



NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Summer | 2017 ISSUE

Finding Firefighters

The challenges of recruiting volunteers for fire departments



The Manchester Volunteer Fire Department is always looking for new volunteers. (Photo courtesy of Mr. Rich Rice.)

Two cars collide on a country road. One car straddles the roadway, its radiator belching steam and front end mangled. The second car is wedged in a ditch on the other side of the road. Pieces of glass and plastic lie haphazardly strewn across the asphalt. The first driver holds a shirtsleeve across his forehead, trying to stop a trickle of blood. The second driver is semiconscious and cannot extricate herself. She remains buckled into her seat, unable to open a car door. Bystanders anxiously call for help.

Before dawn, in another town, dark smoke pours from a kitchen window of a small home. Neighbors furiously pound on the doors, and the family makes it outside just before flames begin to ominously peek through the windows. With tear-stained cheeks, and wrapped in blankets, the family awaits the sound of sirens announcing that help is on the way.

Incidents like these occur every day in communities large and small, and volunteer firefighters respond quickly to provide their help in these emergent situations.

Consider, though, what would happen if that help never arrived?

It is a question fraught with potentially dire outcomes: destruction of property, injuries, and even loss of life.

These scenarios clearly demonstrate the importance of the volunteer firefighters and other first responders who provide aid at accident scenes and fight fires in rural communities.

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Summer 2017 Rural Futures

NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT RURAL NEW YORK STATE

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The NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources is a joint bipartisan office of the State Legislature.



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Mr. Rich Rice has volunteered for the Manchester Volunteer Fire Department for four years. (Photo courtesy of Mr. Rich Rice.)

Yet, it is increasingly difficult to find the volunteers needed to respond to emergencies.

It is a situation of deep concern for Mr. Rich Rice, a member of the Manchester Volunteer Fire Department in Ontario County, New York.

Mr. Rice has been a member of the department for four years, joining after he retired from his job. His path to becoming a member was a bit unusual. While running for Town Justice, a friend of his urged him to join the fire department if he did not win.

Mr. Rice lost the election, and he views it as a blessing in disguise.

Instead, he applied to join the fire department. He submitted the paperwork, obtained the required background checks, and learned about the various training opportunities. He participated in the Basic Exterior Firefighting Operations

training, and he began to take part in fire calls. He took care to listen carefully to the directions he received during those calls.

While Mr. Rice opts out of actually entering burning buildings, he does help with exterior firefighting and other roles, including recruiting. It is a point that he emphasizes with those potentially interested in joining the fire department: They should only be doing those activities that are safe for them physically. There are a wide range of ways to serve on the department.



“We have a job for everyone,” said Mr. Rice.

While volunteer fire departments eagerly accept the help from volunteers of just about any age, they are struggling to find volunteers in the 20 – 30 year-old age range. When they do find recruits, it is often only a handful of volunteers who have heard about the opportunity via word-of-mouth.

To address this issue, Mr. Rice is looking to the next generation of firefighters. He spends much of his time reaching out to the local school district. He has developed a working relationship with the school principal, allowing him to speak with high school students and even set up a table in the school cafeteria on occasion. Other opportunities to connect with students occur at even younger ages. Some of these include teaching fire prevention, anti-drug efforts, and participation in events focused on literacy.



“I think we’ve planted a lot of seeds early on,” said Mr. Rice, and he is

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hopeful that they will see more volunteers down the road as a result.

Clearly, the individuals and families who face the personal tragedies of house fires, car accidents, or other emergencies are grateful for the volunteers who assist them in their time of need. These emergency responders are among the most needed, and the most appreciated, within their communities.

The experience is also quite valuable for the volunteer firefighters. While the training can be intensive and the commitment is significant, the satisfaction of helping out the local community is immeasurable.

“It’s a very rewarding experience to be able to help a member of the community on what might be their worst day,” said Mr. Rice. “You become a part of something bigger than yourself.”



For more information about becoming a volunteer firefighter, please visit the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York (FASNY) firefighter-recruiting website at fireyou.org.

Introducing Senator Pam Helming

Appointed Senate Chair of the Rural Resources Commission



Senator Pam Helming, the Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, at the Commission’s Annual Meeting.

Senator Pam Helming is committed to serving others, and in January, she began a new role of representing the 54th Senate District. At the same time, she was appointed as the Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. She joins Assemblyman Frank Skartados, the Commission’s Assembly Chair, in this role leading the Commission.

“I am truly honored to have been selected to chair the Commission, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to promote policies that will protect the State’s natural resources, while promoting smart development and job creation throughout our rural communities,” said Senator Helming.

After graduating from Hiram College, Senator Helming worked with developmentally disabled individuals, a career path that led her to manage several local group homes. This experience provided her with an even greater appreciation of the importance of public service.

