Message from the Manager

This has been a year full of activity again for the Soil and Water Conservation District. We’ve been busy implementing conservation in every corner of the county. I hope that the new year finds new opportunities to continue our mission of helping people make wise decisions regarding the use of our natural resources. Please take some time to read through this newsletter and contact us if you have any questions or comments or if you would like to become a cooperator with the District.

I have received a few phone calls and emails asking where this newsletter has been and how they can be updated on District activities. As media and outreach avenues have changed over the years, the District is changing with it. This past year we opened up a Facebook page. We will be updating the public on projects and activities on a more frequent basis than this newsletter in that format. Please follow us on Facebook and give us a like. Wishing you all the best in 2016!

Jon Negley - District Manager

The Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District has begun the arduous, yet important task of managing, preserving, and ensuring open access to records that support information needs and which also document the history of our agency through an electronic storage system. During this process, the District uncovered its first issue of this Newsletter, dated October, 1966. Its goal both then and now, is to make the best use of each acre of land in Tompkins County and to keep you informed regarding District activities and the many services available to you. We greatly appreciate the 50 years of opportunity to provide this forum and the opportunity to serve you since 1944 and into the future!
Attention Tompkins County Farmers!

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo launched the New York State Grown & Certified program and announced a new $20 million food hub in the Bronx to increase access to farm-fresh produce. The New York State Grown & Certified program identifies and promotes New York producers who adhere to New York’s food safety and environmental sustainability programs, and assures consumers that the food they are buying is local and produced at a higher-standard. To support the new certification program and increase access to farm-fresh food, the State is also building a state-of-the-art food hub that significantly expands distribution capacity, provides new markets for farmers, and creates 95 permanent jobs and 150 construction jobs in Hunts Point.

“New York State agriculture is an essential pillar of our economy, bolstered by the modern market demands for safer and more sustainable food,” Governor Cuomo said. “The New York Grown & Certified Program strengthens the link between producers and consumers and provides new opportunities for agricultural development. By connecting Upstate farmers to new markets with a state-of-the-art food hub and promoting the consumption of healthy and environmentally conscious food, these initiatives will have extraordinary environmental, nutritional and economic benefits for all New Yorkers.”

More than 100 qualifying vegetable and fruit farms from across New York State already expressed interest before New York State Grown & Certified officially launched. The Department of Agriculture and Markets will work with New York State producers across all commodities to assist them in qualifying for the voluntary certification program. To ensure maximum environmental sustainability and food safety, participation in existing certification programs, including the State’s Agricultural Environmental Management program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Good Agricultural Practices program, is required for participation in New York State Grown & Certified.

More information about this opportunity is available at:

http://certified.ny.gov/
Fields of Green are Golden

By Paul Gier—Natural Resource Program Specialist

As winter is starting to take hold of its season, I am appreciating the extra care being given to our productive Tompkins county soils. How are we protecting those soils? What is being employed in greater capacity? The expanded use of cover crops on ground that has been traditionally left idle for the winter months. Fields that were once only populated with corn stubble are now green with a working crop during those cold winter months.

Why the appreciation? Cover crops are adding so much to our soils’ health and mechanically stabilizing the soil thereby reducing erosion potential. Cover crops can be a small grain, grass, or a legume seeding. Different crops have different benefits but any cover crop planted will add to soil health in a positive way. Examples of cover crops include winter/cereal rye, wheat, oats, clovers, or triticale. Even tillage radish is being used as a natural plow pan busting crop.

With an established cover crop the roots of the cover are locking the soil in place and holding the soil from being eroded by winter snow thaws and early spring time rains. As the cover crop grows, it improves the soil’s structure creating pores which will contribute to the soil being able to hold more water. Some cover crops provide nitrogen to the soil, other species take up nitrogen and hold it in place for the next season’s crop. Cover crops also help to break up soil compaction.

