



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

MAINE NRCS CONSERVATION NEWS

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Supporting Agriculture in Maine

Farmers Markets

Farmers markets are on the rise, in Maine and nationally. Farmers markets improve and build healthy communities. When purchasing your produce this season, consider visiting a farmers market or farm stand near you. By doing this you:

- Create relationships.
- Enjoy food at its freshest and most flavorful. It's better for you and tastes better than the food that has traveled thousands of miles from farm to plate.
- Try new foods. If you're not sure how to prepare a particular fruit or vegetable, ask the vendor for suggestions.
- Get in tune with the seasons. Farmers markets educate us about what foods are local and when they're at their peak.
- Learn the story of your food. Ask questions about how your food was grown and when it was picked.
- Invest in local farms and businesses. By enabling farmers to sell their produce at retail cost, farmers markets help sustain businesses and families in your area, and provide a venue for new and small-scale farms.
- Preserve farmland and the environment. Farmers markets keep local farms in business, which reduces sprawl and protects farmland and open spaces.

As a conservation agency, we provide financial and technical assistance to farmers to conserve the natural resources on many of these farms. Now you can enjoy the benefits of our assistance and support the farmers in a different way.

To find farmers markets in your area, visit www.getrealmaine.com/.

Open Farm Day

Sunday, July 21, 2013 is Open Farm Day throughout Maine! Take yourself and your family to one or more of the farms opening their doors to the public and learn something new about agriculture. You will find such things as demonstrations, displays, animals, crops, field tours, hay rides, petting zoos, and items for sale. A fun, family adventure!

Go to www.getrealmaine.com/ for a list of participating farms.

Agricultural Fairs

Twenty-four agricultural fairs are scheduled throughout Maine from July-October. You can find a list of the fairs on the Get Real Get Maine website at www.getrealmaine.com/. A fun day for the whole family!



Farm Bill Passes Senate

The U.S. Senate passed a \$955 billion farm bill on June 10th and now it is at the House.

“Passage of this legislation by the Senate is a promising development and an important one for rural communities and families,” said Secretary Vilsack. “It provides a strong safety net for agriculture, while making needed reforms by eliminating the direct payment system and tightening payment and eligibility require-

ments. The Administration intends to continue to work with the Senate through the conference process to achieve the savings included in the President’s Budget in the crop insurance and commodity programs while addressing the important priorities of the bill. This is not just a farm bill—it’s a trade bill, a conservation bill, an innovation bill and above all, a job creation bill.”

New Online Tool Helps Producers Estimate Carbon Stowed in Soil

A new online tool, called COMET-FARM™, enables agricultural producers to calculate how much carbon their conservation actions can remove from the atmosphere.

As a collaboration among NRCS, Colorado State University and USDA’s Climate Change Program Office, COMET-FARM™ will also help producers calculate and understand how land management decisions impact energy use and carbon emissions.

“With the help of USDA’s conservation technology and efforts, agriculture and forestry have the unique opportunity to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it permanently in healthy soils,” NRCS Acting Chief Jason Weller said. “Tools like COMET-FARM™ will make it easier for producers to evaluate their soil’s carbon holding potential and allow for the adaptation of proactive climate change adaptation strategies.”

COMET-FARM™ works like this: producers enter information about their land and management using a secure online interface – including location, soil characteristics, land uses, tillage practices and nutrient use. Only the producer has access to data inputs and the information calculated by the tool. The tool then estimates carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions associated with conservation

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New Online Tool (continued)

practices for cropland, pasture, rangeland, livestock operations and energy.

Agricultural conservation, especially soil and crop management, can contribute to removing CO₂ from the air. Historically, conversion of native lands to crop production using intensive tillage has resulted in significant releases of soil carbon.

According to USDA's Agriculture and Forestry Greenhouse Gas Inventory, conservation tillage and other practices have helped reduce these losses and, in many cases, reverse them. Agricultural soils present an opportunity to absorb a significant amount of carbon. Carbon-rich soils are healthy soils, meaning they're more productive and resilient to extreme weather events, such as drought, because they hold more water and reduce soil temperature.