Prior to her election to the Senate, Senator Helming served as the Canandaigua Town Supervisor, where she focused on improving local government efficiency and transparency, reducing property taxes, and growing jobs by attracting new businesses and development.

New York’s diverse range of natural resources is essential to the long-term viability of rural areas. Protecting these resources is a priority for Senator Helming. Even before being elected to the State Senate, she worked diligently to preserve and safeguard the environmental treasures in her region, with particular attention to the importance of water quality. It continues to be a priority for her.

Family farming is at the heart of many communities across the State. In an effort to bolster the agricultural industry and support its ongoing growth, Senator Helming has worked with local farmers and residents to protect hundreds of acres of farmland from non-agricultural development.

Senator Helming and her husband have been residents of Canandaigua, New York, for over thirty years. Together they raised their two children in the local schools and community, and she recognizes the importance of being closely involved in a wide range of community activities. For Senator Helming, this includes volunteering and fundraising for a variety of organizations such as veterans groups and youth athletic programs.

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Senator Helming also serves on the following Senate committees: Banks; Children and Families; Consumer Protection; Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Crime Victims, Crime and Correction; Higher Education; Social Services; the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction; the Task Force on Workforce Development; and the Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases.

“I am greatly pleased with the progress we have made this year as the Commission works to address the variety of issues facing rural areas in the State. There is much left for us to accomplish. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources as we endeavor to strengthen our rural communities in New York State,” said Senator Helming.



Senator Pam Helming, the Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, and Mr. Jared Scali in the Senate Chambers.

A Special Thank-You

Over the last few months, the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources enjoyed having Jared Scali, a high school senior, join the team. Jared served as an intern through the NewVisions Law and Government program, a career-exploration and honors, advanced placement, and college credit-granting program. Jared quickly became an invaluable contributor through his top-notch work. He conducted research and wrote about topics including watersheds in the Finger Lakes region, invasive species, clean energy, and physician shortages. We wish Jared the best of luck as he begins his college studies, and we know that he has a bright future ahead of him.

Source Water Protection Added to the New York State Budget Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017 addresses broad range of water issues

Water is a precious resource, and the efforts to protect drinking water must begin at its source. To address this critical issue, Senator Pam Helming, Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, championed the inclusion of funding in the State Budget for source water protection under the newly enacted Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017.

The need for funding to protect water resources is clear. It is painfully obvious every time a water main breaks or a municipality spends their limited funds to dig up and replace aging pipes.

Yet, as important as it is to solve these problems, infrastructure improvements alone are limited in their effectiveness for addressing issues that arise at the earliest stages of the water cycle.

“If pristine sources of water become contaminated, the ability to provide quality drinking water becomes increasingly complex and costly,” said Senator Helming.

Demonstrating a commitment to providing safe drinking water, the New York State Budget includes \$110 million to fund a proactive approach to preserving water sources. This funding can be used for the voluntary conservation of small, strategic areas that directly affect drinking water sources, such as lakes and watersheds. These buffer areas will protect against pollutants and provide natural filtration for water.



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Examples of buffer activities can include forestation, wetland restoration, and protection of the barriers that protect streams from nearby runoff.

Not only will these initiatives enhance water quality at the source, they will also improve efficiency and reduce costs in the process of bringing drinking water to residents. Importantly, these initiatives will lower the reliance on water treatment chemicals and ease the burden on existing water infrastructure.

“I recognized early on during the budget process that we need to include funding to protect drinking water at its source. Representing a district that includes much of the Finger Lakes, and extends to the shores of Lake Ontario, serves as a distinct reminder of the importance of water in our daily lives,” said Senator Helming.

A range of organizations, municipalities, and private landowners already voluntarily work together on source water protection issues. While many of these organizations are located in the Finger Lakes Region, the issues they address are mirrored throughout New York State.

“The Nature Conservancy is grateful for Senator Helming’s commitment to deliver a comprehensive water quality program that protects water at its source as a cost effective and proactive way to secure clean water for our communities. This funding will help ensure that we can protect our vital resources so we can thrive now and into the future,” said Jim Howe, The Nature Conservancy’s director in Central and Western New York.

“Source water protection funding will be utilized to expand and restore our natural capital infrastructure areas such as wetlands, floodplains, and other green areas that filter out nutrients, bacteria, and sediment from stormwater runoff before these pollutants enter Canandaigua Lake. Restoring and improving the resiliency of the landscape to filter out pollutants from human dominated land uses is the best approach to reducing the levels of blue green algae that create serious economic impacts within the Finger Lakes region and across New York State,” said Kevin Olvany, Watershed Program Manager for the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council, an intermunicipal coalition of 14 municipalities to protect Canandaigua Lake.

