

Watershed Farm & Forest

FALL 2012

Stewardship Programs of the Watershed Agricultural Council

At the Council, we often share our successes and challenges through PowerPoint presentations, text reports and photos. However, a field trip really puts it all into perspective. In early August, DEP Commissioner Carter Strickland visited the Watershed Agricultural Council for the first time. He and select DEP staff took us up on our offer for a private, watershed tour to get a first-hand view of what our Agricultural and Forestry Programs are doing in the NYC Watershed to keep water clean for nine million New Yorkers.

Twenty-five people, including Council Executive Director Craig Cashman and Board Chairman Fred Huneke, visited three Delaware County locations during the five-hour tour. First stop was the large dairy, Holley-Hill Farm, owned by David and Elaine Holley, in Walton. Here, the Commissioner learned about Best Management Practices (BMPs) ready for repair & replacement, the magnitude of post-Irene streamwork, and the Holley's 18-year perspective on working with the Agricultural Program.

Next at Carman Acres, Small Farms Program participants Rodney and Peggy Carman own a mixed livestock operation with pigs, horses, chickens, and beef. The Commissioner saw recently completed projects including covered manure storage and feeding areas, and diversion ditch systems. All worked together to address manure issues, to dry up muddy pasture, and to redirect stormwater to vegetative filter strips away from a waterway leading into the Canonsville Reservoir.

To round out the Commissioner's understanding of the Council, its programs, and partnership efforts, Council program

managers, including Conservation Easement and Farm to Market Programs, presented overviews of the Council's accomplishments. Lucky Dog Organic Farm of Hamden—a participant in the Pure Catskills, Agricultural and Conservation Easement Programs—provided the local foods lunch. The group finished out the afternoon with a visit to the Lennox Model Forest in Delhi, the first outdoor classroom created by the Council and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County to demonstrate the benefits of active forest management. These wooded public spaces—located in the four corners of the watershed region: Siu-slaw (Acra, NY), Frost Valley (Claryville, NY) and Clearpool (Kent, NY)—serve as landowner-forest professional education sites that showcase hands-on woodland BMPs and forest management planning strategies.

Each year, the Council hosts a dozen watershed farm and forest tours for international and domestic watershed experts and visitors. We look forward to the Commissioner's visit next year as we're proud of the technical assistance and construction projects created by our staff and partners, projects that benefit both regional landowners and downstream water consumers.



The group hiked up the Lennox Model Forest trail to get a better understanding of silviculture and the advantages of proactive forest management planning for regional economic gain. Back (l-r): DEP Commissioner Carter Strickland, Forestry Program Manager Tom Pavlesich, DEP Deputy Commissioner David Warne, Executive Director Craig Cashman, Agricultural Program Manager Larry Hulle. Front (l-r): board member Sally Fairbairn, DEP Program Manager Ed Blouin, Council Chairman Fred Huneke. Kneeling: DEP Section Chief John Schwartz.

Change is a Good Thing. . . Transformation, Even Better

Experience

Over the last 20 years, the Council has changed, improved, and evolved. Be it staff, programs or initiatives, transformation continues to take time and leadership. In September, the Council welcomed Sonia Janiszewski as Farm to Market Manager and new face behind the *Pure Catskills* buy local campaign. “Sonia brings an exceptional combination of profes-



sional experience and a passion for agricultural economic development and local food systems,” noted Executive Director Craig Cashman. “Her background includes extensive marketing, communications, and public relations experience in the private sector and as an independent consultant regionally. She will continue our organizational efforts to provide production and marketing education of local farm products and regional technical assistance, and help spearhead a new economic viability initiative to enhance the Pure Catskills brand through the development of an on-line store.” Sonia was promoted internally; as the Farmhearts Fellow she developed Catskills FarmLink, which provides a mechanism for connecting Catskills land with those interested in farming it, and Catskills CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training), a grassroots effort providing beginning farmers opportunities to connect and learn from established farmers. A Delhi native, Sonia is also involved with her family’s diverse farm, Wildflower Farm in Meredith.

