Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) is a voluntary, confidential program, led by the local Soil and Water Conservation District, designed to help farmers protect soil, water and other important natural resources. Using a five tiered approach Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff work with farmers to gauge interest, document existing stewardship and identify potential environmental concerns. Farm-specific conservation plans are developed in partnership with the farmer and the District provides technical assistance to help implement best management practices identified in those plans. District staff host on farm trainings and workshops to help increase farmers’ awareness of practices that are available to use in their operations that benefit the environment. AEM helps to ensure that New York’s farms remain viable and continue to meet their business objectives in an ever-changing market place. The Conservation District currently has a database of 255 participants in various stages of the tiered process. Soil and Water Conservation Districts across New York State continue their long record of leading and implementing AEM with farmers at the county level, supported by statewide leadership from the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee.

The NYS Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Grant Program along with the Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program were established to assist farmers in implementing the plans that are created under the AEM framework. Conservation Districts are the only entity eligible to apply for these competitive grants on behalf of farmers and coordinate funded projects. The grants can cost share up to 75% of project costs for planning or implementation. In the last 17 years, the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District has been awarded over $1,170,000 in State Funding to implement or plan for Best Management Practices to protect the State’s natural resources.
The ACSWCD received funding through the Hurricane Irene/ Tropical Storm Lee Flood Mitigation Grant. This grant was administered by Empire State Development in consultation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, to implement flood mitigation or flood control projects in creeks and streams impacted by the storms.

In 2017 the seventh and final project covered under this grant was completed along the Fox Creek in the Town of Berne. The Fox Creek is a small tributary of the Schoharie Creek and the Mohawk River. During the storms, more than 10½ inches of rain fell in this watershed, causing the Fox Creek to jump its banks and caused severe damage in the hamlet of Berne. The segment of the stream adjacent to the Old Berne Mill store and parking lot experienced severe bank erosion. Trees as well as soil and asphalt from the parking lot slipped down the banks into the stream channel, causing water quality issues.

The District was able to utilize funding to install a 123 foot Geoweb retaining wall that was backfilled with soil, mulched and seeded. The wall measures approximately 24 feet high and is secured to a concrete slab to create a sturdy foundation. This wall has most importantly stabilized the toe of the stream bank to help eliminate any future damage to the banks and structures.

In an effort to help prevent the amount of pet waste washing or being directly disposed of into local streams, water supplies and storm drains, the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District provided municipalities with the opportunity to participate in the Pet Waste Disposal Station project. The Pet Waste Disposal Stations will help encourage the community members to clean up after their pets and ensure that the waste is disposed of properly and to help reduced the amount of waste entering our local streams and water supplies. When waste is washed into streams or waterways, it decomposes, using up the oxygen in the water and releasing ammonia. Pet waste also contains nutrients that encourage weed and algae growth. The District worked with local municipal officials and park managers to install pet waste stations with bags in public areas around Albany County. Each station includes a sign, lock box with bags for waste, and a container for disposal. Through this project 67 stations have been installed in 16 municipalities as well as at the Albany International Airport, preventing hazardous organisms found in dog waste from potentially harming the local environment.
Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District, along with assistance from, the City of Albany and Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County, hosted our 3rd Annual Conservation Field Day with 88 students from City of Albany Elementary Schools. The event was held at the Normanskill Farm.

The purpose of this event is to give students in 5th and 6th grade an opportunity to become acquainted with the world of nature and some of the issues that affect their environment and their lives. A variety of environmental groups and individuals presented a 20 minute program to each group. The students rotated through eight different learning stations throughout the day. Presentation topics ranged from Safety in the Woods, Birds of Prey, Macro Invertebrates and Lyme Disease Prevention.

Community Conservation Events

The District staff takes great pride in a vast range of educational opportunities reaching young students and citizens alike. We strive to educate the conservationists of tomorrow. The Conservation District participated with an educational booth at the Family Farm Day held at Stanton Farms in Coeymans Hollow. At this event the District had the opportunity to talk with landowners about services that we can provide. The District continues to participated in the Altamont Fair to provide information about District programs. SWCD staff assisted the USDA NRCS with a soil health table at the second annual Cut Flower Workshop held at the Carey Institute in Rensselaerville. The District offers the four hour erosion and sediment control training course for contractors, developers, inspectors, engineers, and government employees. In 2017, 116 individuals were trained under this program. Staff members have also presented at Master Gardener meetings and at USDA Farm Service Agency informational workshops.