“Not only is source water protection integral to ensuring good quality drinking water supplies for the many residents of Central and Western New York who are especially dependent upon the Finger Lakes for their drinking water, but it has the added benefit of protecting the aquatic resources of these same water bodies. Investments in source water protection ensure clean water and healthy habitats for aquatic flora and fauna, as well as supporting tourism, recreation, and a better quality of life for the people of the region,” said Kristy LaManche, Program Coordinator for the Finger Lakes - Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance.

The Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017 includes \$2.5 billion to provide for the cost of clean water projects including infrastructure repair and replacement, intermunicipal water infrastructure, green infrastructure, and a septic system rebate program.

The Act also directs financial assistance for farmers to minimize the impact of agricultural activities on water sources and comply with Concentrated Animal Feed Operation regulations. These projects will protect water sources from unintended farm runoff, an increasingly relevant issue.

“New York’s family farms take environmental stewardship seriously. The \$50 million being set aside for cost sharing programs to support dairy nutrient management will be valuable to protecting water quality throughout the Finger Lakes and across New York State. We also recognize the need to protect drinking water resources for farmers and their customers across New York. The entire proposal is a win-win,” said David Fisher, President of the New York Farm Bureau.

Certainly, ensuring clean water must start at its source.



Senator Helming meets with FFA students during their Agriscience Expo day in Albany, New York.

Investing in the Future of Agriculture

Funding Agriculture in the State Budget

Agriculture is at the core of New York State’s economy, and throughout the New York State budget process, Senator Pam Helming, Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, successfully advocated for the vital investments that support family farming in New York.

“Farms of all types and sizes dot the landscape of New York State, and they serve as a reminder of the enduring heritage of farming. Supporting our family farms is an investment in the future of agriculture – one that benefits every resident of the State,” said Senator Helming.

Building and educating the next generation of agricultural leaders is a high priority for Senator Helming, and she led the effort to include increased funding for agricultural education and FFA in the budget. As a result, funding increased by \$350,000 over the amount in last year’s budget, for a total of \$842,000 this year.

“Schools throughout the State have expressed increased interest in establishing agricultural science programs and infusing hands-on inquiry-based STEM curricula into their classrooms. Cornell and the New York State Association of Agricultural Educators is so pleased with the 2018 enacted State Budget, which contains critical resources to enhance student opportunities in agriculture, natural resources, and food science at all levels of K through 12 education,” said Shari Lighthall, Director of Cornell University’s Agricultural Education Outreach programs.



FarmNet Consultants Maureen Kiely and Jerry LeClair discuss individual components of a farm management operating agreement with a multi-generational farm family. (Photo courtesy of NY FarmNet.)



FarmNet Financial Consultant Dewey Hakes working with Pete and Cathy Walrod in Madison County. (Photo courtesy of NY FarmNet.)

It is just as important to support current farm families and agricultural leaders as they tackle the immense business and personal challenges inherent to farming.

One example is NY FarmNet, an organization that has built a reputation of excellence by providing personal and financial consultants who directly help farm families navigate the interpersonal difficulties, communication challenges, mental health concerns, and business issues closely tied to operating a farm.

Senator Helming was also a leader in the effort that fully restored \$800,000 in funding from the Agriculture and Markets portion of the budget that supports the business consulting services provided by NY FarmNet. She also championed an increase in the mental health portion of the budget, to \$400,000, that will help FarmNet address an increased demand for these services.

“I am thankful that NY FarmNet provides business and personal consultants who directly assist family farms with a wide range of concerns, often meeting with farmers at their kitchen tables to help them navigate these complex tasks and issues,” said Senator Helming.

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“We are grateful for the State’s continued support in both agriculture and mental health budgets that allows us to annually work with hundreds of farm families throughout the State and help agriculture thrive,” said Ed Staehr, Executive Director of NY FarmNet.

Furthermore, agricultural innovation is interwoven throughout the State’s history, enabling New York’s farms to become more efficient and feed a growing population.

“There are many examples of agricultural research underway today, or research ideas yet to be implemented, which are crucial to the future success of our farms. It is vital that we support our diverse range of farms by funding a broad variety of research,” said Senator Helming.

For example, the restoration of funding for the New York Farm Viability Institute, which funds a wide range of farmer-reviewed agricultural research projects every year, is an example of this commitment to solving problems and improving productivity for farms across the State.



Research project leader Erasmus Oware of SUNY Buffalo preparing to pull a sensor over a field, in a study to better manage irrigation on vegetables. (Photo courtesy of NY Farm Viability Institute.)



(Photo courtesy of NY Farm Viability Institute.)