In April, John Jackson joined the Council’s IT (Information Technology) Department as the GIS (Geographic Infor-



mation Systems) Coordinator in the Walton office. “John manages the Council’s geospatial data used in every segment of Council activities; he’s our resident map maker,” noted Cashman. “He also provides staff with assistance and training on the GIS system, and integrates that data with our master database. He brings 20 years experience in software engineering and conservation planning to the team.”

As we welcome new staff members, we wish those departing the best of luck. Small Farms Coordinator Dan Flaherty recently transitioned to USDA NRCS as a Resource Conservationist, and remains a member of the Watershed Agricultural Program. Dan accepted the position after Lenny Prezorski retired to full-time farming in May. We thank Dan and Lenny for their service and expertise they brought to the Agricultural Program over the last two decades. We also thank Challey Comer, who went on to com-

plete her Masters at Columbia University, for her efforts in raising the profile of the Farm to Market Program.

Tools

The Council spent nine months exploring the feasibility of an online store. On July 24, the Council approved the business plan and subsequent development of Pure Catskills Marketplace. This Internet-based opportunity will allow farm and forest businesses from the Catskills region to market their products to consumers from New York City to the Catskills, across the U.S. and the world.

Last year, e-commerce accounted for 4.6% of overall retail sales in the U.S. In 2011, those U.S. online shoppers spent \$194 billion, a 16% increase over 2010. Pure Catskills Marketplace will give consumers an outlet through which to purchase Catskills farm and forest products with the simple click of a mouse. By connecting to a broader consumer base online, Pure Catskills’ businesses are provided a cost-effective opportunity for tapping into the growing national and global e-commerce trade.

The need for the Pure Catskills Marketplace became apparent when the



Council conducted a survey of farm and forest businesses during the development of the Council's Economic Viability Strategic Plan earlier this year. The survey indicated that 83% of regional farm and forest businesses sell their products through on-site or on-farm sales. Fewer than 25% of those respondents indicated they were using the Internet and other marketing tools. The survey also showed that these same local businesses have limited time to devote to their product marketing and distribution. There is a strong industry need for cost-effective marketing tools that penetrate markets outside of the Catskills region. The Council acknowledges these regional hurdles to business success and expansion, and is stepping forward to provide this direct marketing opportunity for Catskills farm and forest business by creating Pure Catskills Marketplace.

The Marketplace is a natural extension

of the Pure Catskills brand and reflects the direction of the Council's Economic Viability Strategic Plan (available online at nycwatershed.org). The Council is well positioned to create and manage an on-line store for three reasons:

1. The Council's mission specifically identifies the promotion of farm and forest business economic viability as an organizational priority.
2. The Council works with a network of more than 750 farm/forest businesses within the Catskills region.
3. Through the Council's relationship with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Pure Catskills Marketplace can gain cost-effective marketing access to the NYC marketplace.

Over the next 18 months, the Council

will develop The Marketplace in phases, working one-on-one with Pure Catskills farm and forest businesses to assist them in selling their products online. The on-line store is scheduled to launch on June 1, 2013 and feature more than 30 Catskills farm and forest businesses and their portfolios of products. Gradually, the Marketplace's vendor and product selection will expand to include an even larger variety of regional food and wood products. For updates on the Marketplace's progress, visit www.nycwatershed.org.

Initiatives

The Council works with many organizations and agencies on landowner initiatives. These next three stories highlight recent collaborative successes on the farm, in the woods, and with the public.

Building Farming Community One Farmer at a Time

Building a farming community takes time, but you have to start somewhere. Catskills FarmLink, a collaborative online resource designed to connect Catskills landowners and farmers looking for farmland, does just that—one farmer at a time. Much like an 18th-century matchmaker, Catskills FarmLink seeks the perfect pairing, and successfully completed its second link in just nine months. A previously idle 500-plus acre Bovina farm listed by Andrew Ebenstein is now leased by June Wright of Tuff-a-Nuff Farm. Match made, FarmLink success!

