

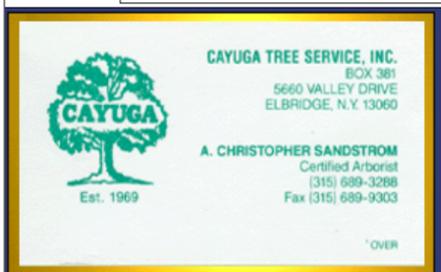


ONONDAGA COUNTY SOIL &
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Email: info@ocswcd.org
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CONSERVATION QUARTERLY

Spring 2020

Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District



FINGER LAKES DAIRY FARM RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD FOR SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

By American Dairy Association North East

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, established under the leadership of dairy farmers and leading companies, announced its annual U.S. Dairy Sustainability Award winners during the Dairy Sustainability Alliance® Virtual Spring Meeting on April 22, 2020.

Twin Birch Dairy in Skaneateles, N.Y., was named a winner in the “Outstanding Dairy Farm Sustainability” category for overall environmental stewardship in the Finger Lakes region. The awards recognize dairy farms, businesses and partnerships whose practices improve the well-being of people, animals and the planet. Winners in the Outstanding Dairy Farm Sustainability category are leaders in socially responsible, economically viable, and environmentally sound dairy production and exemplify a longstanding commitment to continuous improvement.

With a country club in its backyard and million-dollar lakefront homes just miles away, Twin Birch Dairy is nestled in an environmentally sensitive area between Skaneateles and Owasco Lakes. The two watersheds supply drinking water to more than 400,000 people in the two largest cities in Central New York – Syracuse and Auburn – and the surrounding areas. Owner Dirk Young has been a leader in implementing on-farm practices that protect the surrounding water for drinking and recreation.

Young, along with partners Todd Evans and Jeremy Brown, volunteered the farm for a water monitoring study conducted by the Owasco Watershed Lake Association (OWLA), a community organization focused on identifying strategies to restore and improve water quality and provide community education on protecting the Lake. The study found that Twin Birch Dairy’s environmental practices are having a significant effect – showing that water quality immediately downstream of Twin Birch Dairy was generally equal to, if not

Continued on page 2



“Promoting excellence in the wise use of our urban/suburban natural resources.”

slightly better, than the upstream water quality. To Young, this data is an important validation of the farm's efforts.

"I have never been afraid of following the science and coming up with solutions," says Young.

Says Young, "We also live in this community. I want and need the respect of the whole area to truly be successful."

Innovation at Twin Birch Dairy began more than 20 years ago, shortly after doubling its herd size for the second time in a decade. In what originally began as a way to decrease farm-related odor for neighbors, a remote manure storage site was built on the property. A separator that divides manure solids from liquids was added; liquids go to the storage site and solids are recycled for cow bedding.

Ultimately, those practices led to Twin Birch becoming among the first farms in New York to commission an anaerobic digester in 2003. Today, it is the only one operating in Onondaga County. Beyond the benefits for energy savings, an anaerobic digester has other environmental benefits as well. The end products can be used as cow bedding, recycled into the land or sold to landscapers.

According to Mark Burger, Program Manager of the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program, "Per the City of Syracuse's Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural program, Twin Birch Farms leads by example and sets the bar higher for environmental goals, herd health and community relations."

Running a productive farm that is also environmentally and community focused is clearly a top priority for the farm, which is exemplified in Twin Birch Dairy's mission statement: "Twin Birch Dairy, LLC will strive to operate an environmentally friendly dairy farm business that will provide a good livelihood for its principals as well as its employees. We will run our business in a manner that is perceived by our neighbors and the community as an asset to the area."

Looking to the future, Twin Birch Dairy will continue to use existing and new sustainability practices to ensure the dairy's continuation for generations to come.

STAFF PROMOTIONS

By Margaret Connelly



Eric Renfer

The District is pleased to announce the promotion of two Resource Conservation Specialists.

Eric Renfer was promoted to Program Manager. Eric came to the District in 2013 to work with the design, surveying and implementation of projects on farms participating in the New York State Agricultural Environmental Management program (AEM).

Aaron Buchta is now Senior Planner for the District. Hired in 2013, Aaron promoted the AEM program to interested farm producers, both parties collaborating toward the best environmental outcome on the farm. Aaron authors many grants to New York State for funding that helps ease the cost to the farmer.