“Sixteen new projects are already underway thanks to our New York State funding. The work is taking place across the State in vineyards, apple orchards, vegetable fields, cornfields, and dairy barns. Some projects are testing new, cost effective ways to work, while others are working to increase yields or open new markets. They all share a common goal of improving the economic viability of New York’s farms,” said Jim Bittner, Chair of the New York Farm Viability Institute, and owner of Bittner-Singer Orchards.

Research funding was also restored for a number of other programs run by Cornell University and other organizations. Among these are hops and barley, vegetable, berry, onion, and apple research and development programs.

“Our State’s vibrant cities may be constructed of stone and glass, but they rise due to the often unheralded support of New York’s rural communities. Here at Cornell, our commitment to agricultural research and extension empowers these communities as they contribute everything from the fruits and vegetables on our plates, to the hops and grapes that drive New York’s expanding craft beer and wine markets,” said Kathryn J. Boor, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University.

Other important items in the budget include:

Restoration of funding to support the local and county fairs that encourage tourism, provide employment, and highlight examples of agricultural excellence throughout the State.

Continuing funding for the Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program that supports projects to help farms minimize their environmental impact and develop practices that will help them cope with climate shifts and weather events.

Restoration of funding to support farmland preservation initiatives.

“New York Farm Bureau is pleased that the final New York State Budget supports a number of our members’ priority issues. This includes funding for numerous programs that support research, promotion, and economic development of our diverse agricultural community in New York,” said David Fisher, New York Farm Bureau President.

“I am proud to support the tradition of family farming through these budget initiatives. I am confident that these investments will ensure that our region, and New York State, will continue to set a high bar for agricultural achievement,” said Senator Helming.

Conserving a Piece of Skaneateles Lake History

Article provided by the Finger Lakes Land Trust



Young Art Woldt on his grandparents' farm in Spafford, New York.
(Photo courtesy of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.)

When Art Woldt first traveled from Staten Island to visit his grandparents' farm in the town of Spafford in the early 1930s, he was barely three years old. The farmhouse where they lived had no plumbing, no electricity, and only a dirt road leading to the house. From the first day of school break to the last, Art spent every summer at the farm swimming, picking berries, building lean-tos, and helping his grandfather with various chores. He loved the quiet and peaceful open space, so different from the bustling streets of New York City.

Recently, the Finger Lakes Land Trust accepted the donation of a perpetual conservation easement on these 29 acres of land, located on the eastern hillside of Skaneateles Lake. The property has been in Art's family since 1920, when his grandfather purchased the land and farmed it into his 80s.

Protection of the property, which includes 1,640 feet of creek frontage, will help ensure water quality within the Skaneateles Lake watershed, and maintain the rural beauty of the area.

Art's family was self-sufficient, relying on food grown or raised on the farm, and he still remembers his grandmother's apple pies, made from the Northern Spy variety grown in their orchard. In addition to apples, the farm produced wheat, corn, potatoes, and cabbage, and included a herd of dairy cows, pigs, and chickens.

This upbringing gave Art a close connection with the land that endures to this day. The decision to protect his land began with a desire to protect his family legacy and preserve it for his children and grandchildren.

"My vision is that this land will always remain this way," he said. "My children can come up here and fly kites, pick berries like I did, and enjoy nature -- which pleases me."

Ownership of the land has passed from one generation of the family to the next. Art currently resides on the property in a house built by his parents, where he enjoys observing the various wildlife that pass through his property, including fox and coyote. Fittingly, the donation of the conservation easement was completed on Art's 89th birthday.

The property is located in close proximity to other conservation easements. These conservation areas are key components of the Land Trust's Skaneateles Highlands Protection Project, which aims to create a greenbelt around the south end of the lake.

Conservation easements are legal agreements that limit future development while allowing land to remain in private ownership and on the tax rolls. Landowners who donate conservation easements may be eligible for both state and federal tax benefits.

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Art Woldt on his farm at age 89.
(Photo courtesy of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.)

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By working cooperatively with landowners and local communities, the Finger Lakes Land Trust has protected more than 20,000 acres of the region's undeveloped lakeshore, rugged gorges, rolling forest, and scenic farmland. The Land Trust owns and manages a network of nature preserves that are open to the public and also holds conservation easements that protect lands remaining in private ownership.

The Land Trust focuses on protecting critical habitat and lands that are important for water quality, connecting conserved lands, and keeping prime farmland in agriculture. The organization also provides programs to educate local governments, landowners, and local residents about conservation and the region's unique natural resources.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust works across 12 counties that include all 11 Finger Lakes and a significant portion of the Southern Tier. For more information about the Land Trust, please visit flt.org.

Saving More than a House

The importance of foreclosure prevention services

For Ms. Marguerite Yott, home ownership was the fulfillment of a dream. It became an opportunity to transform a house into a home.

Yet, her dream nearly ended in the nightmare of foreclosure.

