



CONSERVATION NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MERRIMACK COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Newsletter of The Merrimack County Conservation District distributed free to Merrimack County residents and others interested in conservation of natural resources

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Conservation District
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EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE for FARMERS to RENT

Thanks to the Merrimack County Conservation District's Soil Health Initiative, grant funds were received for a Mechanical Aerator and a Wood Ash/Lime spreader, both of which are available for rent. The Soil Health Initiative of MCCD strives to keep soils healthy and productive in the recent times of drought.

The mechanical aerator is designed to alleviate soil compaction, improve nutrient retention, and promote root growth. The aerator mechanically removes small cores of soil which reduces water requirements and the chances of water run-off in the fields. When soil is compacted, it is harder for plants to establish a healthy root system and limits the movement of air, moisture, and fertilizer through the soil. Demand for the aerator has been higher than expected. If interested, please contact the district at 223-6020 to be placed on the waiting list.

The wood ash/lime spreaders will be used to help combat the challenges brought on by acidic soils by changing pH levels. Soils with slightly acidic pH levels (6.0-6.8) provide for better quality growing environments. New Hampshire has soils that are naturally acidic making it necessary in many cases to increase the pH level. Acidic soils provide less plant nutrients and lessons biological activity which can make it harder for crops to grow effectively.

While Cheshire and Strafford counties both have standard spreaders available to rent, a spreader designed for orchards was lacking. Merrimack County acquired their equipment small enough for use in orchards and small fruit production. The thinner, smaller spreader will further improve soil help for our area's different agricultural producers.

The mechanical aerator was funded in part by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the spreader was funded by a 2016 Moose plate grant. If you want to be placed on a waiting list to use this equipment, please contact MCCD at 223-6020.



Mechanical Aerator and Wood Ash/Lime Spreader

NRCS WORKS to SAVE TURTLES

The wetlands of the Northeast are home to a variety of wildlife, including the rare Blandings turtle, wood turtle and spotted turtle. All three of these turtles are under consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act which could possibly be accounted by the turtles' population struggles due to loss, fragmentation and degradation of wetland habitat.

To help reverse the decline of these turtles, NRCS is working with private landowners in the Northeast to increase available high-quality habitat to support these species' recovery through land protection as well as restoration and enhancement of habitat.

With the help of NRCS, landowners are making wildlife improvements to working lands and protecting ...

Continued on page 3

Merrimack County is still experiencing severe drought. If you are a producer experiencing problems due to the ongoing drought, please contact the Merrimack County Farm Service Agency Office in Concord at 223-6003 for more information about drought related programs.

~ Donna Juneau, County Executive
Director of the Farm Service Agency

\$500,000 to HELP FARMERS MANAGE DROUGHT CONDITIONS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering information and programs to help farmers in New Hampshire make their operations more resilient in the face of future drought. As part of that effort, NH NRCS has established a state-wide pool using \$500,000 of the Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds to help farmers address concerns of water availability, soil health, water infiltration, and water holding capacity.

Widespread drought conditions during the 2016 growing season affected farms in all ten New Hampshire counties, qualifying them for drought assistance through USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). Producers will be able to apply for irrigation practices that will help them address water needs, irrigate efficiently and improve soil health which intern increases drought resiliency.

“The drought of 2016 in New Hampshire has made it clear that we need to do all we can to help farmers in New Hampshire who are struggling to keep their farms sustainable without enough water”, said Rick Ellsmore, NH NRCS State Conservationist.

NRCS soil scientists also offer the following recommendations for farmers and landowners facing drought conditions: Save the soil and stretch every drop of water. Farmers who want to make every drop of water count can develop an irrigation water management plan with the NRCS conservation planner. Farmers can also increase soil organic matter in three to 10 years if they adopt conservation practices to achieve this goal, including planting cover crops, residue management, converting to crops that use less water, or mulching. Additional information can be found online at: NRCS-NH Drought Resources.

The EQUIP offers technical help for planning and designing conservation practices that protect our water and air, improve soil health, enable us to better care for farm animals, manage animal waste, and sustain our agricultural land. They also offer financial assistance to make these practices more affordable once an application is determined eligible for funding.

EQUIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis and are considered for funding during specific ranking periods. Once all other planning requirements needed for an application to be considered for funding have been completed, your application under this initiative can be considered for the next ranking period. The upcoming ranking batching dates for this initiative are: **January 20, 2017, February 17, 2017, and March 17, 2017.**



Farmer barrowing field

Farmer Appreciation Night

Join us to honor the farmers that support NH Gleans and feed local families while discovering the food access initiatives going on in the community. Guest Speaker Lorraine Merrill, NH agricultural Commissioner, will talk about local agriculture after which there will be a Q&A and a buffet filled with locally-sourced food. Event will be held on **Tuesday, February 7 from 6-8pm** at the **NH Audubon McLane Center** in Concord, NH. Cost is \$15 and all proceeds go to MCCD’s Local Food Program. Please RSVP by emailing localfood@merrimackccd.org or calling 603-223-6020.

Community Movie Screening

Learn about the power of produce and the many ways you can ensure that your child is eating healthy through the screening of the documentary *The Kids Menu*.

The screening will be held **Wednesday, January 25th from 6-8pm** in the **Bessie Rowell Community Center in Franklin, NH**. Please RSVP with your name and number at localfood@merrimackccd.org



Free childcare is available, please specify on your RSVP if this service is needed.

