

# AG CONSERVATION "ROUNDUP"

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME ON-GOING FARM PRACTICES

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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### RESPONSIBLE FARMERS PROTECTING LOCAL RESOURCES

#### NEW YORK STATE FUNDING FOR WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PRACTICES

Just a reminder that, in addition to federal programs to assist agricultural landusers (described in a separate article in this newsletter), NYS has provided funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts since 1994 to support the implementation of water quality protection practices on New York farms. This funding is offered through a competitive grant program, and requires farms that are receiving funding assistance to have gone through the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) process to identify water quality concerns on the farm. This process is done through our office at no cost to the farmer.

Farms requesting funding assistance are grouped together in a watershed-based application, unlike the federal cost-share programs where individual farm applications are ranked by USDA-NRCS. So this becomes an all-or-nothing exercise. While Orange County was very successful in early rounds of this program, more recently we have had project proposals that did not make the funding cut. New York state allocates on the order of \$12 million per year to this grant program. Agricultural landusers are welcome to contact our office to find out more about cost-sharing opportunities for water quality protection practices. Ask for Kristen or Kevin.

Below are three examples of projects done by the District using NYS Ag Funds for water quality practices.

#### STREAMBANK STABILIZATION PROJECT — POCHUCK CREEK



Before this 2010 project along the Pochuck Creek was started, a turbidity curtain was installed to protect the water quality.



Once the bank was graded and geotextile put down, rock was used to stabilize it. Notice how clean the water is on the other side of the curtain. After the rock was put down, sod was used to cover the top and sides of the bank.



Floods came in March, 2011 and the streambank stabilization project worked well.

#### FARM ACCESS ROAD & CROPLAND EROSION CONTROL PROJECTS— TOWN OF WAWAYANDA



We see many open ditches that were dug for the purpose of improving cropland drainage, but due to steep banks, too much channel slope and lack of maintenance, these measures become a source of sediment to local waterways. On this Wawayanda farm, a poorly constructed ditch was re-constructed with mildly pitched side slopes that can be easily seeded and maintained by the landowner.



A rolled erosion control product (RECP) was used to stabilize the soil over this trench through the woods. The trench carries a drainage pipe from the nearby crop field to a stream. The RECP ensures that the area doesn't wash out before grass cover becomes well established.



Previously, a metal culvert carried the stream under this farm access road, but had washed out to the point that it was impassable. This Geogrid stone crossing provides a trafficable stream bottom, and avoids the challenge of trying to pass large storm flows through a pipe. We have learned that these style crossings require regular maintenance (in the form of replenishing the stone), but are still a viable option for some stream crossing sites.



### PASTURE PROTECTION PROJECT—TOWN OF MINISINK



Road water from a State highway culvert previously ran through a pasture on this Town of Minisink dairy farm, causing gully erosion. A new catch basin with a 15 inch pipe outlet now conveys the road water to the bottom of the hill – protecting the pasture. The project received funding assistance from the NYS Ag Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control program (ANPSACP).



Installation of 15 inch pipe continues.



After completion of pipe installation, all disturbed areas are seeded AND stabilized for immediate protection with hay mulch.

### WALLKILL VALLEY DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION UPDATE

*Paul Ruskiewicz, President  
Wallkill Valley Drainage Improvement Association*

As flooding continues to be a concern to growers in the Black Dirt region, the Wallkill Drainage Association has been working with Orange County Soil and Water, the four towns in the drainage district (Goshen, Minisink, Warwick and Wawayanda) and our elected officials to address some of these issues.

One recent accomplishment is that the County Legislature has secured funding to begin removing trees from the section of river below Pellets Island. This section of the river was not included in the river maintenance agreement and consequently has grown up with trees, which restrict flow during high water events.



We feel that by removing these trees the frequency and duration of flooding events will be greatly minimized in the future. The County is currently going through the bid process and work should begin on the project this summer. A special thanks goes out to County Legislator Tom Pahucki who has worked diligently to make this project happen.



Another positive change is that the maintenance work on the river has been moved from the County DPW to Orange County Soil and Water. The maintenance work was put out to bid and was completed by Suburban Excavating. After the first year the four towns and the county are pleased with the results of this change as the work was completed in a timely and cost-effective manner.



The Army Corp of Engineers continues to look at the possibility of doing a large scale flood control project on the river. However, due to funding constraints on both the state and federal level, this will likely continue to be a slow process.

As for future plans we would like to see the maintenance agreement expanded to include the section of river below Pellets Island once the trees are removed, so that we do not have a similar problem in the future. We would also like the maintenance agreement to include some of the tributaries such as Rutgers Creek and Quaker Creek.