NRCS is helping producers employ a variety of different conservation practices on their land to better enable the soil to capture the carbon, including no-till farming. COMET-FARM™ will be instrumental in helping producers decide on the practices that are best for their operation and their land.

COMET-FARM™ is applicable to all agricultural lands in the lower 48 states. The tool is available for use at www.comet-farm.com. Future model releases are planned by USDA as new methods for calculating greenhouse gas emissions become available.

*National Pollinator Week*

Secretary Tom Vilsack has proclaimed June 17-23, 2013 as National Pollinator Week.



Pollinators play a crucial role in the reproduction of many plants, including many of the plants that provide our nation's food, fiber, fuel and medicine. But despite their value, many pollinator species are in trouble. In an effort to fight population declines, NRCS is working with private landowners to establish habitat for pollinators through conservation.

More than three-fourths of the world's flowering plants rely on pollinators to reproduce, equating to one of every three bites

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National Pollinator Week (continued)



of food people eat. Many plants would be unable to reproduce without the help of pollinators.

The 2008 Farm Bill made pollinators a priority resource concern for the USDA conservation programs and NRCS is incorporating pollinators into conservation planning nationwide. NRCS supports pollinators by working with private landowners to establish habitat, which provides both food and sanctuary for bees and other pollinators.

There are 37 conservation practices in the 2008 Farm Bill that, when implemented, can benefit pollinator habitat. Agricultural producers work with NRCS to create ideal habitat for pollinators and increase populations in simple and significant ways.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill (fiscal years 2009-2012), there have been more than 533 occurrences of conservation practices installed on 12,153 acres which could support pollinator habitat in Maine: conservation cover—40 acres; field border—4 acres; upland wildlife habitat management—14,422 acres; and early successional habitat development/management—4,622 acres.

Upcoming Programs Deadlines

National Water Quality Initiative—July 12, 2013 is the application deadline for agricultural and forestry producers located in the Nickerson Lake Sub-Watershed and Alder Stream Sub-Watershed to apply for financial assistance through the 2013 National Water Quality Initiative.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program—The application deadline for assistance through the general Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is **July 1, 2013** to be considered for funding in **fiscal year 2014**.



Technical Service Provider Training—

by Christopher Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Special Projects

Maine held two Technical Service Providers (TSP) update training sessions on April 10 and 11, 2013. Sessions were held in the Bangor and Augusta NRCS conference rooms. All TSPs certified in Maine were invited.

These sessions were optional and the purposes of these sessions included: reviewing the processes for contracting Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) and technical assistance for conservation practice implementation, reviewing results of Quality Assurance of TSPs work, reviewing major changes to EQIP Program and reviewing key points for improving the TSP process. Key points covered with the TSPs included: TSP are responsible for products they “sign off” on; communication between client, TSP and NRCS is critical; the requirement to locate Conservation Practices clearly; and the dynamic nature of the EQIP program—what EQIP requires for a given conservation practice can change each Fiscal Year.

Gerald Barnes, NRCS State Forester, reviewed the major changes in



Forestry Conservation Practices and the payment structure. Conservation Practices covered included: Forest Stand Improvement (666), Forest Trails and Landings (655), Tree/Shrub Pruning (660), Brush Management (314), Tree/Shrub Establishment (612), Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490), Firebreak (394) and Riparian Forest Buffer.

This is the first time Maine NRCS conducted optional Update Training for TSPs. Twenty-five TSPs attended these sessions and feedback from attendees has been very positive.

Outreach Efforts (1)



Soil Conservationist Lance Gorham staffed a display and attended workshops at the 2013 Maine Land Conservation Conference held on April 26-27 at the Mt. Ararat Middle School and Orion Performing Arts Center in Brunswick. More than 450 people and over 40 vendors and exhibitors took part in one or both days. State Conservationist Juan Hernandez also attended the conference.