In Partnership with Franklin HEAL

Garden Planning Workshop

Join MCCD for a workshop that will provide gardeners with knowledge and advice for planning their garden for the upcoming season. This workshop is open to the public. The first in a series of workshops will be held **Tuesday, January 17th from 4-6pm** at **NHTI in Little Hall, room 114**.

Hosted by MCCD and the NHTI Sustainable Agricultural Technologies Program.





GLEANNING PROJECT THANKS YOU

Merrimack County Conservation District would like to thank all those who supported our gleaning program in 2016. Since 2014, MCCD has been the regional leader for NH Gleans, a statewide initiative, coordinating gleaning activities in Merrimack County. Throughout the summer and fall MCCD, with the help of volunteers, harvested extra crops from local farms to bring to food pantries and other donation sites.

During this past season over 13,000 pounds of nutritious, local produce was recovered from local farms and donated to those in need throughout Merrimack County. Not only did this food reach food pantries, but also schools, community centers, soup kitchens, and senior centers. With many food insecure families in NH (around 140,000), NH Gleans helps to increase access to healthy foods and connect people to their local farms.

To learn more about gleaning in your community and how to get involved, visit www.nhgleans.org.

A big thank you to all the farms in Merrimack County that supported NH Gleans in 2016:

- Blue Moon Berry Farm
- Brookford Farm
- Carter Hill Orchard
- Hackleboro Orchards
- Highland Lake Apple Farm
- Muster Field Farm
- Paul Smith School Garden
- Russell Certified Organic
- Spring Ledge Farm
- Terra Organics NH
- Two Mountain Farm
- Warner River Organics
- Work Song Farm

MOOSEPLATE GRANTS

2017 has two different projects that will be funded by the Moose plate grant.

Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, \$20,000

Deuk Conservation Easement

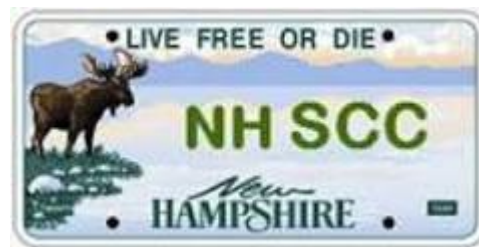
Purchase a conservation easement on approximately 450 acres in Danbury. The property would protect approximately 1.5 miles of frontage on the Smith River and its tributaries. In addition, the property is highly rating in the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan. The easement will allow for low impact recreation including hunting and fishing

Merrimack County Conservation District, \$10,750

Merrimack County Skidder Bridge Initiative

Merrimack County Conservation District strives to improve water quality in forestry operations by creating a Merrimack County Skidder Bridge Initiative. The goals of this project are to create awareness of skidder bridges and other Forestry Best Management Practices to conserve natural resources and make available skidder bridges through a low-cost rental program.

Please consider supporting conservation in New Hampshire by sporting a Moose Plate on your car to help fund conservation projects across the county.



Turtles (continued)

lands not suitable for farming with conservation easements. Through conservation practices, landowners are restoring and protecting wetlands, managing healthy riparian areas and stream corridors, and improving grazing and forestry operations.

This seven-state turtle project is part of the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) partnership, a collaborative approach to conserve habitat on working lands. WLFW provides technical and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and Healthy Forests Reserve Program, all conservation programs of the Farm Bill, the largest funding source for conservation on private lands.

Habitat restored for these turtles benefit many other species, including blue-spotted salamander, New England cottontail, American bittern, wood duck, American woodcock, American black duck, moose, bobcat and brook trout.

If you own or manage land, you can help too! NRCS offers financial assistance and free technical support to help agricultural producers voluntarily improve habitat for these turtle species. This assistance helps producers plan and implement a variety of conservation activities, or practices, that benefit waterfowl and other aquatic species.

Financial assistance helps producers pay for the adoption of conservation systems that improve the health of wetland ecosystems. Common conservation practices include conservation cover riparian forested buffering, wetland creation and restoration, planting trees and shrubs, and management of invasive plants.

Easement programs offer landowners that have agricultural or forest practices an incentive to take those areas out of production or to enable them to implement conservation measures that guide when lands are mowed and harvested to avoid impacting these turtle species.

If you're interested in technical and financial assistance from NRCS, please contact your local USDA service center. An NRCS conservationist in your community will help you develop a conservation plan customized to your land, and if you're interested, apply for financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs. Contact the Concord Field Office at 603-223-6023.



Spotted Turtle, Photo courtesy of NH Fish and Game.

Photo © Judi Lindsey



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Merrimack County Winter Farmers Markets

Winter Farmers Market at Cole Garden—November-April

Open Saturdays 10-1:30. Located in Cole Gardens, 430 Loudon Rd, Concord, NH

Contoocook Winter Farmers' Market—November-May

Open Saturdays, 10-1pm. Located at the Hopkinton Town Hall in Hopkinton, NH

Danbury Winter Farmers' Market—November-April

Open First Saturday of each month from 9am-1pm. Located in Danbury Grange, 15 North Rd, Danbury, NH.

New London Winter Farmers' Market—Saturday, Feb. 18

Open from 10am-3pm in Whipple Hall, New London NH. Held in conjunction with the New London Winter Carnival Festivities.

Sweet Beet Market

Open Saturdays 9am-4pm. Located at 11 W Main St, Bradford, NH.



THE MISSION OF THE MERRIMACK COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT IS TO PROMOTE AND ACHIEVE CONSERVATION OF THE LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE OF MERRIMACK COUNTY.