Nearly.

"I never wanted my family to worry about having a roof over their head," said Ms. Yott.

Therefore, she made the conscious decision to commit to a path toward home ownership. She wanted a structure, a solid roof, under which she could provide a safe place for her family. Ms. Yott worked two jobs, saved up her money for a down payment, and carefully searched for a house when she was ready.

She recognized the gravity of her purchasing decision, and she took quite a while to find the right house, visiting more than two dozen homes and arranging for multiple home inspections. She found a house that was 20 miles closer to her job, and after a lengthy closing process, she received the keys to her new home.

Of course, with the purchase came the responsibilities of home ownership: maintenance, repairs, and home improvements. Ms. Yott did not shy away from the upkeep. At one point, she even climbed atop her roof, scraping off the old shingles during a roof replacement project.

"When you are a homeowner, you commit to blood, sweat, and tears," said Ms. Yott.

Unfortunately, a devastating series of illnesses encroached upon her dreams. Ms. Yott took a leave of absence from her job to care for multiple family members who were suddenly facing serious medical situations, even caring for them under her own roof. Sadly, she lost three of her loved ones in just a short period of time.

Ms. Yott had gone through her life savings to care for her loved ones. In the midst of her grief, she was not sleeping or eating well. As it too often happens, Ms. Yott, the devoted caregiver, became sick herself, and she could not physically return to work. With all the costs piling up, she could not afford her mortgage.

Yet she did not want to seek a handout. "I never wanted to ask for help," said Ms. Yott.



Ms. Marguerite Yott in front of her home.
(Photo courtesy of The Housing Council at Pathstone.)

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Even so, during this desperate time, Ms. Yott's mortgage company suggested she contact the Housing Council at PathStone, an organization in Rochester, New York, that helps people work through difficult situations like this and prevent foreclosure.

The Housing Council is a HUD-approved agency that helps homeowners who are behind on their mortgage payments. Their foreclosure prevention services are funded through the New York State Attorney General's Homeowner Protection Program.

Every client is different. Some need longer-term assistance. Others face problems that can be solved more quickly. To resolve the myriad of issues their clients encounter, the Housing Council can work with lenders to modify loans. They also partner with other organizations who can provide clients with the guidance they need to navigate the difficult legal issues that arise.

In rural areas, making homeowners aware of their foreclosure services relies heavily on word-of-mouth. Foreclosure counselors often go on the road to make it easier for their clients to meet with them, making use of local offices, so clients do not have to travel greater distances to their Rochester office. The Housing Council also takes a pro-active approach to the issue by reaching out to municipalities and identifying localities where events like job losses mean greater potential for foreclosures.

Preventing foreclosure has a wide range of benefits. Homeowners are able to continue living in their homes. Lenders can continue to receive payment on the loan and do not have to take on the responsibility of caring for an unoccupied property. Communities do not have empty, decaying, "zombie" homes cluttering

neighborhoods and reducing property values.

When Ms. Yott reached out to the Housing Council, she was connected with Ms. Luann Brink, a Senior Foreclosure Prevention Counselor. Ms. Brink works with dozens of clients who are facing a variety of similar challenges.

"I try to ease their anxiety," said Ms. Brink.

She works with her clients to help them understand the process they are facing and the actions they can take to avoid foreclosure. Educating her clients on the lengthy legal process is a critical part of her role, and it helps Ms. Brink gain the trust of her clients.

"It gives them hope that they have time," said Ms. Brink.

In this case, Ms. Brink helped Ms. Yott find ways to increase her income, and she worked with the lender to approve a short-term forbearance plan, followed by a loan modification. The result has been very positive, with Ms. Yott now in a position to be able to afford her mortgage payments and continue living in her home.

"If it wasn't for the Housing Council..." said Ms. Yott, her voice trailing off, a mixture of both uncertainty of what foreclosure might have meant, and relief that it did not come to be.

Ms. Yott is eager to share her story with other homeowners. "It's going to be okay," is her advice to a family or an individual in a similar situation. "Don't give up. There are places out there that know you work hard, that know that bad things can happen to good people," she said.

For more information about the Homeowner Protection Program, please visit aghomehelp.com.



Photo by Ms. Hilary Mosher, courtesy of Finger Lakes PRISM.

Invasive Species Profile: Hydrilla

Over the past century, as new travel capabilities connected far-flung corners of the world, a variety of exotic plants and animals became easily accessible. While some of these foreign species may appear as elegant additions to a garden or private collection, they can also bring unforeseen and devastating outcomes.

Just one such example is occurring in Cayuga Lake.

Staff members from the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom, an organization that provides hands-on environmental learning opportunities on Cayuga Lake, initially spotted hydrilla in the Cayuga Lake Inlet in August 2011. Since then, the plant has spread to other sections of the lake.