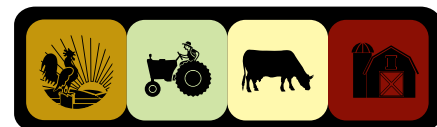
Named after the family's first cow, Tuff-a-Nuff Farm is a dream turned reality. Wright has been building a small herd of heifers while looking for the right opportunity to rent a farm at which she could begin living her life-long dream of starting a small dairy. She also raises sheep, goats, chickens, ducks and horses, and is interested in bringing a few beef cattle to the land. The family hopes to be milking within a year, but there is work to be done. The farm also plans to rotationally graze its herd and to provide fresh pasture daily.



June will now work with FarmLink partners who will provide support and resources to her farm. Her next "links" are with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County for assistance with dairy youngstock, enrolling the farm in the Watershed Agricultural Program, and working with Farm Catskills on funding opportunities that could be used for on-farm im-

provements. For more on this story, visit the Council's blog, You & Your Watershed at www.nycwatershed.blogspot.com.

Catskills FarmLink completed its first link back in April 2012 when the Migliorelli Farm started a second fruit and vegetable retail outlet in the old Alice & Roger's Farmstand on State Highway 28 in Mt. Tremper, Ulster County. Catskills FarmLink is a collaborative effort of seven partners, with a coordinator subsidized by a Farmhearts Fellowship from Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development, administrative support from the Council, and DEP funding.



Catskills FarmLink

www.catskillsfarmlink.org

Fresh From the Catskills

Through December, you'll hear radio spots and see ads—like this one running in *Edible Hudson Valley* at left—promoting Pure Catskills members and the fresh, local products at harvest time. The “Fresh From the Catskills” campaign celebrates our seasonal bounty by making it easy for you to find, prepare and enjoy!

Through the Pure Catskills campaign, the Council received nearly \$18,000 from a New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets grant to promote specialty crops like berries, vegetables and Christmas trees as part of a marketing campaign designed to connect more people to the great tasting food of the Pure Catskills region. The campaign dovetails with the Pride of New York promotion. The Council is working with Kingston-based CRSR Designs, using multi-channel marketing to promote regional farms and their products, and highlighting the venues where fresh, local products are found.

When you buy local, you're choosing to support our farmers, strengthen the regional food system, and invest in our communities. Visit PureCatskills.com for county-specific listings of farmers' markets, u-pick locations, farmstands, and harvest festivals, as well as recipes for cooking up what's in season. Follow the Pure Catskills Facebook Page and tweets from @Pure Catskills for coupons and special giveaways, “Fresh From the Catskills.”

FRESH

From the Catskills

Heading off to pick your own pumpkins?

Visit our website to print a coupon for a free Pure Catskills market bag, redeemable at participating Pick-Your-Own farms during October.*

Our website is also updated weekly with info on **Farmers' Markets - U-pick Farms - Farm Stands Giveaways - Tips on Buying Fresh and Local - Recipes and more!**

Brought to you by



*while supplies last

purecatskills.com

PICK A PECK OF . . . PUMPKINS

DELAWARE COUNTY

Maple Shade Farm
2066 County Highway 18, Delhi 13753
www.mapleshadefarmny.com

Greenane Farm Market & Garden Center
196 County Route 10, Meridale 13806
www.greenanefarms.com

Sunflower Farm
834 Crescent Valley Road, Bovina 13740
www.sunflowerfarmofbovina.com

ULSTER COUNTY

Hurd's Family Farm
2187 State Route 32, Modena 12548
www.hurdsfamilyfarm.com

Prospect Hill Orchards
40 Clark's Lane, Milton 12547
www.prospecthillorchards.com



Fences Make for Good Neighbors and Healthy Forests

A warm day accompanied by a steady rain did not deter this group from visiting the newly erected deer enclosure at the Clearpool Model Forest, situated in the heart of the Clearpool Education Center (a program of Green Chimneys) in Kent. "This seems much easier to do than I had envisioned," said Tom Hall, member of the Putnam County Fish and Game Club, in reference to installing a deer enclosure on the nearby Club property. Other members of this wet excursion expressed the same sentiment, including Joe Patriciello and John Corrao, both stewardship-dedicated local woodland owners in the Croton Watershed.

