

Watershed Farm & Forest

FALL 2011

Stewardship Programs of the Watershed Agricultural Council

Irene and Lee delivered a double whammy that left our region reeling. Water filled the streets, leaving in its wake downstream farmland littered with debris piles from towns further upstream. Mud, rocks and sediment added to the mess. Crops ruined, trees debarked, homes shoved off foundations or simply swept away, water's fury raged from Prattsville to Hamden, Windham to Callicoon. These two storms weren't just a water quality nightmare; Irene and Lee uprooted families, destroyed livelihoods, and permanently altered life in the watershed.

First responders like town fire departments and the National Guard delivered residents to safety and looked for the missing. Secondary support provided by United Way, American Red Cross and local churches met community needs for water, food, clothing and shelter. The Watershed Agricultural Council – with its partners Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) – claimed its role in flood response addressing long-term recovery efforts. Even partners based outside our region, like New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), dispatched crews and equipment to assist watershed communities get back on their feet.

Progress by Action

As an organization targeting third-tier flood assistance, the Council and its partners' responsibilities centered around six recovery objectives:

1. assess farm damage;
2. apply for emergency funding from federal and state sources;
3. identify secondary funding, where applicable;
4. collect and disseminate information;
5. plan necessary emergency measures out in the field; and
6. begin on-the-ground clean-up and repair efforts as quickly as possible to resolve emergency issues.

During Week 1, the Council and its partners sent out 10 teams of whole farm planners, engineers and technicians to assess and report farm damage. Of approximately 350 watershed farms, 27 immediately topped the priority list needing assistance. Damage ranged from streambank failures and crop loss to barnyard wash-outs, impassable access roads, and destroyed fencing. Responding to the flood crisis required multi-agency support which collectively connected with farmers despite downed power lines, interrupted mail delivery and nonexistent phone service.

Agency staff assisted farmers with an immense amount of paperwork that was required for disaster funding. FSA staff assisted with crop insurance filings and encouraged farmers with less than 10 acres in any one crop to complete the USDA's Emergency Crop Program (ECP) that may become available later in the year. SWCD, CCE and Council staff submitted applications to state emergency funding programs such as the Agriculture and Community Recovery Fund (ACRF).



At least the cows were safe at this Windham dairy farm.

State and Federal Aid

The repair work and farmland soils recovery will take months, if not years, to address. Seeing the need for disaster relief, Governor Cuomo created the **Agriculture and Community Recovery Fund (ACRF)** to aid in recovery efforts. ACRF allots \$15 million to 27 counties affected by the flood waters. Of that, \$10 million is earmarked for farm operation recovery to replace equipment, machinery, crops, and other business-related needs with long-term impact on farms and communities.

The other \$5 million, known as the ACRF Conservation Program, is designed to help farms recover, stabilize soils and stream banks, restore water control structures, and improve and protect water quality. This funding specifically targets on-farm emergency work to save farmland, bringing farm operations immediately back online and into production. Farms with livestock or farms with

severely affected production topped the list of worthy ACRF awards. The State monies pay for technical assistance, construction, and even fencing. Repairing Best Management Practices (BMPs) that affect water quality, farm operation, public health and safety, all fall under the Council's mandate. Unfortunately, farmer labor is not reimbursable under this Program.

For land to be eligible for ACRF funding, the storms must have created a new conservation problem that, if left untreated, would degrade the State's natural resources; impact public drinking water supplies; present ongoing pollution risks to surface and groundwater; pose threats to production facilities; impair farm safety; affect the land's productive capacity; or present challenges to farm production that are too costly to implement without State assistance.