Hydrilla, an aquatic waterweed native to Asia, was introduced into the United States during the 1950s through the aquarium trade. Hydrilla was originally used as a decoration in aquariums. It is believed to have made its way into waterways through careless or accidental releases. Commonly referred to as one of the world's most invasive aquatic species, hydrilla found no trouble colonizing bodies of freshwater in the southeastern United States, outcompeting native waterweeds, and spreading elsewhere.

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Hydrilla creates dense mats of vegetation that block out sunlight, outcompetes native species like elodea, and impedes water flow, causing stagnation. The mats of vegetation and the stagnation created from concentrated areas of hydrilla lowers the dissolved oxygen content of the water, harming recreational sport fishing. Hydrilla also tangles with engine propellers in concentrated areas, can damage passing boats, and wreaks havoc on what should be an enjoyable day on the lake.

Hydrilla is identified by whorls of bright green serrated leaves around a tubular stem, anchored by a potato-like tuber that grows in the sediment. Hydrilla is able to grow voraciously, increasing in length by about an inch a day, and reaching lengths of 25 to 30 feet. Hydrilla is able to reproduce as stem fragments drift away from the parent plant and anchor themselves elsewhere, causing great difficulty in managing the spread of hydrilla.



Photo by Ms. Hilary Mosher, courtesy of Finger Lakes PRISM.

Ms. Hilary Mosher, Coordinator for the Finger Lakes Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (FL-PRISM) at the Finger Lakes Institute at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, works with various agencies, institutions, and citizens to coordinate efforts to manage invasive species in 17 different counties. Ms. Mosher coordinates efforts in places like Monroe County, where FL-PRISM actively manages hydrilla by using innovative methods like benthic barriers and triploid grass carp. Benthic barriers are mats that lay along the bottom of a waterway, inhibiting the growth of aquatic plants like hydrilla. Triploid grass carp are aquatic grazers that can help manage a population of hydrilla.

Given the difficulty of controlling hydrilla after it becomes established, preventing its introduction to a body of water is critical. Individuals can help prevent the spread of hydrilla by complying with regulation, especially by cleaning boats. Checking watercraft for evidence of invasive species before entering the water, and cleaning pets after they get out of the water, are imperative in the fight to stop the spread of hydrilla.

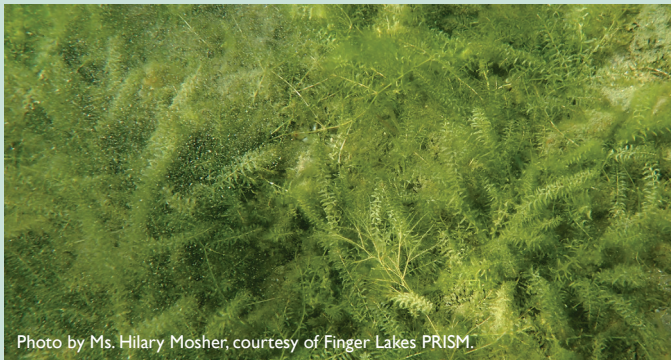


Photo by Ms. Hilary Mosher, courtesy of Finger Lakes PRISM.

“Prevention is far and away the best method to control invasive species because the cost to prevent invasive species is exponentially less than dealing with it after it gets established,” said Ms. Mosher.

As more people become aware of the critical importance of these preventative measures, the more likely invasive species like hydrilla will cease to plague our waters.

For more information about hydrilla, and to learn about stopping its spread, please visit Finger Lakes PRISM at fingerlakesinvasives.org.



Ms. Erica Leubner on her family's pumpkin farm. (Photo courtesy of Ms. Erica Leubner.)

Settling the Snow Globe

Stress management for farm families

In her effort to help farmers, Ms. Erica Leubner shares her perspective on dealing with stress on the farm. “If our brain is like a snow globe, with the floating snow representing our jumble of thoughts, then we need to first settle the snow globe,” said Ms. Leubner.

Stress is a fact-of-life on the farm, and Ms. Leubner helps farmers manage it through her role as a personal consultant for NY FarmNet. This organization provides personal and financial consultants who directly help farm families navigate the interpersonal difficulties, communication challenges, mental health concerns, and business issues closely tied to operating a farm. Often, these discussions occur on the farm – in the fields, or across the kitchen table.

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In addition to meeting one-on-one with farmers, Ms. Leubner has facilitated Stress and Conflict Presentations for groups of farmers in various locations in New York State.

During these presentations, she involves the attendees in an informal discussion of stress, and in so doing, provides a different perspective on it. Rather than putting the focus on a particular circumstance, she instead urges participants to consider the impact a whirlwind of thoughts can have upon an individual during a difficult situation.

