

Watershed Agricultural Council
nycwatershed.org



2020 Annual Report

Our Mission:

To promote the economic viability of agriculture and forestry, the protection of water quality, and the conservation of working landscapes through strong local leadership and sustainable public-private partnerships.

Thank you to our collaborative partners: New York City Department of Environmental Protection, Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County, United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency.

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Times of Transition

If we have learned anything this past year, it is the importance of community, the value of the natural world and the significance of rural economies. The Watershed Agricultural Council, like so many others, faced unprecedented challenges and unexpected transition in 2020 but met them with perseverance, commitment and compassion. Despite it all—our fields flourished, our markets soared, and our small towns opened their big hearts for visitors from near and far. Our forests were havens for those escaping the built environment, and our farms supplied upstate al fresco feasts to downstate school lunches.

Throughout this report you will read stories of success, accomplishment and pride

that were made possible by our Agriculture, Conservation Easement, Forestry and Economic Viability Programs. As the world around us paused, we carried on—our staff, farmers, loggers and partners continued to work together to protect our people, our land and our water. We also took this year as an opportunity to fortify our relationship with our main funder, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. It's undoubtedly clear that we must cooperate and collaborate to achieve our shared mission of preserving water quality through sustainable working landscapes. We know that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Together we are stronger, and together we will prevail.



Agriculture



264

Active Farms

147,000

Acres

30

Educational
Events

1,500

Acres of
Cover Crops

A Team Approach to Overcoming Challenges

2020 has presented the West of Hudson Watershed Agricultural Program (WAP) with many challenges, but with the teamwork of our partners and dedicated professional staff, the WAP met the challenge and has continued to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) throughout the region. Staff used a variety of methods to continue full operations during the pandemic which eventually lead to on-farm visits when the health department guidelines allowed.

Four of our large structural BMPs began implementation in late May from previously contracted projects in the Fall/Winter of 2019. One of those projects was located at Squan I, LLC, in Meredith, NY owned by Ron Cieri. At ~300 animal units, it is one of the largest beef farms in the NYC Watershed. The 1,000+ acre farm has approximately 140 cow/calf pairs and runs another 60-80 head of young stock. Since joining

the program in 2010, numerous BMPs have been implemented to help facilitate rotational grazing on roughly 600 acres of pasture on the farm.

The current project is a covered feeding area for ~160 weaned calves and feeder cattle. The 8,500 square foot feeding area will be split into two sections for each group of cattle, and there is a centralized 3,500 square foot manure storage that is sized to hold five months of manure which can then be spread according to their Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). This structure replaces the old barnyard that had a watercourse running through it where the animals were historically fed through the winter and there was little to no means to collect manure.

Another large project completed was a 4,000 square foot roofed barnyard and feeding area at Black Willow Morgans Farm, which is a horse breeding and training facility located in Delhi,

NY near Lake Delaware. The owners, Jeff and Kim Wilson, breed, train and sell Morgan horses. This BMP was designed to provide a covered area for the 25+ horses to be fed on during the winter, as well as a place to stack and store manure. Previously the horses were fed outside where runoff from the manure could not be controlled and ran directly to a watercourse. The new structure contains the manure so that it can be properly managed and spread according to their NMP. The new BMP protects surface and ground water by diverting it away from the site, so it is kept clean as it flows to the Little Delaware River.

While 2020 has brought unprecedented challenges, we are proud of our team of professionals including the WAC, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County, Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.

Pilot Manure Injection Program

In an effort to further reduce phosphorus and nitrogen loss, enhance crop production and move to the next level of manure management, the WAP led by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County (CCE), facilitated a coulter manure injection demonstration on several farms from August through October 2020. The purpose of these demonstrations was to allow farmers and program staff to see what this technology looks like, and how it works in our soil and terrain. Research has shown that these type of injectors are effective in reducing soluble phosphorus loss in surface waters, and they are compatible with no-till production and injection of manure on sod and in stony soils, all objectives the WAP would like to meet. Thus far, the results look promising and the demonstration will help the program consider how this type of technology can be implemented efficiently through the WAP.