The Clearpool deer enclosure was designed and installed in April 2012 by Jennifer Stengle of Putnam County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Stephen Knapp of On-Earth Plant Care Specialists, Chris Hendershot of Clearpool Education Center, and several members of their energetic educational staff. The deer enclosure accomplishes a few simple goals. First, the



deer enclosure keeps deer from eating new forest growth. Second, the site demonstrates the relationship between our woodlands and deer browsing. Lastly, as Hall stated earlier, the project shows that installing a deer fence doesn't have to be a daunting task.

People interested in installing deer enclosures should contact Chris Hender-

Pictured above during a routine fence inspection are (l-r): Tom Hall, member of the Putnam County Fish and Game Club; woodland owners Joe Patriciello and John Corrao; Jennifer Stengle of Putnam County Cornell Cooperative Extension; Chris Hendershot, Director of Clearpool Programs

shot, Director of Clearpool Programs at (845) 225-8226 for details and a tour of the Clearpool Model Forest.

Show Us Your Cauliflowers

Visitors to the Delaware County Fair put a face to local food this year—their face—as hundreds of fairgoers “showed us their cauliflowers” and shared why they support regional farmers and a strong local food system. The Council and NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) opened the fair with an annual ribbon-cutting ceremony followed by the Ultimate Sugar Rush. Staff, friends and visitors sampled everything sweet from four Pure Catskills members: Slickepott fudge and caramel, local maple syrup cotton candy from Candyland Concession, six flavors of Lazy Crazy Acres gelato, and Yellow Crimson watermelon from Edgevilla Farms. The affair marked the partners’ continued commitment to water quality and economic viability in the watershed.

Throughout Fair Week, the Council featured Pure Catskills members and their products through free food samplings. Farmer Denise Warren shared ricotta-herb meatballs from Fable Restaurant at Stone & Thistle Farm. Diane Frances of La Basse Cour Farm and B&B baked a half dozen goodies including lemon cake and raspberry shortbread. Both farmers used ingredients from their own and neighboring farms. The Council also held heirloom tomato tastings throughout the weekend, introducing Green Zebras, Foxies and Japanese Trifeles to anyone willing to try them. (Visit purecatskills.com to find out what’s “Fresh From the Catskills.”)

Best of all, visitors young and old took a minute to place their face among the growing number of voices supporting local farmers. For a glimpse

at those portraits (and to find your own), visit the Council’s Flickr page or check out the slideshow on the Council’s YouTube Channel. Post your own photo and comment to add your face and voice to the growing Pure Catskills buy local movement.





Eyes in the Sky

When a landowner and the Council enter into a conservation easement, they embark on a long-term relationship. This “forever” commitment—to water quality, working landscapes and the natural resources under our collective care—requires work, maintenance and communication.

This task falls to the Easement Program staff and Land Conservation Stewardship Specialists, Rob Birdsall and Ryan Naatz, who oversee 123 easement relationships on 22,785 acres in the watershed. Together, they provide guidance and technical support to landowners to ensure responsible stewardship of easement properties, and that the conservation easement terms and conditions are being followed. These terms and conditions of stewardship are outlined by the deed of conservation easement which is

a legal binding document that follows the property in perpetuity. The Council entered its first conservation easement to protect working landscapes in 2001 and has subsequently closed on 123 conservation easements (a number of daughter easements have been “created” from original easements by subdivisions, thus totaling 140 properties restricted by easements today).

Staff monitors properties twice a year following Council monitoring guidelines (available at nycwatershed.org). “Ryan and I split the portfolio and it takes us a year to schedule, visit, report, and complete the entire monitoring process for all portfolio properties. This includes walking the property and meeting with the landowner, called a ground visit,” explains Rob. “Our second annual visit comes from above. Aerial monitoring al-

lows us to check in on the property in an efficient, fast and cost-effective way.”

