

Watershed Farm & Forest

July 2006

Stewardship Programs of the Watershed Agricultural Council

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L-R: Watershed Partners Larry Beckhardt and Ira Stern of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection share Tom Hutson's celebration of the Steward of the Land Award, given by American Farmland Trust's Executive Director, Ralph Grossi.

"Tom is a champion of good agriculture—leading and showing by example on his farm how you can provide consumers with food and environmental benefits—and attract wildlife at the same time," stated AFT Executive Director, Ralph Grossi, "he is a true steward of the land and a great inspiration to farmers across the country."

Tom operates River Haven Farm in New York's Catskill Mountains where he has 380 acres and a herd of 108 Holsteins. He raises corn, alfalfa hay, grass hay, along with oats and barley for grain, and straw for bedding. There are 57 acres of hardwood forest on the farm. He also raises Hi-HO's, a Holstein-Scottish Highland beef cattle cross.

Tom was one of the first farmers to participate in pilot programs administered by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) to reduce pollution in the Catskill/Delaware reservoir systems. He installed buffer and filter strips, permanent rows of vegetation that slow water runoff and erosion of riverbanks, and filter out damaging substances from the water supply.

In 2002, Tom protected his farm with a conservation easement acquired by the WAC, which allows him and future owners of River Haven Farm to continue working the land while limiting any non-agricultural development of his property.

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Tom enjoys the special day with farmers, friends, watershed staff; pictured here, Tom with brother Jim, and farm partner and mother, Ruth.



*Whole Farm Plan Summaries

Westchester Farm Conserved

On May 10, Governor George E. Pataki announced \$15.2 million in funding under the New York state's Farmland Protection Program to help protect 5,159 acres of active farmland in 13 counties across the state, including Hemlock Hill Farm in the Towns of Cortlandt Manor and Yorktown Heights in Westchester County, where the announcement took place. A conservation easement, administered in partnership between the Watershed Agricultural Council and Westchester Land Trust, will conserve the 116-acre vegetable and livestock operation. The farm adjoins 140 acres of protected property along Hunter Brook, which flows into New York City's Croton water supply reservoir system. Hemlock Hill Farm is operated by John and Laura DeMaria, and has been in the family since 1939. In addition to selling produce through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, the farm grows and processes livestock. Westchester County Executive Andy Spano said, "I'm grateful to the State for approving our grant application and working with us to preserve Hemlock Hill Farm. When you think of farmland you don't usually think of Westchester, but that's what our county once was. There are still active farms in the county that provide valuable agricultural products to our residents. It's vital that we protect that heritage and understand how important agriculture is to our health, our environment, and our economy." New York State's Farmland Protection Program provides financial assistance to towns and counties to support local farmland protection activities. Tom O'Brien, WAC Executive Director, stated, "We are pleased to be working with the Westchester Land Trust and the county on this project...The DeMaria's are great stewards of the land and this will help ensure that the land stays in farming."

2006 Flood Devastates Catskills/Delaware Region

On Tuesday, June 29, after weeks of continuous rain, nearly a foot of additional rainfall sent tributaries raging into the main stem rivers in the western portion of the Catskills region. At the time of this printing, with a state of emergency still in effect and many roads impassable, damage assessment has begun. Look for more coverage of the farming community and the agricultural agencies' response to this historic flood in the summer issue of *Watershed Farm and Forest*.

Watershed Farm & Forest is a newsletter of the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to support the economic viability of agriculture and forestry through the protection of water quality and the promotion of land conservation in the New York City Watershed region. WAC is funded by The New York City Department of Environmental Protection, USDA Forest Service, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and other federal, foundation and private sources. Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Karen Rauter, Communications Director. To reach the Watershed Agricultural Council, call: (607) 865-7790.

- Fred Huneke, Chair
- Dave Cammer, Vice Chair
- Gail Hillriegel, Secretary
- Bill Coleman, Treasurer





Tom Hutson of River Haven Farm, Delancey, addresses the New York City press corps on the steps of City Hall in Lower Manhattan on June 8.



WAC Chair, Fred Huneke, congratulates Steward of the Land, Tom Hutson, at the June 9 upstate community celebration in Hamden.