Forestry



4,426

Acres Enrolled
in 480a
Tax Law

54

Timber Harvests
using BMPs

68

Stewardship
Projects on
477 Acres

Resiliency in a Time of Unprecedented Challenges

This past year presented loggers, forest landowners and foresters in the NYC Watershed with unprecedented challenges. The Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) Forestry Program adapted to meet these challenges with the help of our program participants. Over the past year the WAC helped 35 landowners enroll 4,426 acres in the 480a Forest Tax Law in the NYC Watershed. Through our Best Management Practices (BMP) Program, water quality BMPs were implemented on 54 timber harvests. The Management Assistance Program facilitated the implementation of 68 forest stewardship projects, effecting more than 477 acres of watershed forest. The Watershed Forestry

Institute for Teachers hosted 25 teachers weekly, using virtual learning techniques over the course of a month. The Bus Tours and Green Connections programs were most affected by virus mitigation efforts within NYC. With the help of participating teachers, staff switched to virtual techniques for delivering educational curriculum to classrooms, providing a source of support for teachers as they transitioned their classroom activities to remote learning. 2020 was certainly a year of challenges, but every step of the way staff and participants met those challenges with creative and engaging solutions.

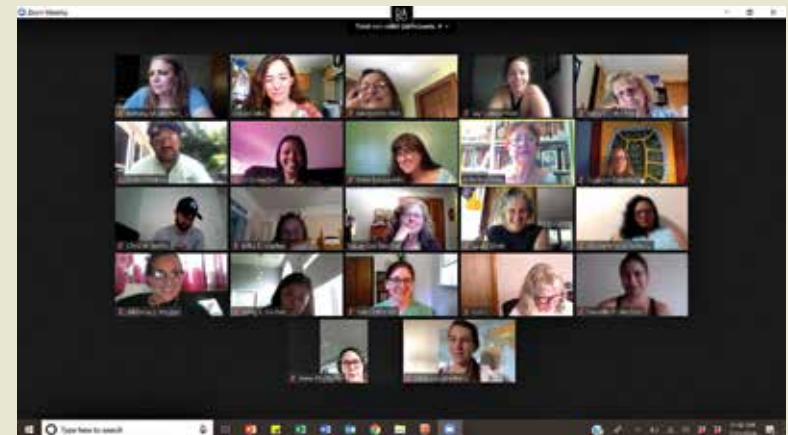


Watershed Forestry Institute for Teachers Goes Virtual

For the past 19 summers the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) has gathered teachers for five days in Upstate NY to explore the waters, forests and communities of the NYC Watershed at the Watershed Forestry Institute for Teachers (WFIT). In light of COVID-19, we decided to take our “summer camp for adults” virtual, but how do you translate five days in the woods to Zoom? Throughout July, we met online twice weekly with our 25 upstate and downstate teachers. Sessions included games, small group discussions, conversations with forestry, history and engineering experts, and time to plan how to incorporate watershed forestry into remote and hybrid teaching.

Much-loved in-person experiences had to be re-imagined: Can't run a streamside forest filtration experiment? Mail the teachers supplies to build and test their own filters at home, then have them share and compare their filtration results by posting photos and videos online. Can't tour reservoirs, forests and farms together? Build a Google Earth tour of the NYC Watershed and water supply system, and challenge the teachers to locate and document parts of the system near their homes then make a virtual collage using their photos and videos.

Despite the challenges of adapting to a virtual setting, the grit and pioneering spirit of our teachers motivated us to deliver a program that, in the words of one participant, “provided a thorough examination of the evolution of the NYC Watershed, including the forests, communities and stakeholders involved. I wish all NY educators received this vital education!”