To date, all State money was appropriated from the \$5 million Conservation Program to projects submitted through

county SWCDs. Delaware, Greene and Schoharie Counties claimed top funding priority. As of this printing, over \$408,429 in funding will be directed to emergency projects on 18 watershed farms. Through the Watershed Agricultural Program, ACRF funding will restore streambanks, divert river water out of pastures, and fix on-farm issues that prevent farmers from bringing product to market. Much of the watershed work involves debris removal, fixing cropland to minimize water flow, emergency streambank stabilization, barnyard restoration, and short-term rental equipment such as post pounders, excavators and dump trucks. Some hurdles to recovery efforts are limited contractor availability; stone, gravel and large rock supply; and just 24 hours in a day.

ACRF awards also covered land shaping and grading, and installation of vegetative practice including cover crops. All of these BMPs are designed to

reduce soil loss and mitigate water pollution due to erosion. According to Governor Cuomo's office, the State lost nearly 140,000 acres of farmland from Hurricane Irene, even before Tropical Storm Lee hit.

The Governor's ACRF also includes three other components.

On Farm Capital Needs Program: Provides grants and deferred/low-interest loans to meet the immediate and long-term needs of farmers devastated by Hurricane Irene.

Main Street Business Assistance Program: Provides a combination of grants and low-interest loans to help Main Street businesses get back in operation within eligible counties.

Farm Operations Match Program: This will cover the costs flood-affected farmers have incurred to replace crops that would have fed livestock and crops that had to be replaced to maintain customers of consumer supported agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets



Rainwater literally carved its way to the region's lowest elevations. The water's speed and volume widened creek beds, eroded stream banks, leaving rocks, sediment and whatever else strewn across watershed lowlands.

and farm stands. Farmers submit an application to NYS Department of Ag & Markets certifying their loss and incurred replacement costs. The Department will approve farmer applications and determine the amount of funding per farmer and per county. A direct link to that application can be found on our home page at www.nyc-watershed.org under “Watershed Headlines.”

Flood waters washed away both bridge abutments and parts of the access road to the East Valley Ranch, Frost Valley’s equine facility, located eight miles from the main campus. The farm repairs qualified for \$11,850 in ACRF funding; however, bridge repairs, pictured here, did not. Frost Valley YMCA is fundraising to meet ineligible expenses and work through its Hurricane Irene Relief Fund at www.frostvalley.org.



Hours of swift water eroded banks 20 feet high, rendering properties like this unusable and uninhabitable.



While water typically will flow through fences, it can undermine posts and leave its baggage behind. Farmers must tediously handpick debris—like grass, sticks and stumps—caught on fencing.

Hazardous Waste Clean Up

Household hazardous wastes also pose a threat to water quality during times like this. Ensuring the proper disposal of contaminants like light bulbs, appliances, paints and varnishes, also rank as a high priority, too. Despite questionable road conditions, the Council—with its partners Delaware County Department of Public Works (DPW), CCE-Delaware, DEP and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation—held its annual community household hazardous waste drop-off day, Clean Sweep. Twenty-one farmers, 28 businesses and 189 residents took a break from flood clean-up to drop off old paints, motor oil and electronic waste. Farmers alone brought in enough paints, pesticides, tars and other liquids to fill ten 55-gallon drums. For those unable to participate that September weekend, DPW and US EPA arranged hazardous waste drop-off points in Fleischmanns, Margaretville and Sidney. Those community efforts collected another 22 55-gallon drums of bulk flammable liquids, 42 pallets of electronics and 62 cubic yards of paints, pesticides, tars and other liquids.

Farm Feed & Forage

While there's much talk about rebuilding communities and repairing infrastructure, little's been mentioned about the long-term repercussions of the 2011 flood. One estimate from CCE-Delaware reports over \$1 million in loss of corn, hay and silage.