With the help of Delaware Aviation, the team can spot-check all 123 easements by air in two or three days. “Aerial monitoring also provides us with an efficient way of covering a large area of land,” adds Ryan. “Sometimes it’s hard to access high points, and walking a property in its entirety isn’t always feasible.” The Council holds several conservation easements that are each in the 300-800 acre range. “Two annual visits is the minimum requirement. We’re probably visiting every property more than that because we’re regularly providing technical assistance to landowners. That’s what we’re here for. It all depends on the landowners, the activities they want to conduct, and their requests for assistance.”

When flying above at 3,000 feet (often



Rob Birdsall and Ryan Naatz sit before the BDR Wall containing stewardship files on the Council's 123 conservation easements.



times lower), the team looks for activities and changes on the landscape. Landowners are required to obtain Easement Committee approval for extractive activities like logging or bluestone quarrying, stream work, or new structures greater than 5,000 square feet outside of building areas. "We look for stuff we might not be able to see during the ground visit," adds

Ryan. "Aerial monitoring serves as a second set of eyes for what's happening on the ground. Most of the time, there's nothing new happening."

Monitoring of properties is reconciled against a Baseline Document Report, or BDR. Housed in one of the large black binders lining the easement stewardship office, a BDR binder contains informa-

tion on an individual property from the first day of its conservation easement. "We document in pictures every aspect of the property from Day One," says Rob. The BDR establishes a baseline from which activity on a property can be measured. Additionally, staff maintains a stewardship file for each property. "Every year, we may add photos and text from our visits to the



This aerial view of the Schoharie River, four months after the 2011 Irene-Lee flooding, magnifies the lasting impact of soil erosion, sedimentation and turbidity on water quality.

stewardship file that shows any changes for each property. The BDR not only contains photography, property descriptions and observations on the day the property closed; it also holds a survey which documents buildings, use area boundaries along with GIS or other imagery maps that visualize various landscape conditions.

"Ideally, when you have a light coating of snow on the ground, you can see from the air most land-based activities like logging tracks. Light snowfall gives you a clear view of property and land topography. If something's off, it'll show in the photo comparison," adds Ryan. "All new photos become part of the stewardship file and we compare these photos from year to year to the BDR." The team's work with GIS has inspired staff training provided by GIS specialist John Jackson. "We're encouraging staff in the Agricultural and Forestry Programs to use the data available," says Ryan.

For aerial monitoring, the team usually observes the land during the spring or fall when the leaves are off the trees. Rob usually conducts the aerial "visits" and instructs the pilot on where to fly, usually by memory, line of sight, landmarks and visual cues. There is no GPS. "I look for a clear, calm, crisp, blue-sky kinda day to do the fly-overs," says Rob. "We're generally

aloft for four hours, letting the fog burn off and starting midday. The airspace can get a bit bumpy in the Catskills...I've hit my head on the cockpit ceiling with my seatbelt on. So I'm always looking for calm conditions." While air turbulence makes for a bumpy ride, other times, it's the "unexpecteds" that can ruin a flight: incoming weather, equipment glitches, an airsick passenger. "One time on landing, a pigeon flew right by my window," recalls Rob. "I asked my pilot Bernie Ford what would have happened if the bird hit the propeller, and he just shook his head. Needless to say, there are no parachutes and I call my wife every time I hit the ground."

The two fly out in a three-seater Cessna with an occasional third person to record observations while Rob takes photos. Flying at 130 mph, the observation plane can make it from Sidney to Grahamsville in 20 minutes. Rob works from a paper list of properties, a digital map, and last year's memory. "I've dubbed it 'real-time GIS,'" quips Ryan, "Rob's using local landmarks to plot his course to the next property. Generally, they start out in the south in Sullivan County, and then work their way back through Delaware, Greene and Schoharie Counties."

For Rob, there's no glamour in head-

ing to the skies each year. "Sometimes we circle easement clusters for an hour, just to get the right photo angles and a sense for ground activity. Either way, it gets kinda monotonous for the pilot, but Bernie is patient and gets me an eye on what I need to see."