Annual Conservation Field Day

Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District, along with assistance from, the City of Albany and Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County, hosted our 3rd Annual Conservation Field Day with 88 students from City of Albany Elementary Schools. The event was held at the Normanskill Farm.

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Each spring the Soil and Water Conservation District conducts their annual Tree and Shrub Program, offering a wide variety of tree seedlings, ground covers, and wildflower seed mixes at reduced prices. All species, available for purchase, are ideal for conservation practices such as erosion control, windbreaks, shade, wildlife food/cover as well as backyard homesteading. Staff members offer advice and maps on soil types, which can help determine what to plant and where. Over eight thousand seven hundred tree and shrub seedlings were distributed to Albany County residents during the District’s 2017 Program. This program has been offered in Albany County for over 22 years with more than 332,800 trees being planted for the conservation of natural resources in Albany County and the surrounding areas.

Fish Pond Stocking Program

Popular among sportsman and kids alike is the District’s Annual Spring Fish Sale. Private pond owners across the region had the opportunity to stock their ponds with Rainbow Trout, Largemouth Bass, Channel Catfish, Triploid Grass Carp and forage fish, which are available to purchase at low cost. Adding a diversity of fish life is a great way to improve the overall health of a homeowner’s pond. Creating the proper balance of predator and prey fish will help limit the amount of bothersome issues that most often require chemical treatments such as algae, weeds and nuisance insects. Through the spring fish sale approximately 13,700 fingerlings and minnows were stocked into ponds across the county. This includes 76 Triploid Grass Carp, a herbivorous fish that provides environmentally friendly, low-cost control of nuisance aquatic weeds. The carp sold during the fish sale provide an alternative to chemical controls for a variety of pond weeds.

Technical Assistance

The Albany County SWCD strives to improve local land management practices and provide technical assistance to county residents, landowners, municipal staff, county government staff, and others. Conservation District staff provide a variety of information and permit assistance on stormwater management, erosion and sediment control practices, Agricultural Environmental Management, drainage, pond site evaluation and management, wetland identification, wildlife habitat improvement and restoration, native and invasive/exotic plants identification and management, identification of soil types and characteristics, and other natural resources management. In 2017 staff responded to over 325 requests for technical assistance. Resources made available to the public include but are not limited to soils maps and interpretation, USGS Topographic maps, Historic Aerial Photography, and NYS & Federal Wetlands maps.
A portion of the Vly Creek that runs directly through the Voorheesville Elementary School property and that is immediately adjacent the school building was severely eroding and causing a safety concern for children and staff. This area of the stream is used as a public fishing access for the community and as an outdoor teaching classroom by the school. The site contained old railroad timbers that once were used to hold the bank but were falling into the stream channel and were no longer effective. The District worked with a private contractor to replace the old railroad timbers with large angular stone along the 100 foot stretch of vulnerable stream bank. Two layers of large dense limestone were stacked along the entire stretch of the project area, carefully offsetting the layers to provide a small floodplain bench. The rock was keyed into the most stable points up and down stream. This project will stabilize the bank eliminating the erosion and providing a safe easy access point for students and the public. Small crevasses were purposely left in between the rocks to provide fish habitat and increase the irregularity of the bank. After the rocks had been positioned into place, topsoil was filled in behind the rocks. The exposed soil was seeded and mulched as soon as the heavy equipment was removed from the site.

For more information contact the Albany County SWCD at:
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**Board of Directors**: John Santacrose (Chairman - At Large Member), Edward Kleinke (Vice Chairman - Farm Bureau Rep), Jo Downey (Grange Rep), Richard Touchette (County Legislature Rep) and Vacant (County Legislature Rep)

**Staff**: Susan Lewis (Administrative Manager and Technical Assistant), Peter Bayzon (Natural Resource Specialist), and Polly Festa (District Technician)

*The mission of the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District is to advance comprehensive natural resource management on a voluntary basis to residents, landowners and units of government. The District leads by providing science based technical and educational assistance and coordination of resources from Federal, State, Local governments and other sources.*