Some of this crop loss is covered by FSA crop insurance. Generally, farmers with 10 acres or more in one row crop like corn, hay, alfalfa—or who have lost baleage and silage during the flood—will see a federal reimbursement check but only for acres 10 or more. Crop insurance only covers above 50% loss; that means 50% is not covered. Many farmers don't even qualify for crop insurance as

Flood Impacts

With much corn and hay crop inedible or completely destroyed by flood waters, and winter just eight weeks away, a feed and forage shortage now threatens herd size. This in turn will impact meat and dairy prices. Some farmers may choose to reduce herd sizes, others will cob together winter feed at a premium and pay for it with savings or worse, a bridge loan on next year's profits. Herd reductions, in turn, impact dairy and meat prices, as with smaller supplies come higher pricing. New York State, a national grower of seed corn, was hit hard here too, so feed and forage shortages are likely to last through next spring and into the 2012 growing season.

Feed supplies weren't the only crop impacted. Many farmers, seeing the fruits of their labors ripen in the fields,

they dedicate land in quantities less than 10 acres to produce such as lettuce, pumpkins and squash, all hard hit by the flood. According to FSA, less than 10% of WAP participants hold crop insurance. Hopefully funding from USDA ECP and the State's Farm Operation Match Program (see page 2) will cover the gap in cash losses.

In light of the feed and forage shortage, CCE-Delaware reinstated its online Forage Exchange (<http://ccetest-lamp.cit.cornell.edu/forage/>). Farmers in search of winter feed, or those with it to sell, are encouraged to post their needs/surplus on the website. A CCE white paper, "Handling Flood Damaged Crops," outlines rec-

ommendations for stored and standing forage and the impacts of silt and water contamination such as mycotoxins, coliform and listeria bacteria, and mold. That white paper and two others addressing flooded berry and vegetable fields are posted at www.ccedelaware.org.



Crop loss can be standing or flattened.

watched their profits go just as swiftly down river. Fall harvest profits traditionally bring a farmer even, allowing him to pay off credit card debt incurred during the growing season, pay seasonal labor, provide for winter living, and purchase seed and startup supplies next spring. It is in these costs that

we are seeing the shortfalls in support. Monies from the ACRF Farm Operations Match Program and grassroots fundraisers like Farmer Flood Relief (FFR) should help alleviate some long-term cash flow issues and infuse next year's growing season.



Streambank stabilization will prevent further erosion but won't remedy lost pasture or replace rental acreage enrolled in federal programs.

City Support

From the start of the storm, the DEP Police Special Operations Division dispatched search and rescue teams which were assigned to the Incident Command Post in Phoenicia. Officers assisted local authorities with the evacuation and rescue efforts in Shandaken. The DEP Police also assigned an officer to the Schoharie County Command Post in Cobleskill to support their efforts and assigned extra officers to the Gilboa Precinct to handle local police calls for service in Conesville, Gilboa, and Blenheim. In Margaretville, DEP officers also helped recover propane tanks, gas cans, paint cans,

and even a safe containing personal items.

The Bureau of Water Supply deployed an impressive force of equipment and personnel to Prattsville, Windham, Margaretville, Fleischmanns, and other communities. Dozens of watershed maintainers and supervisors used dump trucks, backhoes, excavators, loaders, and chainsaws to remove debris. A Vactor truck and crew from DEP's Bureau of Wastewater Treatment cleaned manholes in Margaretville. Similar crews from Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations used flusher trucks and rodders to clean the collection system in the village.



AT WORK: DEP crews in Margaretville provide clean-up assistance on August 31.



DEP Commissioner Carter Strickland reviews clean-up efforts by DEP crews in Margaretville on September 2.

Resources to Rebuild

Businesses in the Catskill-Delaware Watershed that sustained structural damage to their buildings as a result of flooding may receive assistance from a new program approved by the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC). Derived from the Catskill Fund for the Future, the 2011 Flood Recovery Grant Program (FRGP) will award \$5 million to help for-profit enterprises get back on their feet. The program will provide a maximum of \$30,000 to businesses for labor and materials needed to repair walls, floors, founda-

tions, windows and fixed improvements damaged in the late summer storms. The business portions of home-based companies are eligible for repair grants, but residences are not. Inventory losses, income loss, or expenses covered by insurance or other grants are not reimbursable through FRGP. Non-profits, mobile home park operators or apartment building owners are also not eligible for assistance, nor are multi-state franchises or chain stores. The Program allocates funds for each of the five counties in the

Catskill/Delaware Watershed, based on the percentage of Watershed land in each county:

- Delaware \$2,573,000
- Greene \$931,500
- Schoharie \$220,500
- Sullivan \$245,000
- Ulster \$1,029,500

Business owners interested in assistance should contact their town supervisor. Supervisors will submit CWC with a list of businesses needing reconstruction help.