“It’s really about how we think about different things, those uncontrollable variables like weather or market prices,” said Ms. Leubner. “The broken tractor doesn’t cause the stress – our thoughts about it are what lead to the stress.”

Calming the myriad of stressful thoughts is an important part of the process for handling challenging situations, allowing the individual to think clearly and arrive at creative solutions. It is especially important in farming where distractions can lead to dangerous situations. It goes a long way in reducing conflict, which can become more prevalent during times of high stress. Incidentally, Ms. Leubner’s presentations also include discussions about handling conflict on the farm.

Ms. Leubner earned a master’s degree in social work from Syracuse University. She grew up on a dairy farm and married into another dairy family. She and her husband run their own farm that grows pumpkins on 70 acres. It also features a bakery and brewery. But her favorite job is the work she does as a personal consultant for FarmNet. It is a natural fit, given her educational background and farming experience.

Ms. Leubner intends to continue these group presentations after the traditional growing season, perhaps starting again in November. It is an important conversation, and one that she looks forward to sharing with more farmers in New York State.

For more information about the services provided by NY FarmNet, please visit nyfarmnet.org.



Ms. Taylor Rollins and Alfalfa the bunny.
(Photo courtesy of Madison FFA.)

Books and Bunnies

Four dedicated members of the Madison Central School District community devote much of their time to helping students read. They also hop around the classrooms, nibble leaves of lettuce, and twitch their adorable noses.

Shadow, Snowball, Alfalfa, and Hazel Nut are rabbits who visit elementary classrooms on a weekly basis with a mission to encourage students to read. They are the stars of a program implemented by Ms. Taylor Rollins, a tenth grade student.

Ms. Rollins created the program as her “Supervised Agricultural Experience” (SAE), a key component within the agricultural education program at the school. Under the school’s agricultural education program, every student in seventh and eighth grade takes a 10-week agriculture course. In addition, high school students have the opportunity to pursue agriculture courses as electives. Many of the students, including Ms. Rollins, are also active FFA members. They complete SAE projects, gaining leadership and practical experience along the way.

Ms. Rollins envisioned the program as a unique way to help younger students develop and improve their reading abilities, especially those students who struggle to become comfortable with reading.

“I like the bunnies and wanted to incorporate them into something with the younger students, so I figured reading with them would be a good opportunity to do that,” said Ms. Rollins.

Paul Perry, Agricultural Science Teacher at Madison Central School District, was initially cautious when Ms. Rollins approached him with the idea. “How are a rabbit and a first grader going to get along?” wondered Mr. Perry.

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He quickly found out that the students and rabbits connected quite well. It creates a relaxing atmosphere for the students. On occasion, students have reading time first, followed by playing with the bunnies. Other times, the bunnies sit in students' laps as the teacher or a high school student reads to the group. The program receives positive feedback from the classroom teachers, and many students who previously dreaded reading look forward to their reading time with a fluffy friend.

"The elementary students get companionship, as well as skills that will last them for a lifetime," said Ms. Rollins.

Additionally, the program has enhanced Ms. Rollins' leadership skills. She coordinates the program with assistance from some of her high school classmates.

"We gain responsibility and leadership from working with the younger students, and additional responsibility and compassion skills from taking care of the bunnies," said Ms. Rollins.

Recently, the rabbits took their show on the road to visit the New York State Capitol, providing a practical example of the importance of agricultural education in schools. Yet, they could not stay long.

After all, there are just too many books to read with their human companions back in Madison.



Ms. Taylor Rollins reads to a younger student who enjoys the company of Hazel Nut the bunny.
(Photo courtesy of Madison FFA.)



Great Grapes

Importance of farm-to-school programs and products

Mr. Len Barron is the owner of Barron's Pratt Barn and Vineyard, a small family farm in Canandaigua, New York. His specialty is growing table grapes.

Students in nearby school districts affectionately call him the "Grape Guy."

According to Mr. Todd Fowler, Food Service Director for both Canandaigua City School District and Bloomfield Central School District, word spreads rapidly at school upon the arrival of a new shipment of grapes. The fresh seedless grapes that Mr. Barron delivers are favorites among many students who select them to go along with their school lunches.

For more than a decade, Mr. Barron has sold his grapes to schools. It was a market that opened to him after he attended a local farm-to-cafeteria meeting. Currently, he serves 15 – 20 schools, and they make up approximately half of his grape business.

Locally grown table grapes in New York are only available for a short period of time each year. Typically, they are harvested during September or October. Mr. Barron ensures his school district customers receive freshly-picked grapes. He picks the grapes one day and delivers them the next.

Clearly, students appreciate their availability.

"Kids eat with their eyes," said Mr. Fowler.