Aaron Buchta

LARGE AG TIRE RECYCLING PROJECT



SKANEATELES LAKE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM

Watershed Agricultural Program Review Committee (WAPRC)

- Mike McMahon, *Chair, Cortland Co.*
- Craig Richards, *Vice Chair, Onondaga Co.*
- Tim Leubner, *Onondaga Co.*
- Eric Brayman, *Onondaga Co.*
- David Perry, *Cortland Co.*
- Gaelen Head, *Cayuga Co.*
- Rich Abbott, *City of Syracuse*
- Jim Greenfield, *Counsel member*
- Dale Kehoe, *Counsel member*
- Steve Nemeec, *Counsel member*

Staff

- Mark Burger, *Program Manager*
- Eric Jensen, *Farm & Nutrient Mgmt. Planner*
- Kim Clark, *District Conservation Technician*
- Chris Travis, *District Conservation Technician*

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The Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program is a cooperative effort between the Soil & Water Conservation Districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations of Onondaga, Cortland and Cayuga Counties, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the City of Syracuse, and Skaneateles Lake watershed farmers. Principal funding provided by the City of Syracuse.

SKANEATELES LAKE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM

FOR RENT

12' Esch 5512 No-Till Drill



2020 RATES

\$11.00/Acre

\$100 Delivery/Set up Fee on all equipment

*Rentals inside Onondaga County & SLWAP only

- Small Grains
- Cover Crops—winter rye, wheat
- Small Seeds—alfalfa, clover
- Buffer Strips
- Soybeans
- 5.5" Rows—(11" rows available)
- 2 - Seed Boxes
- Wildlife management areas

Call us:
(315) 457-0325
Eric Jensen, Resource Conservation Specialist

Note: No charge for any buffers, field borders or filter strips installed inside Skaneateles Lake Watershed



** A \$100 cleaning fee will be charged on invoice if equipment is **NOT** returned clean; including mud between coulters, and seed boxes.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

*100 HP minimum tractor * 2 pairs Hydraulic hose connections * Certificate of Insurance

LARGE AG TIRE RECYCLING PROJECT

By Eric Jensen, Resource Conservation Specialist

Waste ag tires piled outside provide an environment for mosquitoes to breed in the stagnant water that collects inside. These mosquitos pose a health concern since they can carry West Nile Virus, EEE, and other diseases. By removing the tires, the risk of disease is reduced. In addition, large tire piles are a risk if they catch fire and release thick black smoke into the air and other pollutants into the water from fire suppression. Farms have a difficult time finding safe options to dispose of worn out ag tires to comply with new NYS DEC waste tire regulations since landfills and tire recyclers do not accept them due to the size and thickness of the tires. The Skaneateles Lake Watershed Ag Program (SLWAP) was able to identify a facility in Niagara Falls, New York that processes large ag tires.

This summer, a pilot program was initiated when two trailer loads of waste ag tires were collected and sent to be processed. These trailers required extra high lifts to load the tires over the 13.5 feet side-walls. Smaller ag tires were added to fill in the void spaces to complete the trailer loads. The tires will be shredded into chips of various sizes and used for energy or other uses. We believe the extra effort to remove these large ag tires and comply with NYS DEC regulations will provide lasting environmental benefits to the watershed and community.

For more information on large ag tire recycling, contact the SLWAP & Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District office location at 6680 Onondaga Lake Parkway, Liverpool at (315) 457-0325.



Our vision - The Skaneateles Lake watershed will be an environmentally sound region, where a viable agricultural industry and others benefiting from the lake work together harmoniously to improve and maintain a high standard of water quality.
Our mission - To carry out a cost-effective, innovative program for the farming community that upholds the high drinking water quality standards of Skaneateles Lake.

SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES HELP PROTECT CROPS AT BURTON FARMS

By Aaron Buchta, CCA

With this June being one of the driest on record, many crop fields are starting to show signs of water stress. I had the opportunity to talk to Jeremy Burton of Burton Farms about how his management practices help mitigate the effects of weather. Improving soil health is a priority for the farm, where these conservation practices have shown a direct benefit on yields.

Burton Farms grows grain utilizing no-till and cover crops. He cites the lack of soil disturbance and residue from cover crops helps to keep moisture in the soil, reducing the risk of water stress. Recently, the field featured in the photos has been inter-seeded with a radish-rye mix, to have the cover crop established prior to grain corn harvest.

The Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District has multiple opportunities to assist farms with the installation of cover crops, and owns a 12' no-till drill available for rental. If you are interested in either of these programs, feel free to contact us at: (315) 457-0325.



FACE COVERINGS & HAND SANITIZER FOR FARMS

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga, in cooperation with New York State Agriculture and Markets, is distributing hand sanitizer and face coverings to Onondaga County farms. Please call (315) 424-9485 to schedule your pickup.