Businesses also have the option of applying for low-interest loans through the Catskill

Fund for the Future. CWC also established a second recovery fund to which anyone can make charitable monetary donations to regional recovery. DEP donated \$1 million to this Special Projects fund created to extend flood recovery efforts to nonprofits, businesses, and coverage for non-structural losses. For more information, go to www.cwconline.org, or call (845) 586-1400.

One other fund is available to New York farmers who lost equipment or other infrastructure to this year's back-to-back



In Prattsville, farm equipment not swept away by the river waters came in handy during town and farmstead clean-up.

tropical storms. The State established another \$5 million fund, the Agriculture Disaster Fund run by NYSERDA. This fund will provide money for replacing electric and natural gas systems and equipment for milk processing, cooling, heating, and other farm systems. Farmers in the 27 counties identified by the State as storm-damaged are eligible and will have to prove their losses were the result of the storms. Applications are available at NYSERDA's website and on our homepage and will be processed on a first-come, first served basis until December 15 or until funding runs out. The maximum assistance will be \$100,000 per farm.

The Silver Lining

Despite so much destruction, few in our region lost their lives. Many are displaced or out of work. Many more will leave the watershed for good; but many more will stay and rebuild. Volunteering is up in our area,

with neighbor helping neighbor, shovel in hand. People are donating clothing, food, and living necessities in record number. This process of rebuilding strengthens communities, as residents come together for the greater good.

Fundraisers are popping up all over, bringing in money for United Way and Salvation Army. Even the Watershed Agricultural Council is working as an administrative sponsor to individuals and grassroots organizations holding fundraising events that benefit local communities by supporting Catskills farmers in need. The fund, Farmer Flood Relief (FFR), helps regional farmers where other programs fall short. The awards, to be announced in November 2011, are designed to address farmer need in securing next year's seed, bridge the lean winter months, and replace damaged or missing equipment as a result of the flood. Over the past couple months, many organiza-

tions have staged fundraisers and donated over \$25,000 to FFR. Farm to Market Manager Challey Comer, Morgan George of Sherman Hill Farmstead, and Holley White of Lucky Dog Organic Farm coordinated the Raise the Roof fundraiser on September 18 at The Hamden Inn. Bids on over 70 silent auction items and 30 raffle prizes brought in over \$10,000 to the cause. Pure Catskills member Catskill Harvest Market of Liberty added another \$650 with its September 17th fundraiser. Heather Ridge Farm's pig roast raised over \$6,000 and the Livestock Foundation of Bovina contributed \$1,400. The Catskill Center, through its various Lark in the Park events, also collected donations for the Fund.

You can make a donation to FFR through December 31, by contributing online via the Council's donation page at www.nycwatershed.org, or by check mailed to FFR c/o WAC, 44 West St., Walton, NY 13851. (Note "FFR" on your check's memo line).

A panel of local farmers will select awards from eligible farmer applications. Farmer applications are available online at www.purecatskills.com. Awards, up to \$2,000 per farm, will be distributed in November 2011. All remaining monies as of December 31 will be distributed in January 2012. To all who have donated time, talent and treasure, to this effort we thank you!



Flood Protection Through Working Landscapes

The recent storm puts the punctuation mark on land conservation. Land in farming and forests protects Main Street and our communities from extensive damage. Embracing agriculture and forestry along these water corridors can save communities a lot of clean-up and heartache with smart community planning. Flood plains traditionally house the richest soils and are best suited for farming. Forested parcels lining water courses, also known as riparian buffers, stabilize stream-banks naturally while providing a cushion to encroaching floodwaters.