While the crop is growing above the ground, below ground the roots are providing an environment for sustaining soil microbes, earthworm and other organisms. All these organisms help to enhance the recycling of nutrients, create soil aeration and porosity. Cover crops can be used as an additional forage crop or incorporated right back into the soil to increase organic matter.

Attending soil health workshops held throughout the year will give an amazing amount of information on the varieties and benefits of different cover crops. Best of all, it is an opportunity to network and share success trials with other farmers and landowners. Even this year with the drought conditions experienced, production would have been even less had it not been for the benefits added by the cover crop planted the year before.

Have an interest to further examine the positive results of cover cropping? Please give us a call and we will be happy to share our knowledge and put you in touch with other cooperating partners who share our enthusiasm in the benefits of cover cropping. Remember, keep your soil covered and growing throughout the year to feed your soil.
Hydrilla Management Update

In December of 2016, the Hydrilla Program Manager, James Balyszak, decided to take a position as a police officer with the City of Ithaca Police Department. We know James will serve and protect the citizens of Ithaca with as much diligence and determination as he provided to the Hydrilla Project. We wish James luck as he embarks on this new career.

James’ departure does leave a hole within the program that we are looking to fill internally within the District. Along with the Hydrilla Task Force, the District will continue the fight against the spread of the invasive plant Hydrilla. We have had major successes to date in the Cayuga Inlet battling this plant. We will continue applying herbicides in 2017 to control the spread, but monitoring has shown that our efforts to date have been extremely successful!

The recent discovery of Hydrilla in Aurora, NY along the Eastern Shore of Cayuga Lake has raised concerns about the spread of Hydrilla throughout the State. We will be offering assistance, when possible, to our partner agencies in controlling that population. If you find plants in a local pond/lake or stream that look similar to that shown below, please contact the District!

“Additional information on the Cayuga Lake Watershed Hydrilla Project can be found on the Project website at www.Stophydrilla.org”

Hydrilla - serrated edges up close. Photo courtesy of New York State Federation of Lake Associations and Jon Reis, photographer.
Erosion Control with Food Waste!

TCSWCD has recently been awarded funds through the NYSDEC Water Quality Improvement Project grant to start a compost product based Best Management Practice (BMP) project. Through the grant, TCSWCD was able to purchase a Bark Blower which will be used to apply the compost blankets and build erosion control compost socks.

TCSWCD will be working with many agencies on this project including the Cornell Waste Management Institute and Cayuga Compost. This project will also include educational, research and demonstration aspects to help others better understand the capabilities of compost based BMPs.

The main goal of this project is to reduce the amount of nutrient, sediment and pollutant transport into bodies of water in and around Tompkins County.

Jean Bonhotal of Cornell Waste Management Institute applying a compost blanket
TCSWCD has again been awarded funding to host a tire collection event. Tires will be collected and sent to a recycling facility where they will be ground into useful and environmentally sustainable materials. Check our website periodically for our announcement of the upcoming date and location for 2017. 2016’s event in the Town of Lansing brought in a record amount of tires in the history of our hosting these events. Over 72 tons (2,385) of tires were collected and processed! Thank you to all who participated.
It is the mission of the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to provide assistance to citizens and units of local government in making sound decisions on the management of soil, water and related natural resources based on their needs. The SWCD will further assist in the implementation of decisions by seeking and coordinating technical and financial assistance from federal, state, and local governments, and private sources.

The Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District (TCSWD) has recently joined Facebook! The TCSWCD Facebook page will showcase the numerous conservation projects in progress and those we have recently completed. The page also contains contact information for the office and a timeline of upcoming events. Take a few moments out of your day to give us a visit and a LIKE!

https://www.facebook.com/TompkinsSWCD/

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District Staff

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(Schuyler & Tompkins Counties)
Justin Olsen . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Soil Conservationist
Lori Beach . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Civil Engineer Technician (Area III)

Board meetings are held monthly on the 2nd Monday at 3:30 P.M. in the District office. The public is always invited.

The Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service prohibit discrimination in all their programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.