A bird's eye view also provides a privileged understanding of how land activities influence streams, reservoirs, and water quality. "It wasn't until I flew over a few reservoirs after last year's flood that I realized the sedimentation issues created by those storms. You couldn't see this from the ground. To see this turbidity for myself, that the water still hadn't settled out after four months, proved to me the big impact of land conservation," notes Rob. "You might think random activities on your land don't have an effect, but they all add up in a big way. At the Council, we're concerned with keeping water clean for nine million New Yorkers. When we steward the land in a responsible manner, we can help mitigate impacts on the environment and water quality."

Rob and Ryan regularly call landowners, visit properties, and maintain the BDR as part of the Easement Program's stewardship responsibilities. "Stewardship is a lot of education and a lot of paperwork," says Ryan. "But over the long haul, it all boils down to the relationships we have with landowners. We routinely call them up to see what's going on and keep in touch regularly. It's as simple as asking, 'Hey, what's new?'"

Be it from the air or on the ground, regular annual property visits play a key role in easement stewardship, information gathering and land conservation oversight. "We all know aerial monitoring is an effective tool to confirm our ground monitoring. But from our perspective," says Rob, "communication is the best tool for easement monitoring."

Sustainable Starts With Soil

When Liz Taggart started an organic vegetable and fruit operation in 2009, she intended to create nutrient-rich soil that would yield bountiful produce, bringing affordable, locally grown, farm products back to her Westchester County community. Now Amba Farms also sells its organics to local restaurants like the Bedford Post, Café of Love, Tarry Lodge, and Equus, all in Westchester County. Liz also works with several school systems and a local hospital to connect students and families to wholesome foods. In just three short years, Liz has innovatively expanded the 2.5 acre Amba Farms located in the New Croton Reservoir drainage basin, by leasing 6 acres of cropland at Amato Farm in the Muscote Basin and another 10 acres in North Salem. While the farming locations differ, they all share the same soil—the mainstay for strong, healthy pro-

ductive plants—soil she makes herself in the compost facility recently constructed by the East of Hudson Program. Her success with multiple lettuce varieties, vegetables du jour, berries and fruit trees testifies to the soil's richness.

The First Ingredient

"We need to bring soil back to life," says Liz. "Nutrient-dense soil, created through composting, provides us with nutritional food and seeds. We must build a sustainable food system from the ground up, starting with our soils." One of Liz's goals last year was to make her own soil amendments, like compost; she's now doing that, thanks to the East of Hudson Program. Recent construction of a composting facility allows Amba Farm in Bedford Hills to create "Black Gold" at Amato Farm in Katonah.

According to Liz, soils packed with the right ingredients make for healthier, more productive plants. "Nutrient-dense growing means applying vital plant nutrients during the growth cycle. Organically packed soils allow plants to grow, thrive and fruit longer. Plants grown in hearty soils are more resilient to pests and weather, and they continue to produce even past the first frost." Liz follows five steps in boosting her organic economy:

1. Test soil annually.
2. Apply soil amendments as needed. "Berries, beans, potatoes and lettuces need certain nutrients; give them a fighting chance by properly preparing your soil."
3. Use organic materials. "Feed your soils with a tea of worm castings, compost and molasses. This combination stimu-



Expansion through land leasing: Amba Farms, here in Bedford Hills, uses six acres at Amato Farm, Katonah, and 10 additional acres in North Salem. In Sanskrit, "Amba" means "Universal Mother."



lates microbial life and is bio-available to the root system.”

4. Avoid soil desertification. “Increase your organic minerals, a plant’s building blocks.”
5. Move away from poisons and GMO seeds to create FrankenFoods. “When you treat the soil right, plants will respond and provide clean food.”