The necessity for working landscapes along our streams and creeks is evident. These lands need to be conserved within the working context, not just to provide food and recreation, but to protect our communities from Mother Nature's fickleness. Conservation easements are just one tool by which we can protect those working landscapes on behalf of our families and our neighbors. Rebuilding farm and forest infrastructure is hard enough. Smart community planning can place rebuilt Main Street businesses in their proper places outside flood prone regions, saving money, clean-up and personal turmoil in the process.

The Catskills Region offers enormous agricultural opportunity and is well-positioned for supplying metropolitan areas with fresh produce and meats. It is ideally suited to grow and raise food, contribute to the viability of our small communities, and maintain the mountains' rural esthetic and farming way

of life. The Catskills are a great place to operate a small, diversified farm.

Catskills FarmLink is yet another tool that provides the mechanism for connecting Catskills land with those interested in farming it. Whether you are a beginning farmer looking to transition to independent farm management, an existing farmer looking to acquire or access more land, or a landowner interested in making your property available for agricultural use, Catskills FarmLink offers the resources and tools to begin your search. This free web resource and posting site is designed to:

- maintain the regional working agricultural landscape by connecting farmers with underutilized land,
- provide online access to statewide and regional resources that support the farming community,
- offer land lease planning, landowner guides and "Come Farm with Us" contacts;
- list farmland available for rent/sale/share within the Catskills and New York City watershed, and compile opportunities like edu-



Catskills FarmLink

www.catskillsfarmlink.org

cational workshops, networking events, classifieds, internships, job offerings, equipment and livestock sales, and distribution partnership/sharing.

Catskills FarmLink is a collaborative effort of regional organizations committed to the future of agriculture in the region. These organizations include Catskill Mountainkeeper; CCE of Delaware, Schoharie and Sullivan Counties; Delaware Highlands Conservancy; Farm Catskills; Farmhearts; DEP; and the Watershed Agricultural Council.

Visit www.catskillsfarmlink.org to explore land listings and classifieds or submit your own, and to learn more about farming and land access in the region.

Eager to learn, area farmers attend networking meetings of the Catskills CRAFT group. Farm visits like this one to organic vegetable producer and Pure Catskills member, Willow Wisp Farm, are part of the monthly outings. Greg Swartz (at left) guides CRAFTERS through his fields and describes how fencing doubles as a trellis for peas.



Ways You Can Help

While much of the initial clean up is well underway, there is still much to do. Here are just a few ways you can help a fellow farmer or neighbor:

BUY LOCAL Support businesses and farmstands that are open. How you choose to spend your weekly food dollars is an investment in your community. Eat at the local restaurant; pick up an extra pumpkin for the holidays.

GIVE Participate in one of the regional fundraisers that benefit Farmer Flood Relief. Make a donation by check or post your gift online at nycwatershed.org; note "Farmer Flood Relief" on your gift.

VOLUNTEER Help clean up, rebuild local businesses and residences, or move hay bales into winter storage by lending a working hand. If you have a service skill like web design, advertising or online marketing, donate your talents to a business recently reopened.

Flood waters complicated this farm's twice-daily milking schedule by washing away the barnyard and cattle traffic area.

PREPARE Our next flood event is simply a matter of "when." Compile an emergency disaster preparedness kit for your family. Include copies of key documents like birth certificate, Social Security card, homeowner's insurance, driver's license and photos of pets and loved ones.

PLAN AHEAD Farmers are seeing the value of contingency plantings and value added products. Pumpkin patches planted on hillside fields escape flood waters. Diversifying business revenue stream with value-added products, ancillary services, like firewood sales, insulate one's business during hard economic times and weather conditions. Be smart: develop a crisis management plan.



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