CONSERVATION QUARTERLY

Spring 2026

Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Highlighting Farms of the North

Young Farms

Lyle and Kristina Young

Young Farms, located at 9177 Caughdenoy Road in Clay is an incredibly long-standing family farm operated by Kristina Young and her father, Lyle Young. The farm has deep historical roots, with land tied to the family dating back to the early 1800s. Passed down through generations, including ancestors from a Dutch settlement along Verplank Road, the farm has grown over time into its current 127 acres. Primarily a dairy operation with a self-sufficient homestead focus, the farm maintains a herd of around 50 head of livestock and reflects a long agricultural tradition, with buildings on the property dating back to 1911 and 1926.

Young family in the 1930s, Helen, Henry, Mary, and George

c. 1949

c. 1952

c.1973

Kristina and George Young

Kristina, representing the next generation, grew up farming with her father in Fulton and now continues the family legacy on the Clay property. Her goal is to maintain the beef herd and sustain the farm as part of her long-term livelihood. While the operation remains local, currently selling eggs by word of mouth with plans for a future roadside stand on Caughdenoy Road, it embodies a strong connection to heritage, including notable landmarks tied to the family (Youngs Creek and Youngs Corners!). Lyle was also involved with the Town of Clay Board and was a past President of the Clay Historical Society. Kristina is also active in the community as a salon owner at ShortCuts in Fulton. Though not focused on publicity, Young Farms stands as a meaningful example of generational farming and commitment to preserving a historic family homestead with a rich history in a largely forgotten part of the county.

District News

Spring Tree Planting

By Teresa Link, ISA Certified Arborist

Pictured above is the completed RFB planting.

This spring was one of the busiest planting seasons the District has had in years! Total, the District assisted with planting nearly 3,600 trees across Onondaga County (not including our tree sale). 1,300 of those trees were installed by District staff at a riparian forest buffer (RFB) planting in Lafayette. Another 1,280 were landowner installed through an Upper Susquehanna Coalition/The Nature Conservancy program. 100 trees were planted by the District at Beaver Lake Nature Center as part of the County's Ash Tree Management Reforestation Strategy. The District's first round of our "Free Trees Program" was also a success, distributing 323 trees at no cost to local municipalities and schools.

Tree Sale 2026 Summary

By Carina Coleman-Gridley and Andrew Hudnut

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2026 OCSWCD Tree Sale! We are proud to say we fulfilled 119 customer orders, totaling 11,247 trees.

The most popular offerings this year were swamp white oak, red maple, and the native flowering pack.

Some new varieties were offered this year, including the Seckel pear and American hazelnut!

Got a suggestion for a species you'd like to see next year? Send us an email at info@ocswcd.org and we would be happy to hear your thoughts!
Thanks again for everyone that purchased. We thank you for doing your part to green up our county!

NYS DEC Tree Tracker is LIVE!

Did you order from our 2026 (or prior) tree sale? If so, consider reporting your planted trees on the NYS DEC's Tree Tracker as part of the NYS 25 Million Trees Initiative. More information can be found at https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/climate-change/25-million-trees or scan this QR code go directly to the tracker.

Below: District staff planting trees at the RFB.

District News

Regional Envirothon 2026

Congratulations to the winning team "Hemlocked In" from Skaneateles for winning the 2026 Regional Envirothon. They progressed to New York State Envirothon in Cortland at the end of May to compete with winners from all across New York State. Congratulations to all schools that participated and I hope we see you again for the 2027 Regional Envirothon!

Onondaga County			
	School	Team Number/Name	Score
1st	Skaneateles	33 Hemlocked Inn	489.1
2nd	Fabius-Pompey	35 The Pack	449.8
3rd	Fabius-Pompey	32 Dum Basses	355.5
4th	Skaneateles	34 No Egrets	335.6
5th	West Genesee	31 Ain't That a Birch	282.8
6th	Fabius-Pompey	36 The Shy Pines	275.8

Meet our 2026 Summer Crew!

Madison Quaco

My name is Madison Quaco and I am going into my junior year of college at SUNY Morrisville. I am working towards a major in Environmental and Natural Resources Management and a minor in Aquaculture. I also run cross country and track for SUNY Morrisville. In my free time I enjoy fishing, hiking, and kayaking. I am excited to be working with the water chestnut crew this summer.

Josh Plumley

Hello everyone, my name is Josh Plumley. This summer I'll be the crew leader of our water chestnut removal team. I'm currently headed into my senior year of college at SUNY ESF, where I am studying natural resources management with minors in forestry and urban forestry. I spend a lot of my free time training and competing as an amateur boxer, hiking the 46 Adirondack High Peaks, playing golf, skiing during the winter, and spending time with friends and family. I grew up in the small town of Camden, New York, where I developed a passion for the environment while playing in the woods behind my house as a kid. What I am looking forward to most this summer is helping communities in Onondaga County clean and promote biodiversity in their waterways, working on a boat in the sun while doing so.