A Dash Of Season Extender

Amba Farms specializes in three-season organic farming thanks to the addition of a hoop house built with a USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) grant in 2011. “One question in farming is how to be most effective,” explains Liz. “Between mid-November and mid-February we get less than 10 hours of sunlight, and these three months are a more dormant period for germination and photosynthesis. But plants can still grow even though the soil is cold. For every layer of protective hoop cover, the soil heats up eight degrees, or one growing zone. The hoop house transitions my growing area from Zone 6 to 7, allowing me to plant in February instead of mid-March and harvest well into October and November.” Season extenders add 12 weeks to the growing season, six in the spring and six in the fall. This means farm security by adding revenue to the farm’s bottom line. “If we’re the first farm at market with carrots, greens and Jericho varieties, we can charge a premium. Give us six weeks of planting and we can get a second planting in, too.”

Liz manages her farming operation with the help of her niece Teresa Stanonik and Isaac Glick. This small business employs five full-time employees and several seasonal apprentices. Her assistant and bookkeeper, Susan Golden, coordinates the farm’s summer internship program which serves as an educational tool for local high school students interested in sustainable agriculture. Golden also assists community members with organic vegetable garden start-ups. “The Modern Farm, supported by the community, encourages second- and third-tier businesses. When

BEFORE:

Liz Taggart’s farming practices place emphasis on soil quality and organic growing methods. Liz imports manure from other nearby farms and composts it prior to applying it to her crop fields. One site Liz farms has sensitive wetlands immediately down slope from composting and farming activities, from which water flows a short distance into the Muscote Reservoir.



AFTER:

A 80’x30’ compost pad was installed to contain the composted material and provide a suitable surface for management. The pad was designed to divert clean stormwater away from the storage area; pad runoff is directed into a 1,250 gallon-precaster concrete collection tank. The runoff collected in the tank is then utilized as ‘compost tea’ on crop fields. The tank overflow outlets to a vegetated filter area, which prevents runoff from reaching the wetland area.



we put the land to work, we put ourselves to work,” adds Liz.

Liz grew up on a small community farm and remembers always having her own garden. Her grandfather and three brothers immigrated from Slovenia around 1918 to Cleveland, where they secured a few acres near each other. “Each brother had a responsibility for providing food to the family unit,” remembers Liz. “Ludwig was the family arborist. Joe was in charge of the vineyard. My grandfather tended to the bee hives and grew vegetable crops. This is how we grew up: a family farm where we shared and raised food as a community.”

Sprinkle In A Generation

In 2011, when Liz’s son Lincoln was in the 8th grade, she and a few moms started a school garden. “Mothers desperately want their children to be healthy. Peer pressure however often trumps food choices. Luckily, kids are tuning in to how it’s all related: food, earth, water, eating well, sustainability and the economy. Reaching out to children, educating them to be stewards,

and acting on land’s behalf are part of the school garden lesson.”

Amba Farms supplied nutrient-dense soil and farmer expertise which guided the launch of a 60’x100’ garden at Rip-powam Cisqua Elementary School. “I didn’t want to force faculty to integrate the garden into their curriculum. Instead, this connection is developing naturally. We created The World is Our Family beds representing different countries in need, growing indigenous foods. For Chile, the students planted blue potatoes and black beans. For Egypt, they planted a fig tree, sesame and chickpeas. And Japan was represented in cucumber, radish, ginger and edamame. We planted these countries because they all needed a little TLC at the time. It was our way of honoring them and their troubles in a positive way.” That year, Chile experienced an earthquake; Egypt, civil unrest; and Japan, the tsunami.

Before Liz knew it, the school garden has caught on. “Kids fell in love with the fresh fruit like strawberries and blueberries. In the Shakespeare Bed, we integrated literature through herbs and

flowers mentioned in his quotes. The 9th-graders built a sustainable water catchment and delivery system. The 7th-grade art class used basil, eggplant and strawberry leaves to make ceramic tiles. We are working with faculty and students as they express interest. The school garden is an integral piece of the school community and provides students with a hands-on experience for a lifelong practice.”

Mix In Community

Liz also serves on the board of the Westchester Land Trust (WLT) where she represents the farming community. She identifies with the WLT mission to save open space, forward farmer-landowner connections, and increase farmer-chef relationships. “To keep land active, we need to get small farmers growing on plots throughout the region. There isn’t a lot of active farming going on in Westchester but there is a lot of land, and we hope to turn that around,” says Liz. “At WLT, we’re aggressively making land more relevant to the communities it serves. Land is for all to enjoy. Small park areas and rooftop gardens demonstrate that all land is precious.”