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Mr. Len Barron on his farm.
(Photo courtesy of Bloomfield Central School District.)

Mr. Fowler has witnessed children eat more fruits and vegetables when they have greater choices of fresh, healthy, appealing foods. On the other hand, forcing students to take a specific food item can lead to increased waste, and less nutritional value of the meal.

Farm-to-school programs require planning, patience, and investment. According to Mr. Fowler, training is critical. School districts need to learn how to work with farmers. Farmers are not produce companies. They may have limitations related to product availability and delivery. Additionally, for a program to be successful, farmers need to learn more about the intricacies of selling their products directly to schools.

“Every school, every farmer does business differently,” said Mr. Fowler.

In spite of the challenges, Mr. Fowler has been buying local farm products for years. Connections occur at the ground level. Mr. Fowler has worked with local agricultural groups, visited farmer’s markets, and conducted assessments to meet and connect with farmers.

Mr. Barron is not surprised at the popularity of his grapes. New York seedless grapes tend to be smaller, but they are also more flavorful.

“We sell out every year. I like dealing with the schools. I have more customers than grapes,” said Mr. Barron.

Mr. Fowler is grateful to have the Grape Guy as a local supplier. He recognizes the value of having fresh, local food products that students can choose to add to their lunch trays. The benefits of farm-to-school purchases are wide-ranging. It is great for local farmers, it helps the economy, and it provides access to nutritious, healthy foods that students actually consume.

“Wouldn’t it be great to have New York products on all those lunch trays?” said Mr. Fowler.

Growing Technology. Growing Data.

During the growing season on farms across New York State, rows of corn plants reach to the sky. Tomatoes ripen, turning bright red on dark green vines. Apples hang from thin branches, awaiting their selection by a discerning picker.

All the while, farm-related data is gathered, processed, and used by an increasing number of applications, computers, and technological tools including global positioning systems, specialized sensors, and even drones.

By measuring a wide range of variables such as soil conditions, crop yields, topography, and many other factors, farmers can gather detailed data for use in the day-to-day operation of their farms. When this data is associated with precise locations within a field, farmers are able to make site-specific adjustments to minimize the inputs needed to efficiently manage their farmland and increase productivity. Other data can be associated with specific animals, resulting in improved care and management of livestock. The use of these tools, along with the associated data, is often referred to as “precision agriculture.”

In 2015, legislation that originated in the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources called for an assessment of precision agriculture in New York State, along with related recommendations.

Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has issued the report, titled “Digital Agriculture in New York State.” By using the term “digital,” in place of “precision,” the report takes a broad approach to reviewing the technological tools and data management that have the potential to revolutionize agriculture in New York State. Recommendations include building infrastructure to improve connectivity in rural areas, developing data management capabilities, and investing in research and educational programs focused on digital agriculture.

To read the full report of the study, please visit the Meeting and Training Archives link under fieldcrops.cals.cornell.edu/extension-outreach/.



(Photo courtesy of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University.)

Connecting Communities

Phase Three of the New NY Broadband Program

Rural communities without meaningful access to broadband are at risk of falling behind their better-connected counterparts. Closing this digital divide is essential.

High-speed internet access allows rural businesses to expand their markets through the creation of an online presence. Emerging telehealth technology connects rural residents directly with medical professionals without requiring long distance travel to medical facilities. It increases educational opportunities through online courses and access to global information resources. Broadband access allows farmers to obtain real-time information and implement precision agriculture tools that lower costs, increase crop yields, and further improve stewardship of natural resources.



However, too often, high-speed internet access is either not offered in rural communities, or it is priced too high, making it prohibitively costly for the average resident.

To address this vital need, the New York State Broadband Program Office has already awarded funding for broadband expansion projects during its first two phases of funding. They are now accepting applications for a third phase of funding. Applications are due by August 15, 2017.

For more information about the third phase of funding for the New NY Broadband Program, please visit nysbroadband.ny.gov.

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SAVE THE DATES!

Summer is County and Youth Fair Season. For a complete list of fairs in New York State visit: agriculture.ny.gov/fairshome.html or nyfairs.org.



-  **Empire Farm Days**
August 8 – 10, 2017
Rodman Lott and Son Farms
Seneca Falls, NY
empirefarmdays.com
-  **The Great New York State Fair**
August 23 – September 4, 2017
New York State Fairgrounds,
Syracuse, NY
nysfair.ny.gov

-  **New York State Association for Rural Health**
16th Annual Conference
September 13 – September 15, 2017
New Paltz, NY
nysarh.org
-  **North Country Telemedicine**
Third Annual Conference
November 2, 2017
Lake Placid, NY
<https://3rdannualnctc.eventbrite.com>

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Please email the Commission at RURALRES@NYSENATE.GOV**