Sophia Eallonardo

My name is Sophia Eallonardo and I'm member of the water chestnut crew this summer! Im a senior at SUNY ESF majoring in Environmental Biology with a minor in Biotechnology. I'm originally from Lockport, Illinois and this summer I am looking forward to getting hands on experience with all aspects of invasive species removal. Outside of work and school I enjoy spending time with my friends, thrifting, hiking, and reading.

District News

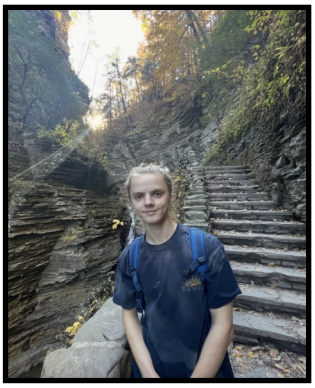
Meet our 2026 Summer Crew!

Faith Wheeler

My name is Faith Wheeler, and I am a team member for the Emerald Ash Borer / Hemlock Woolly Adelgid program in Onondaga County. Last summer I was a buffer steward for Chenango County but have recently graduated from SUNY ESF with a Bachelor's in Forest Resource Management so I am staying in the Syracuse area. I am originally from Sidney, NY, and I enjoy being outside, gardening, and my cat, Bug. I am looking forward to this new environment and learning more about invasive species and obtaining my pesticide certification!

Giovanni Carrero

My name is Giovanni Carrero and I am from Monroe, NY. I recently graduated from Binghamton University with my B.S in Environmental Science: Ecosystems and have my associate's degree from SUNY OCC. I am going to be spending the next 3 months on the Emerald Ash Borer team and then pivoting to spend 3 months on the Hydroseeding team. In my free time I enjoy watching tv, hiking, and cooking. I am really excited for this opportunity to experience two different roles in OCSWCD, learning new skills while refining existing ones.



Hayden Loan

Hello! My name is Hayden Loan and I am a Watershed Inspector for Skaneateles Lake. I was born and raised right here in Syracuse. I received my Bachelors of Science from ESF and now I am in charge of patrolling the watershed and making sure residents and contractors are following the watershed rules and regulations. It's great to work in Skaneateles and very meaningful to me to keep our city's water clean! In my spare time I like hiking around, identifying plants, basketball, winning trivia, and listening to music.

Nick Skinner

Hello! My name is Nicholas Skinner and I am a Watershed Inspector for Skaneateles Lake. I am originally from Oklahoma. Along with Hayden, I will patrol the watershed and make sure residents and contractors are following the watershed rules and regulations. I look forward to becoming more familiar with the Skaneateles Lake Watershed. In my free time I do long-distance kayak racing, hiking, and I'm a huge dancer.

Josh Lefkowicz

My name is Josh Lefkowicz and I'm interning as a hydroseeding aide for the summer of 2026. Andrew Hudnut, a Resource Conservation Specialist, and I will spend the summer revegetating vulnerable areas throughout Onondaga county. This is my 3rd summer interning at OCSWCD, as I have worked as a member and crew leader on the water chestnut hand pulling team. I'm going into my senior year of college at SUNY Geneseo, where I am pursuing a BS in Biology with minors in data analytics and business studies. In my free time, I enjoy playing rugby, camping and cooking. I'm super excited for the opportunity to be back at OCSWCD and to be working on a new project.

District News

Spill Cleanup Equipment Update

By Eric Jensen, Resource Conservation Specialist

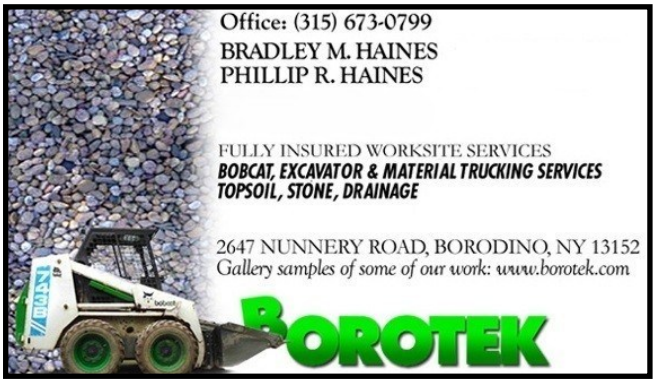
The Onondaga County Soil & Water District has taken delivery of a new Schwarze Super Vacuum trailer. It will address local needs and allow the district to mitigate/clean-up dry fertilizer spills on paved roads across the county in a timely manner, as part of our agricultural spill response program. The trailer unit is designed to be towed to the site with a pickup truck. The gasoline-powered vacuum unit can cleanup dry fertilizer on paved surfaces as it is pulled over the area. The spilled pellets can be removed to the farm and reused at the farm while local water quality is protected from potential nutrient pollution. The unit has trailer lights as well as a safety beacon. A garage style shed is in place to store the trailer unit while not in use to protect it from the weather and always be ready to respond to an emergency. The District is thankful to NYS SAM grant funding through NYS Senator Ryan and former NYS Senator Mannion's' offices for this opportunity to come into reality.