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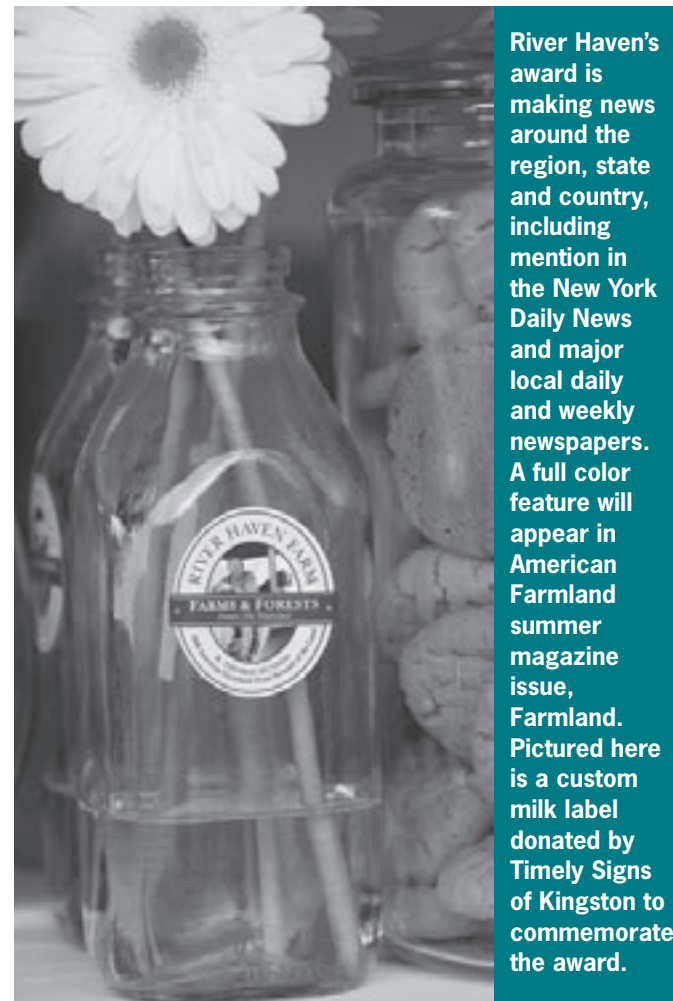
This will ensure that New Yorkers enjoy clean water and wildlife habitat in perpetuity - including the bald eagles that nest in a huge sycamore tree on his farm.

Tom has shared his experience with his peers and advocates conservation stewardship through numerous on-farm demonstrations and speaking to countless visitors. His one-on-one consultations with other farmers have resulted in numerous applications to the WAC Easement program.

“Tom has always understood how his farm’s stakeholders include not only the consumers of his products but the residents of New York City, whose clean drinking water depends on environmentally friendly agriculture,” said Ralph Grossi, President of American Farmland Trust. “Tom both works the land and sustains it.”

Fred Huneke, Chair of the WAC, added his praise for Hutson’s efforts. “New York City faced a looming crisis in 1990—spending billions of dollars to build and operate a water filtration system. Instead, they came up with a novel plan to protect the water supply and keep it clean: by partnering with farmers like Tom who work to manage their farms in environmentally positive ways. Tom has encouraged farmers in the watershed to join him in these efforts and that’s meant the City has been spared a huge financial burden.”

Established in 1997, AFT’s Steward of the Land Award recognizes the American farmer or farm family who best demonstrates leadership in protecting farmland and caring for the environment. The award honors the memory of Peggy McGrath Rockefeller, an avid farmer and conservationist who helped found AFT. Hutson is the tenth farmer to win this award and the first from New York State to be honored.



River Haven’s award is making news around the region, state and country, including mention in the New York Daily News and major local daily and weekly newspapers. A full color feature will appear in American Farmland summer magazine issue, Farmland. Pictured here is a custom milk label donated by Timely Signs of Kingston to commemorate the award.

City-Owned Lands in Farm Use Now

As the 2006 crop season began, New York City Department of Environmental Protection announced the availability of City-owned parcels for agricultural use by nearby farmers. Requests for proposals were announced in the public notices for 12 projects and, currently, 7 producers are cropping 223 acres in Stamford, Roxbury, Hamden and Windham. The resulting projects will be in place for 5 years, with most farmers harvesting hay after an initial crop of corn. Revisions to DEP’s initial policy on these lands now allow the use of fertilizer, manure and the pasturing of livestock. Tom O’Brien, WAC Executive Director, commented, “making these City-owned lands available for agriculture is a strong indicator that DEP supports farming as a preferred land use in the watershed.” Contact Paul Lenz at NYC DEP’s Kingston office (845) 340- 7545 for more information.

Farm Bill: A Vision for Change

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a national nonprofit organization working with communities and individuals to protect the best farmland, plan for agriculture and keep the land healthy. Jerry Cosgrove, of the Trust’s Northeast office in Saratoga Springs, has assisted area farmers in building the WAC Agricultural Easements Program over the last nine years. As the leading advocate for farm and ranch land conservation, AFT has ensured that more than a million acres stays bountiful and productive. American Farmland Trust has recently embarked on a campaign to create a new farm policy in 2007, one that saves our best farmland, helps protect the environment and produces healthy food.

To do this, AFT is working with a unique alliance of farmers and ranchers, conservationists, environmentalists, and other public interest groups to pursue a new approach that will help all farmers and ranchers. New farm policy options are evolving around three key pillars of support: a financial safety net and tools to manage the risk of natural disasters and dramatic swings in prices and yields; rewards for environmental stewardship on farms and ranches to protect and improve the quality of our nation’s air, water and land; and new market opportunities to sell farm products and encourage entrepreneurial innovation for profitability.

This vision of a well-managed, protected farm and ranch land that provides open space, clean water and wildlife habitat meets many of the same goals as those of the partnership Watershed Agricultural Council and its partners. You can find AFT’s new policy recommendations, Agenda 2007: A New Framework and Direction for U.S. Farm Policy, on their website at www.farmland.org. The telephone number for AFT’s national office, located in Washington, D.C., is 202-331-7300.



A trip to the Catskills gave AFT’s Ralph Grossi an opportunity to tour area farms that, like Hutson’s River Haven, are conserved with WAC Conservation Easements. He spent the morning speaking with George and Linda Morgan of Tyrbach Farms in Walton and is pictured here at Lucky Dog Farm with owner, Richard Giles.