Established in 1995, the Maine Land Trust Network strengthens the land conservation community by serving as a central hub of information. It brings conservationists together to facilitate information exchange and collaboration. Additionally, the Network provides a broad array of programs, services, and resources that build the capacity and sustainability of land conservation organizations throughout the state.

Outreach Efforts (2)

Staffs from the Augusta and Lewiston Field Offices conversed with many attendees at the 13th Annual Maine Fiber Frolic held on June 1-2, 2013 at the Windsor Fairgrounds. This is the first time that NRCS has had a booth at this event.

The Maine Fiber Frolic is produced by a committee of members from the Maine Llama Association, Maine Sheep Breeders Association, Maine Alpaca Association, Maine Angora Producers, Maine Spinners' Registry, Cashmere Goat Club and other fiber enthusiasts to promote education, understanding and appreciation of fiber farms, fiber artists and other small farming ventures. Maine Fiber Frolic encourages interaction with communities to foster a relationship between community and small family farms.

Amanda Burton from the Augusta Office helped to staff the NRCS booth.



Piscataquis High School to Represent Maine at North American Envirothon Competition



As a result of the State Envirothon held on May 23rd at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Piscataquis High School will represent Maine at the North American Envirothon competition. The

Maine Association of Conservation Districts awarded the three top-scoring high school Envirothon teams at the event. The first, second and third place winning teams respectively were: Piscataquis High School, Mt. Ararat High School and Spruce Mountain High School. Ten teams from around the state competed at this event. Other high schools competing in the state competition included: Bonny Eagle, Bucksport, Brunswick, Central, Easton, Hampden and Maine School of Science and Math. These teams represented the top scorers from four regional competitions held around the state earlier in May, at which 63 teams representing 34 high schools participated statewide.

Maine NRCS Goes International—by Helena Swiatek, DC, Houlton

In Aroostook County, we have the planning and designing of grassed waterways down to not only a science, but an art. But recently in Southern



(left to right): Lance Gorham, Dan Baumert and Robert Cullins.

Aroostook we were reminded that not everything is always that easy. For example, what do you do when the field is split by the US/Canadian border and the outlet is in Canada? Well as it turns out, you do A LOT of paperwork.

The project involved a challenging site to begin with. The land slopes severely to both the north and the east. Previous practices installed had failed and a complete re-evaluation was needed. But the challenge had always been how to evaluate something you couldn't see. State Conservationist Juan Hernandez took the question to his peers and it seemed this is the first time this situation had occurred. Undeterred, the next contact was to National Headquarters, who contacted the Office of General Counsel and the Foreign Agricultural Service in Canada. The lawyers weighed

and gave us the green light. We assembled a team to cross the border consisting of Dan Baumert and Robert Cullins for engineering, Helena Swiatek for planning and Lance Gorham for legal and policy back up. Then came the paperwork...government passports, international travel authorizations, and country clearance forms. It seemed we contacted every conceivable government agency from Border Patrol to the US Embassy in New Brunswick.

When the day came to cross the border a lot of jokes were made such as "I wonder if NRCS pays bail?" And while we didn't find out the answer to that question, we did see Border Patrols' show of force. As soon as we arrived on site, a SUV came speeding up the road and we were put to questions while a helicopter flew low overhead. But at the end of the day, planning is planning. We evaluated the field in short order and returned to our homeland safe and sound. Now construction... that ought to be interesting....



Dan Baumert at the borders edge.

Maine NRCS Employee Receives National Award



Lindsay Hodgman receives Soil Scientist of the Year Award from Roy Vick, Associate Director, Soil Science Division, NRCS, Washington, DC.

Assistant State Soil Scientist Lindsay Hodgman was presented with the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) Soil Scientist of the Year Award on June 20th at the 2013 National Cooperative Soil Survey National Conference in Annapolis, MD.