New Straw Blower

By Mark E. Burger, Program Manager

The SLWAP and OCSWCD recently took delivery of a new Finn B40 straw blower. This unit will help staff expedite seeding and mulching and establishment of final vegetation at project sites across the watershed and the County. This unit was specifically purchased as it is smaller, lighter, and able to be towed off road with a UTV into remote project sites that require vegetative stabilization.

A special "Thank You" to our sponsors!



CAYUGA
50th Anniversary

CAYUGA TREE SERVICE, INC.
BOX 381, 5660 VALLEY DRIVE
ELBRIDGE, N.Y. 13060

A. CHRISTOPHER SANDSTROM
I.S.A. Certified Arborist NYS # 158
ASCA Consulting Arborist # 314
(315) 689-3288
Fax (315) 689-9303
Email: csandstrom@cayugatreeservices.com
cayugatreeservices.com
OVER

RICCELLI TRUCKING INC

RICCELLI TRUCKING, INC.
PO BOX 6401 • SYRACUSE • NY • 13217
PH: 315-701-0002 • FAX: 315-458-9690

Skaneateles Lake Watershed News

Milk Production and Solar Energy – Are Both In Direct Conflict With Each Other?

A summary of the presentation at the 2025 SLWAP Annual Meeting by Mike McMahon, Chairman, SLWAP WAPRC

NY State is poised to be the largest dairy processor in the United States! But, how are we supposed to feed all our cows if we continue to loose the valuable land that is required to grow all the crops and recycle all the organic nutrients generated in this, natures perfect recycling venture?

Here are some ideas how to protect this land to support dairy and to support solar.

Mineral soil groups. Restrict putting solar on the top 5 mineral soil groups. Currently, USDA recommends the remaining soil mineral groups (our poorer quality soils that typically do not support production of agricultural commodities).

We support the concept of solar arrays on poorer quality soils not suitable for agricultural production, but three-phase high-voltage lines nearby can negatively impact our dairy herds (please see items 5 and 6 below).

Model solar laws so that the laws are available to smaller towns, especially those with no zoning, as these are typically the communities being targeted by solar developers.

Solar developers should be required to produce a bond with a 2% escalation clause per year, so that there is a fund available for decommissioning solar arrays. Most contamination occurs during the decommissioning process of solar arrays.

Stop allowing solar developers from appealing to NYS to allow projects that generate greater than 20 MW of energy. This takes decision making and compliance opportunities out of the hands of the local communities and bypasses these communities' local regulations and review processes. (With today's technology, it typically takes ~6 acres of land, in solar arrays, to generate 1 MW of energy).

The solar array system is only 12 to 15% efficient because of the weather in Central New York and the general inefficiency of the solar voltaic system. This leads to stray voltage that has been known and documented to contribute to mastitis and other metabolic issues in dairy cattle. Stray voltage can be mitigated by implementing battery storage systems. These systems can govern voltage output thereby eliminating the spikes that occur as a result of direct feed from panels to the grid. Developers don't want to do this because of the added expenses.

Solar energy spikes when either the sun comes out and/or snow slides off from the panels.

Currently solar developers are paying ten times the leasing rate for agricultural land and three to five times the purchase price for agricultural land.

NY State will need to make a large investment into their infrastructure to support the solar grid into the future.

Per the title of this article, we strongly believe and encourage that nuclear energy is the better choice for the future. Small nuclear energy facilities are so efficient that they only require a land area approximately the size of a tractor trailer.

Small nuclear energy facilities are 90 to 95% efficient. They resemble bio digesters on farms that produce energy from dairy manure of 500 cow farms. Belgium is a country that has demonstrated great examples of how this program could be implemented successfully. No matter what, the grid supporting energy infrastructure and transmission needs to be substantially beefed up!

Skaneateles Lake Watershed News

What Keeps Code Enforcement Officers Up At Night Addressing Solar Field Projects?