### AEM PROGRAM



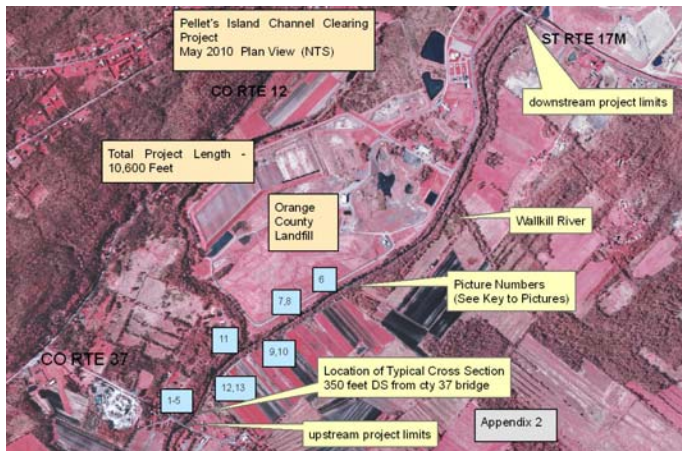
Ever heard the term: ‘April showers bring May flowers?’ Well, I think April showers bring May MUD!! It seems as if this year we have constant amounts of snow, mixed with some ice that has turned our soil into mud, and well, large amounts of it. Spreading patterns have to be altered, feeding areas are saturated and cows standing in mud, mud and more mud. Well I can’t say we are here to solve the world of your mud problem, but through the AEM program we can offer FREE, yup free, technical assistance to aid you in your mud problem. AEM is a free, voluntary program offered by NYS to help farmers with natural resource concerns (aka mud, along with a few others). This program is multi-tiered to ensure the farm receives the right amount of assistance needed. After a farm completes the first few tiers and resource issues are identified, then we can include the farm on grant applications or refer them to potential areas of funding. As with everything that has to do with the state budget, funding is not guaranteed but if nothing else, you can receive free technical advice for the farm. If you are interested in participating in the program, give Kristen a call at the office to schedule her visit (845)-343-1873.



### PELLET'S ISLAND CHANNEL CLEARING PROJECT

Can the flooding along the Walkkill River ever be completely stopped? With the current land uses along the River the answer is probably not but there are and will continue to be projects that try to mitigate some of the impacts of the flooding. In place for a number of years has been a flood control maintenance program that is overseen by NYS DEC and the Army Corps of Engineers. This program provides for annual inspections by DEC and the removal of dead, down or leaning trees that may inhibit the flood water to move past the area covered by this agreement that involves the Towns of Goshen, Minisink, Warwick and Wawayanda and the County of Orange. The section of the River in the program is the entire reach from immediately upstream of the County Route 37 bridge to Oil City Road in the Town of Warwick.

But this covers only a small section of the River and there are other areas that need to be looked at and improved. The Soil and Water Conservation District, with the cooperation of the County of Orange, proposed in 2010 to complete selective cutting and removal of trees and woody growth and debris within the Pellet's Island reach of the Walkkill River— specifically between the County Route 37 bridge to the south and NYS Route 17M/6 to the north (downstream), all within the Towns of Goshen and Wawayanda. This is just downstream of the maintenance agreement area.



The 3 photos (#4, #5 and #6) show some of the sites that have been determined to be part of the project. The numbers correspond to sections on the project map.



The District and County feel that the work will be a benefit to flood mitigation without having any potentially, significant, adverse environmental impact based on field inspections and coordinated project review with NYS DEC staff, staff from County departments of Public Works and Planning, and District staff.



Requests for bids for the Pellet's Island Channel Clearing Project have already been publicized and sent out. The bids are scheduled to be opened on May 12th, with an award by the Soil and Water Conservation District's Board of Directors on May 18th. The goal is to complete the work by summer or early fall.

### USDA NRCS PROGRAM UPDATE

*Larry Larson, District Conservationist*

Almost all NRCS assistance programs are now under what is termed a continuous signup. This means that at any time of the year producers can call or come in to the office and sign up for programs. In most years the end of the signup period happens early in the year. The signup period for most 2011 programs has ended and now producers are beginning to sign up for 2012. It is to the producer's advantage to sign up early because now we are seeing more requirements attached for the application to be funded. An example would be our EQIP grazing program. A requirement to fund grazing components such as fencing, livestock watering facilities, laneways, etc., is that we need to have a detailed prescribed grazing plan in place. These plans can take weeks to develop, so waiting to sign up at the last minute no longer works.