Lindsay has played a central role in the soil survey successes of Maine and of the MLRA Soil Survey Offices that covered 144B and 143. Maine could not have met the 2010 deadline for completing the initial soil survey (about 2 million acres in the last 4 years) without her excellent assistance in developing and correlating the SSURGO data (tabular and spatial). All the

while she has maintained the spatial and tabular data of the state of Maine soils information. Leading up to the current reorganization of the Soil Survey Division she has been providing much support to the Soil Survey Offices in ramping up the Soil Data Join Recorrelation (SDJR) efforts.

Since 2006 she has been intimately involved in the spatial and tabular work for Maine – many millions of acres. This includes the initial soil survey in Washington County that was completed in 2007. She helped with all phases of field mapping preparation for soil mappers from all over the country, digitizing and editing of the new soil mapping products used in the North Maine Woods, and in all phases of the map finishing and NASIS data population/validation. The survey in the North Maine Woods was challenging to say the least, and Lindsay help devise and implement “hybrid” methodology utilizing digital mapping techniques in concert with plain hard field work hours from a cell phone signal.

During the summer of 2012, Lindsay was instrumental in hosting the Northeast Regional Cooperative Soil Survey Conference in Maine, with the technical tour and banquet focusing on the soils of the North Maine Woods. She continues to be the leading training force in geospatial and NASIS matters for the soil survey offices in Maine, as the MLRA Regional Office comes on line to take on that task.

She is similarly central to all aspects of the Technical Soil Services in Maine. Lindsay keeps Maine at or ahead of schedule with NRI work, as well as organizational aspects of the HEL and Wetland Conservation provisions of the Food Security Act which the Soils Program leads in Maine.

Do's and Don'ts When Assisting People with Blindness or Vision Impairment

- ⇒ Please identify yourself.
- ⇒ Ask if the individual needs assistance and in what way the person would like you to help.
- ⇒ If the individual is traveling with a dog guide, please give directions to the handler and not the dog.
- ⇒ Offer your arm, if the person requests it. This is preferable to leading the person by the hand or pulling or pushing him or her.
- ⇒ Please give the individual specific information as to where you are leaving him or her. For example, "We're at the Main Street door of the building."
- ⇒ Do not shout at the individual, unless you observe that he/she is having some difficulty hearing you.
- ⇒ Don't leave the person in "space." Show the individual to a bench, seat, side of a building, or some other tangible reference point.
- ⇒ Please do not speak to the dog guide or try to attract its attention.
- ⇒ Do not grab the individual's white cane or the dog guide's harness or leash.
- ⇒ When on the street, please do not encourage a person to step out in front of traffic, by calling out that it is OK to cross.
- ⇒ Do not stop and beep your horn at a person with visual impairment who is waiting to cross the street. This may be confusing.
- ⇒ If the person with visual impairment is waving you to drive on, please do so. Many people with visual impairment use traffic sounds to help with their decision about when to cross. The person may not be able to hear the movement of traffic above the engine of your car.



A Brief Look at Some Projects in the Field—Lewiston Field Office



Client in Androscoggin County is in the process of transitioning to organic. Two years ago she installed drip irrigation through the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program (above). She is currently installing a high tunnel.



(Above): This EQIP participant in Androscoggin County has installed a high tunnel, and has used cover crop and pest management practices.

A Brief Look at Some Projects in the Field—Augusta Field Office

AMA participant in Lincoln County raises Elderberry trees (above right), Choke Cherry trees as well as other botanicals for medicinals. She installed micro-irrigation (above left) which was critical to managing elderberries since these plants are drought susceptible.



Beginning Farmer in Lincoln county has organic livestock and vegetables. Through EQIP, a culvert and access road (above left) were completed to address erosion issues and a high tunnel was installed (above right) to extend the growing season.

2012 Digital Photo Contest Winners—1st Place



Conservation 101

*Wayne Munroe, District Conservationist,
Scarborough Field Office*



Maine—The Way Life Should Be

*Amanda Burton, Soil Conservationist,
Augusta Field Office*



Before

Before and After—2008 Farm Bill

*Mary Thompson, Soil Conservationist,
Belfast Field Office*



A Picture in a Category of Its Own!

*Mary Thompson, Soil Conservationist,
Belfast Field Office*



After