You will be asked to provide the Farm name, type, number of employees, and contact information.

Orders will be put together based on number of employees and farm type. We will call back when your order is ready (same or the next day).

Pickup will be contactless, with orders organized **outside** of our **second** entrance and can be picked up at any time.

Face coverings are required to be worn by all. CDC guidance for COVID-19 procedures will be adhered to.

****NEW CCE LOCATION****
 6505 Collamer Road
 East Syracuse, NY 13057

Thank you CCE!

The Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.

EMERALD ASH BORER PROJECT UPDATE

By Teresa Link, Conservation District Technician

The District continues to implement the Onondaga County Ash Tree Management Strategy with partnership with Onondaga County. Below is a summary of the 2019 progress made with the EAB program and the totals from 2014-2019:

2019 Tree Injections: 213	Total Trees Injected: 655
2019 Tree Removals: 2,852	Total Trees Removed: 15,797
2019 Trees Planted: 297	Total Trees Planted: 2,117

As a reminder, if you have an ash tree on your property there is a chance it is infested with EAB or will be soon. Even if the tree appears to be alive, it can take several years for a tree to show signs of the infestation. You may begin to see tree crowns become smaller, less dense, and branching density move towards the trunk of the tree. It is safer to be proactive with your options (removal or preservation) than to let the tree die naturally. As the tree dies from EAB, it becomes even weaker than when it dies normally which can pose a safety concern for the landowner, public, and the tree removal contractor. Contact an ISA Arborist or NYS certified pesticide applicator in your area to go over options for your tree(s).



The District, Onondaga Earth Corps, and Pratt's Falls County Park hosted a community tree planting event on November 2nd, funded in part by a grant from the United States Forest Service.

FREE: WATER/MILK STORAGE CONTAINERS



The District has 3 water/milk storage containers available, for free, to farmers to be used for agricultural purposes. These containers are food-grade and were donated by a local company in response to hearing of farmers needing to dump milk due to decreased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are first-come-first serve. Contact us today: 315-457-0325

LOCAL ENVIROTHON CANCELLED



In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, regrettably our local CNY Regional Envirothon was cancelled. The decision to cancel was difficult, however, we needed to prioritize the health and safety of our students, volunteers and the employees of the host site.

The State Envirothon went forward, and offered an online event on May 27th for those schools and teams still in the running.

To our local schools, students and advisors, and our sponsors, thank you for your continued support and your understanding. Our Committee highly values our relationship and we are committed to provide a high quality environmental educational event now and in the future. Let's make 2021 the best yet!

A TOOL FOR YOUR TOOLBOX NYS Drainage Law

By Chris Travis, Conservation District Technician

Soil and Water Conservation District staff members wear many different hats. At times, we are professional environmental stewards and are often the first called upon to assist with environmental damage, storm water events, and property development disputes. We are familiar with the concerns that our communities may have, specifically including those involving drainage issues such as changes to drainage patterns. Property owner disputes around drainage issues may elicit emotional reactions that can sometimes, unfortunately, lead to litigation.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are non-regulatory agencies and because of this, District employees are uniquely positioned to assist community members looking for answers and resolutions to problem. To better serve our communities in this capacity, we should become more familiar with NYS Drainage Law. This knowledge is a valuable tool in our toolbox which we can deploy to explain to concerned parties, the "if", and "when", of changing drainage patterns in their area.

Two cases in particular best explain the basic principle of NYS Drainage law, **Kossov v. Rathgeb-Walsh (1958)** and **Cottrell v. Herman (1991)**. A brief summary:

"A landowner in NYS will not be liable for damages to abutting property for the flow of surface waters resulting from the improvement of his land, 'provided...that the improvements are made in good faith to fit the property to some rational use to which it is adapted and the water is not artificially collected in a mass, as in a pipe, ditch or drain, and cast onto adjacent property..." (Cornell Local Roads Program – Drainage Law and Drainage Situations and Problems in NYS 2015)

I encourage Districts and landowners to familiarize themselves with the above publication, as well as the Cornell Cooperative Extension Info. Bulletin 195, Summary of NYS Drainage Law 1983. The above quotation provides the answer to one of the most frequently asked questions District's receive – do my neighbor's actions on his property make him liable for changes to water drainage on my property? With this tool in our toolbox, we can be better prepared to encourage a productive dialogue among neighbors that will hopefully lead to a resolution rather than litigation.

"It is our vision to live in a society in which future generations will have natural resources necessary to sustain and enrich their quality of life."

ONONDAGA COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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