A summary of the presentation at the 2025 SLWAP Annual Meeting by Kevin McMahon, Codes Enforcement Officer for the Towns of Cortlandville, Homer, and Virgil

It would be ideal if NY State would develop a template for towns so municipalities can adequately review, comment on, and support sound solar projects. This would also help independent engineers and Soil and Water Conservation Districts better address runoff and soil stabilization.
Right now, solar developers are building through 2028 and buying equipment and land to divest from future federal funding cuts, highlighting the need for stronger oversight.

Site Design and Environmental Concerns

- Requirements are needed for screening and privacy borders for neighbors, adhering to local fire codes.
- Solar arrays on hillsides are fixed panels that typically face south.
- Solar arrays should not be constructed on wetlands.
- Developers should not discharge clean water; stormwater must be managed on-site to pre-development conditions.
- Service roads should not exceed 8% slope (currently up to 20%), as runoff is causing erosion and flooding.
- Daily maintenance of earthen roads is required, with same-day repair of ruts.
- Wildlife studies should be conducted prior to development, with consideration for wildlife corridors.

Infrastructure and Community Impact

- Road damage during construction, including broken shoulders, should be repaired at the developer's expense.
- Frequent sales make it difficult for municipalities to track the Owner of Record and responsible parties.

Safety and Emergency Access

- Two points of ingress/egress are required; one is insufficient for fire access.
- Pull-offs every 500 feet should be required for emergency vehicles.
- Standardized signage must clearly display owner/operator information to avoid emergency delays.
- Inverter noise can exceed the 60 dB limit when multiple units are present.
- Battery storage sites are a serious concern for first responders and Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs). These fires can burn for days, exhausting VFD resources and limiting their ability to respond to other emergencies. Safer technologies should be utilized.

Review, Operations, and Enforcement

- Code Enforcement Officers must be able to fully review sites and require deficiencies to be corrected before energizing, including runoff and wildlife concerns.
- Operation and Maintenance agreements must be provided and include weed management to protect nearby agricultural land.
- The date of last production should be documented in O/M agreements.

Bonding and Testing

- Sites should be tested for contamination before, during, and after development.
- Bonds must be provided so municipalities have adequate resources to address issues.

Additionally, newer solar panels contain fewer heavy metals than previous versions.

Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District

Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Board Of Directors

Craig Dennis, *Chair, Practical Farm*
Carlton Conklin, *Vice-Chair, Farm Bureau Rep.*
James Pollard, *Treasurer, Grange Representative*
Mark Olson, *At Large Non-ag*
Jessi Lyons, *At Large Business Representative*
Ken Bush, *County Legislator*
Jeremiah Thompson, *County Legislator*

Staff

Mark Burger, *Executive Director*
Aaron Buchta, *Program Manager—Planning*
Eva Brown, *Account Clerk II*
Danny Kite, *Program Manager—Implementation*
Conor Larkin, *Conservation District Technician*
Teresa Link, *Resource Conservation Specialist*
Alyssa Derr, *Resource Conservation Specialist*
Andrew Hudnut, *Resource Conservation Specialist*
Carina Coleman-Gridley, *Administrative Assistant*

Phone: 315-457-0325
Fax: 315-457-0410
Email: info@ocswcd.org
Website: www.ocswcd.org

Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program

Watershed Agricultural Program Review Committee (WAPRC)

Mike McMahon, *Chair, Cortland Co.*
Craig Richards, *Vice Chair, Onondaga Co.*
Eric Brayman, *Onondaga Co.*
Andrew Leubner, *Onondaga Co.*
David Perry, *Cortland Co.*
Gaelen Head, *Cayuga Co.*
Daniel Ripley, *Cayuga Co.*
Rich Abbott, *City of Syracuse*
Dale Kehoe, *Counsel Member, non-voting*
Tim Leubner, *Counsel Member, non-voting*

Staff

Mark Burger, *Program Manager*
Eric Jensen, *Farm & Nutrient Mgmt. Planner*
Kim Clark, *Conservation District Technician*
Chris Travis, *Resource Conservation Specialist—Engineer In Training*
Carina Coleman-Gridley, *Administrative Assistant*

Phone: 315-457-0325
Fax: 315-457-0410
Email: info@ocswcd.org
Website: www.ocswcd.org

IN CASE ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED AT AN AG SPILL EMERGENCY, PLEASE CALL

MARK BURGER

315-415-5057

Your Sponsorship Reaches 1,785 residents

$250/year= 4 issues

ONONDAGA COUNTY SOIL &
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
6680 Onondaga Lake Parkway
Liverpool, NY 13088
Phone: 315-457-0325
Fax: 315-457-0410
Email: info@ocswcd.org
www.ocswcd.org

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.*