Preserving open space also creates a desirable community amenity. “People need access to beautiful open space; we need to plan this within our communities. The gift of open space takes foresight, finance and commitment,” adds Liz. “Open space improves land value. We need to apply community experience and wisdom



Harvesting seed for the next growing season provides promise of the next generation. “We started a seed tray to help kids connect to the food cycle,” says Liz. “We use this and other displays to highlight what’s going on in the school garden. Not only was it really fun to build, it provided us an outlet for creative expression. It is a real gift to be involved.”

to protect land for future generations. It’s not just about food quality; we’ve also got to protect the best soils and land topography within our regions. Stewardship is a verb, not a noun and requires full-time thinking by the landowners. Planning communities with a common farm component allows us to incorporate all these values into our daily living.”

As a result of one WLT meeting, Amba Farms supplied an Earth Day salad bar to Northern Westchester Hospital. “The farm-to-hospital concept is simple: feed ill people with the best local, fresh foods,” says Liz. “Food is a drug, a therapy that can improve overall health. The hospital has adopted the motto: Food is healthcare. Offering clean healthy food falls in line with the hospital’s lifestyle and diet classes and aligns with its wellness program for managing food-related diseases. The hospital is intuitively designed to serve as a central hub for food-for-better-health education; to team up with them just makes sense.”

For Liz, farm viability is the most challenging part of farming. “I want the farm to be profitable but even more so, I want organic food to be available and financially affordable for all ages, incomes, and modest means people. We’re entitled to know what is in our food and to eat the best food possible. The notion that eating good food is a basic human right is achieving critical mass in small pockets like the Rip-powam Cisqua school garden.”

Liz also sees investment opportunity by supporting more farming in Westchester. “The younger generation has the energy and cares, to their core, about Mother Earth. We need to anticipate the needs of new farmers and help them over the hurdles so they aren’t discouraged. These new farmers will create a stable food supply in this area and help consumers connect the food cycle dots.”

Lastly, along with making great soil, Liz looks to establish a goat herd, make goat cheese, and live by her motto: grow wholesome food for wholesome purposes. She does this through the Amba Foundation. “The Foundation is designed to give back to community and the earth,” explains Liz. “Money isn’t everything. Just ask yourself: Do you want to be wealthy? What is *wealth*? Turning life into what you want, and working with the earth, changes your perspective on what is wealth. As a farmer, I embrace the responsibility, honor and privilege to provide people with good food to eat. Connecting my community to farming, nature and local food. . . *now that’s wealth.*”

Outside and inside the season extender, winter lettuces mature for market





During a late summer watershed tour to Holley-Hill Farm (Walton), Agricultural Program Manager Larry Hulle (l) explains the farm's BMP repair & replacement concerns to DEP Commissioner Carter Strickland (c) and Large Farms Coordinator Brian Latourette.



Farm owners Elaine and Dave Holley tell DEP Commissioner Carter Strickland (at right) about their 18 years with the Watershed Agricultural Program. For more on this story, see page 1.

- UPCOMING EVENTS:**
- Easement Program Committee Meetings: October 4, November 1
December 6
 - October 5: TLC Skidder Bridge Construction Workshop
 - October 6-7: Taste of the Catskills, Delhi
 - October 10: New Green City, Union Square
 - October 12: TLC Forest Ecology and Silviculture
 - October 16-17: Growing Health 2012 Cultivating Common Ground
 - November 8-9: Clearpool Sustainable Education for the Next Generation
 - November 8: TLC Forest Pests & Diseases
 - November 9: TLC Game of Logging-Level 1
 - November 15: Harvesting Opportunities Conference, Albany
 - December 7: TLC Adult First Aid/CPR



When you give to the Conservation Easement Stewardship Fund online, you're investing in working landscapes—over 21,000 acres—throughout the NYC Watershed region. Scan the QR code to give today!

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