Economic Viability



316

**Pure Catskills
Members**

8

**Approved Micro
Grants Totaling
\$27,318**

1

**One Business Plan
Completed**

Buying Local – A Way of Life

2020 has been challenging, unprecedented and at times unnerving, but it has also shown us the importance of knowing where your food comes from, supporting local businesses, and the strength of small communities. Buying locally, knowing the source of your food, and committing to supporting local farm and food businesses is no longer a trend—it is a lifestyle.

One of the greatest strengths of this region is the diversity of products being grown, produced and raised by our local farm and food producers.

The Catskills represent the definition of what it means to 'buy local,' and is a robust foodshed offering everything from honey, meat varieties of all kinds, vegetables, any dairy product you need (from cow to goat), maple, fruits and so much more, to farmers' markets, farm activities, social distancing options, you name it—we have it.

Now more than ever, the work of our Economic Viability (EV) Program to promote, showcase and support our small, committed and diversified farm and forest businesses through Pure Catskills,

social media and our grant programming is invaluable. We are a trusted source making direct connections between farms and businesses to consumers during a time of such uncertainty. Though our programming shifted, we were working from home, and all of our favorite events were cancelled, the EV Program was able to dedicate our workload and time to being a resource so many people still rely on, and we are proud of all that was accomplished this year.

Our Pure Catskills members, along with all of our watershed farmers and

foresters, represent the very best of this region, clean water, high-quality food, and the future of food purchasing. With the world changing so rapidly around us, our hardworking farmers and producers remain persistent, relentless, and most importantly they remain consistent. Our hope, especially after this year, is that you'll join our buy local movement and make it a continual and integral part of your lifestyle.



Conservation Easements

32,097

Acres
Closed

204

Easement
Landowners

40

Activity
Requests

A Critical Time for Working Lands

Much like our farm and forest families, the Watershed Agricultural Council's (WAC) Easement Program faced unprecedented times in 2020. The year began on a high note with the addition of two forest easements, totaling 400+ acres. But just as spring had sprung, a usually energizing time, our world literally shut down. We were sent home to work and acquisition efforts were placed on hold. Despite the many stresses, it became abundantly clear that outdoor life, access to open space, and a steadfast local economy were more important than ever. It appeared that despite the uncertainty there could not be a more critical time for working lands conserva-

tion. With that as motivation, our team persevered. This year became an "all-hands on deck" approach to assist landowners with education and stewardship. Even with the shutdown, we were just as busy. Staff processed ten notifications, 40 activity requests, including 16 commercial timber harvests, several new rural enterprises, three rights-of-way, and one new agricultural building. We are incredibly proud of the easement landholders who carried on despite this year's challenges. Our soils may be tough here in the Catskills, but so are those who sow it. Here's to a bigger, better and healthier 2021!

Working Lands Remain Active

While many things were paused this year, working landscapes were as active as ever. When you combine a hard-working farmer, well-managed property, a working easement, a good logger and a tough stream crossing—what do you get? Our Catskills economy—working farms and forests supplying NYC with drinking water and conserving the natural resources.

The 400+ acre Tuttle Farm has been a mainstay of the Windham, NY area for generations. The Tuttle Farm is one of the largest remaining farms in the Windham area, due in part to the working conservation easement placed on the property through the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) to help continue its legacy. Scott Tuttle has managed the 300+ acres of woods on the farm with the help of Dave Jaeger who is harvested 175 acres this year.

A team effort allowed for this harvest:

1. The WAC Easement and Forestry Programs oversaw the harvest, loaned a 30' and 40' bridge and provided cost share to help implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to make it possible.
2. Bridges were placed end-to-end across the 70' wide Batavia Kill to allow access to the woods being harvested.
3. The BMPs helped to slow and disperse run off keeping it out of streams.

This team effort is part of the WAC playing an active role in keeping NYC's drinking water clean and Catskills streams running clear.



