United States. While their list of hosts is large, the greatest agricultural concern falls on grapes, hops, apples, blueberries, and stone fruits. Effort is underway to try to eradicate this insect in Pennsylvania. However, in 2018, it was found in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia.

Found a Spotted Lanternfly in New York? 1. Take pictures of the insect, egg masses, or infestation you see and, if possible, include something for size, such as a coin or ruler. 2. If possible, collect the insect. Place in a bag and freeze, or in a jar with rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer. 3. Note the location (street address and zip code, intersecting roads, landmarks, or GPS coordinates). 4. Email pictures and location spottedlanternfly@dec.ny.gov. (Information taken from Cornell Cooperative Extension IPM Program)

For More Information :

New York State Integrated Pest Management Program: Spotted Lanternfly:
nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exoticpests/spotted-lanternfly New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation: Spotted Lanternfly:
dec.ny.gov/animals/113303.html
 United State Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Pest Alert: Spotted Lanternfly: aphis.usda.gov/publications/plant_health/2014/alert_spotted_lanternfly.pdf
 PennState Extension: Spotted Lanternfly extension.psu.edu/spottedlanternfly

Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project

Thanks to the efforts of former NYS Senator Jen Metzger and others, a \$400,000.00 contract funded through NYS's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) will support the work of five Soil and Water Conservation Districts in delivering a Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Pilot Project (HVCFP). The Project started in 2020 and will be completed by April, 2022.

Orange was fortunate enough to be included in the Project, and has worked hard to develop farm plans that meet the goals of the overall project and the participating farms.

- Two farms will implement a combination of cover crop and residue management practices to sequester carbon, improve soil health and protect water quality.
- Two farms will implement composting facilities to improve soil health and reduce runoff risks.
- Two farms will implement controlled drainage systems on organic soils that will slow soil subsidence, sequester carbon and allow for efficient subsurface crop irrigation.

All participating farms will participate in a comprehensive soil health testing program using the Cornell Soil Health Test (CASH) that will evaluate soil health before and after soil health practices are implemented. Although it will be challenging document significant improvement in soil health parameters within the time frame of the HVCFP (2 years), we are hopeful to be able to continue monitoring efforts beyond the time frame of the HVCFP contract to make the monitoring component more meaningful.

While this was a stand-alone pilot project, there are currently Soil Health bills before the NYS Legislature that hold the potential to provide ongoing programming to support adoption of soil health practices on NY farms.



This Controlled Drainage system, funded by the HVCFP, included installation of over 10,000 feet of subsurface drains using a drainage plow operated by Minkus Farms, New Hampton, NY.



Staff from Pine Island Turf Nursery install the water control structure that will allow the farm to regulate the water table in the Controlled Drainage system field.



This field was reclaimed as cropland after a gravel harvesting operation. Use of cover crops in the rotation will accelerate restoration of soil organic matter and tilth. Soil Health Testing will be conducted in effort to measure the improvement over time of these and other soil health parameters.

No-Till Equipment Rental Program

The Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) rents out no-till seeding and planting and other equipment as part of its soil and water conservation program. This allows farmers to employ erosion reduction/water quality benefits.

The District had a busy year moving our no-till equipment last year as equipment use was up compared to previous years. In total, 880 acres were planted with our no-till grain drills and corn planters. This equipment is available to Orange County farmers and while we do not require that they be used strictly as no-till planters, the District does encourage it.

We currently have two Great Plains No-till Drills and two John Deere Conservation Planters. The No-till Drills include native grass seed boxes as well as a general grain box and a small seeds box. Our corn planters are 4 row planters with dry fertilizer boxes. Both planters now have row cleaners to clear trash out of the way of the planting units. If you are interested in renting one of our planters or grain drills you can contact the District for rental information and requirements.



Our technician Travis found this nest while performing maintenance on our floodplain bench. The nest belongs to a Red-eyed Vireo. They make their nest in tall shrubs and saplings. Nests are made with various materials and glued together with spider silk.

The floodplain bench was planted with trees in 2016 to eventually provide roosting habitat for endangered bats. It's great to see other animals using the bench as habitat while we wait for the area to return to a mature forest.

More information about Red-eyed Vireos can be found at: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-eyed_Vireo/overview



Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District

District Board of Directors

Chairman, At-Large
Vice-Chairman, Grange Representative
Legislator
Legislator
Farm Bureau Representative

John Wright
Paula DeBlock
Paul Ruszkiewicz
Kathy Stegenga
George Constable

District Staff

District Manager
Office Manager
District Technician
Part-Time District Field Technician

Kevin Sumner
Christine DeGroodt
Travis Ferry
Roland O'Dell, Jr.