The 2008 Farm Bill brought many new program opportunities and one of the best ways to keep track of what's available is to visit the New York NRCS website at <http://www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/>. One program gaining popularity in Orange County is the Wetland Reserve program (WRP). The program pays approximately \$6000/ ac to landowners willing to place permanent easements on restored wetlands. The intent of this program is to take wetlands that were degraded by agricultural activity and restore that land back to its original wetland condition. Besides earning \$6000/ac., landowners will also receive 100% of the restoration costs.

If you would like more information on any of the USDA NRCS programs, contact either Larry Larson, District Conservationist, or Bob Merrill, Soil Conservationist, at 845-343-1872 or 845-343-1873.

### EQUIPMENT RENTAL UPDATE

With spring quickly approaching have you taken a look at those hay fields. You know the ones that you have delayed seeding for yet another year because the cost of seed is so high. Have you noticed an increase in weeds or a higher amount of refusals in the barn? On these few days of nice weather take a walk through your hay fields and look at the forage species present. If your grass & legume species are out numbered by the weed species, it may be time to replant. As you ponder whether to crack open that wallet, you can think of one cost effective thing: no tilling that field over yonder. The District offers two Great Plains 7 ft seed width grain drills for rent. We strongly suggest for anyone considering use of these drills to first burn down the area that is to be re-seeded, then shortly after all weeds are burned (depending on the herbicide used) drill in the new seed. This avenue not only is good for the environment, but with the escalating cost of fuel it only requires one pass over the field instead of 2-3 with conventional equipment. The District also has a John Deere 4 row conservation corn planter for rent. Before you can use the equipment you must sign and return the Rental Agreement and get your insurance company to send us a Certificate of Insurance with the appropriate information on the equipment you're renting listed. A copy of the Rental Agreement can be printed out from our website- go to [www.ocsoil.org](http://www.ocsoil.org) then look under Our Work, Ag Conservation- and the agreement is right there under the No-Till listing. The agreement lists the prices, each piece of equipment and other pertinent information you need to read before renting the machinery. Or you can call Kristen at 845-343-1873 to get the necessary paperwork, information and to sign up to use the equipment.

**NOTE:** Our Board of Directors has issued a directive that the equipment is to be used in Orange County only.

### PELLETER PROJECT UPDATE

From it's humble, but quite large, beginnings in 2009 at SUNY Cobleskill where the mill was assembled to a working, mobile pellet mill- one of the first fully mobile and self-contained on such a large scale in the world- lots of time and patience have gone into this project. At this point the pilot production phase is currently underway. Huge strides have been made in the project and the mill has been out visiting local farms, trying out a variety of materials to make pellets. Here in Orange County it has been at DeBuck's Sod Farm, Dean Ford and Sons Dairy Farm, Mighty Maples Farm, P. Johnson Farm and O'Dell Family Farm where mulch hay, reed canary grass, switchgrass, straws, soybean stubble and corn stalks have been put through the pelleter. With the economics of farming as they are today the benefits of growing grasses to be used for pelleting can be a boost to farm viability. This has always been one of the main goals of the pelleter project- help local farmers keep land in production. Plus it saves them time since the mill comes to them- they don't have to transport the biomass materials to the mill.

This project involves a variety of partners- USDA Lower Hudson-Long Island RC&D Council, and the Orange County, Dutchess County, Ulster County and Rockland County Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Sponsors of the project have been New York Farm Viability Institute, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, USDA Rural Development, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Orange County Ag and Farmland Protection Board, and SUNY Cobleskill.

On April 12th a Bio-Burner demonstration using pellets made by the Hudson Valley Grass Energy's (HVGE) mobile grass pellet mill was held at Tantillo's Farm, Gardiner, NY. LEI Industries brought their bio-burner from Kentucky to show how locally-made pellets burn in their stove. Previously pellets made with HVGE's mill were sent to LEI for tests. Approximately 50 people attended and they had the opportunity to see the mobile pelleter firsthand and to talk with some local stove dealers about pellet stoves and the use of grass pellets. This demonstration was a culmination of many months of hard work and the cooperation of many people (some hair pulling, nail biting and screaming were also involved).



**A demonstration of a St. Croix Lincoln stove, from Hearth and Home in Rosendale, NY, was conducted using HVGE grass pellets .**



**HVGE mill and team members- John Brown, (volunteer), Toby Wetrus (Mill Operator), Libby Murphy (Project Manager), Kevin Sumner (Orange Co. SWCD Manager), Jim Wiest (volunteer) and Jake Wedemeyer (Ulster Co. SWCD Technician).**

For more information on the pelleter project and for the latest on what's happening with it, contact Kevin Sumner, Orange County SWCD or visit Hudson Valley Grass Energy's website [www.hvge.org](http://www.hvge.org) The website has some great background information and what's happened from the beginning till today.