East of Hudson



69

Active Farms



7,305

Acres



15

BMPs Completed

Offering Support in a Time of Need

With Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties having some of the highest COVID-19 infection rates in the state, the East of Hudson (EOH) Watershed region was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Virtually every EOH farm partner has been affected; vegetable growers and meat producers rushed to create online ordering and contactless pick-up systems, orchards radically modified their Pick-Your-Own operations, fiber producers scrambled to secure animal shearing and fiber processing services and equestrian farms were forced to suspend operations for the duration of the “NYS on Pause”

period. In an effort to support our farm partners through these challenges, the EOH Program focused on increasing communication with farms, providing technical assistance to improve agricultural practices, and prioritizing high-impact implementations and emergency repairs to ensure Best Management Practices (BMPs) continue to protect drinking water quality.

EOH staff increased their communication, outreach and site visits to ensure the program was in contact with our participants, and able to provide assistance when necessary. The program partnered with extension and other agricultural

service providers to share emergency resources as well as information on the pandemic, best practices and farm assistance programs.

EOH staff also worked with farms to improve management practices, better utilize resources and increase efficiency with the implementation of Nutrient Management Plans, Forage and Biomass Plantings and Prescribed Grazing Plans.

East of Hudson’s focus for implementation has been to complete critical emergency repairs to BMPs and to replace conservation practices that have reached the end of their lifespan. In response to farm requests for assistance, the EOH

Program has designed and implemented repairs to wastewater systems, underground infiltration, structures for water control, underground outlets, heavy use areas, dumpster pads, compost pads, vegetated treatment areas and access roads. These repairs improved farming operations while ensuring BMPs continue to protect water quality.

While 2020 has been extremely challenging for our farms, the East of Hudson Agriculture Program has worked closely with our participants and partner agencies to support and strengthen our farm community.



REVENUE JULY 1, 2019 - JUNE 30, 2020

	\$	%
Federal	33,368.00	0.18%
Donated Services	364,894.00	2.00%
Program Service Revenue	25,107.00	0.14%
*Interest and Gains/Loss of Asset Sale	687,607.00	3.76%
NYC DEP	17,161,549.00	93.92%

Total **18,272,525.00** **100.00%**

EXPENDITURES JULY 1, 2019 - JUNE 30, 2020

Forestry Program	1,376,628.00	7.80%
Easement Program	3,679,013.00	20.83%
Agricultural Program	9,490,690.00	53.74%
Economic Viability and Outreach	494,010.00	2.80%
Administration & DEP	2,253,743.00	12.76%
Donated Services	364,894.00	2.07%

Total **17,658,978.00** **100.00%**

Credits

Art Director/Editor: Heather Magnan
Assistant Editor: Kristan Morley
Graphic Design: Cynthia Dunne

Photos:
Cover: Heather Magnan
p 2: Heather Magnan
p 3: Heather Magnan (1-3),
Heather Hilson (4)
p 4: Kari Sheridan
p 5: Rob Orleski (1-2), Heather Magnan
(inset)
p 6: Heather Hilson

p 7: Heather Hilson (1-2),
Jessica Alba (inset)
p 8: Kristan Morley
p 9: Kristan Morley, Heather Magnan,
Monticello Farmers' Market
p 10: Heather Magnan
p 11: Kristan Morley (top),
Heather Magnan (2-3),
Karl VonBerg (inset)

p 12: Gibson Durnford
p 13: Gibson Durnford (1-2),
Heather Magnan (3)
p 14: Kari Sheridan
p 15: Heather Magnan
Back Cover: Heather Magnan



Help Us Save Farms and Protect Water Quality

Farmland, clean water and a way of life. All three are dependent on a thriving agricultural community that is threatened by rising land prices and development.

Now, more than ever, we need your help. Help us safeguard these irreplaceable resources — our rural landscape and our family farms — by protecting regional farmlands and working landscapes. Donate today to help our programs continue to support farm and forest landowners.

nycwatershed.org/donate

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