



**ESSEX COUNTY  
SOIL & WATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

# **ESSEX COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

**ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2025**

# AGRICULTURE

## FARM COMPOST FACILITY

**Echo Farm worked with Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District** to complete a compost facility with funding through the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program (Round 28). The farm compost pile was located close to a waterway, and technicians worked with the farm to find a solution to the resource concern that was recognized through the Agricultural Environmental Management program tiered planning process. The compost is now processed in a covered compost area with a concrete pad which prevents nutrient runoff and allows for improved nutrient management on the farm. The new system will prevent clean rainwater from entering the compost, keeping clean water clean and preventing polluted runoff from reaching waterways.



*AEM project: Compost pad under construction*

## AEM ROUND 18 IMPLEMENTATION

**Several Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program Round 18 Implementation projects were completed in 2025.** This cost share program allowed for the completion of a pasture management system that installed a livestock watering system and fence to keep animals out of waterways and drainage areas, provide appropriate fencing for a rotational grazing system, and allow for ease of watering. Soil health practices, including both single and multi-species cover crops, and no-till practices were implemented. This program also assisted with the construction of two compost facilities to eliminate runoff from compost piles and allow for better nutrient management on these farms.

## WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

**Water management systems were completed on three farms in 2025 utilizing Climate Resilient Farming funding.**

One of these included two ponds, a pump, and grassed waterways. Another installed a roof runoff system, a storage tank, and livestock pipeline. The third included a pond and a pump system. All of these projects will help the farms better manage water on the landscape, hold water for use in droughts, and move water to where it is needed on these farms.



# AGRICULTURE

## 2026-2030 AEM STRATEGIC PLAN

The District completed its next five year plan for the Agricultural Environmental Management program. This plan helps guide District staff as they work with producers to plan and implement conservation practices throughout the county. Two stakeholder events were held; one for agricultural producers and one for partner organizations that work with the District to serve farms. These events provided feedback and helped shape the plan. The 2026-2030 Essex County plan can be found on the District's website.



## Hugh Hammond Bennett Award Given to Essex County Farm

Ben Wever Farm of Willsboro, NY was awarded the 2024 Hugh Hammond Bennett National Producer Award in Salt Lake City at the National Association of Conservation Districts annual conference. This award is given to a farm that has "exemplified outstanding service through development and implementation of sound conservation planning and other conservation techniques". Owners Shaun and Linda Gilliland were recognized for their commitment to environmental stewardship.



Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District nominated Ben Wever Farm as a result of the farm's participation in the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program, including continued planning and implementation of best practices over their 20 years of farm ownership. The Gillillands, in collaboration with conservation professionals from Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Plattsburgh, have embraced innovation, overcome challenges, and stayed true to their vision of intentional farming, with conservation stewardship as their main objective. Congratulations to Shaun and Linda Gilliland of Ben Wever Farm for this well-deserved recognition.

# EDUCATION



## Day in The Life – HUDSON RIVER PROGRAM

**In August of 2025, Essex County Soil and Water Conservation District technicians took an instructional course, alongside high school science teachers, that provided base guidelines for following the Day in The Life program.** This partnership program uses hands-on education for middle and high school level students to learn stream features such as turbidity, pH, and invertebrate ecology. Later in the year, the District collaborated with a high school science class from Minerva Central School that requested additional equipment and program information. The District provided field equipment including waders, kick nets, invertebrate identification keys, along with guidance and instruction focusing on stream health. A fun and educational day was spent on the Hudson River, where students gained practical experience and knowledge about stream ecology.



## FARM TALKS

**In 2025 the District finished up its series of farm talks, which were supported with funding from the Lake Champlain Basin Program and NEIWPCC.** Over the three-year period 16 events were held throughout Essex County. These events brought producers together on farms to share a meal, tour the farm, and talk about anything pertaining to farming. Projects were showcased, farmers shared challenges and discussed solutions, and new connections were made. The District plans to support continued farm events in the future. Please reach out if you'd like to host an event.

Over the three-year period  
16 events were held  
throughout Essex County.

# EDUCATION

## SCHOOL MINIGRANT

**2025 was our most successful year yet with our school mini grant. We were able to reimburse 7 school projects across 6 different school districts in Essex County!** These districts included AuSable Valley, Boquet Valley, Crown Point, Minerva, Newcomb, and Saranac Lake. With this mini grant schools were able to fund projects and field trips, including studies on a local pond, building and growing in a greenhouse, and learning about water ecology on a boat. This is an annual program and Essex County schools are encouraged to participate.



## SEPTIC WORKSHOPS



**Three septic workshops were held in 2025.** The District partnered with Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District and CWICNY (Champlain Watershed Coalition of New York) to put on the Saranac Lake event. The other two workshop locations were Keene Valley and Schroon Lake. Participants learned about how septic systems work and the importance of maintaining a properly working system. The Lake Champlain Basin Program and NEIWPCC provided funding support.

# MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE



## NAACC ASSESSMENTS

District staff assessed 12 culverts in 2025 utilizing the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NAACC) protocols. This helps identify culverts that have reduced aquatic passage capacity and helps prioritize replacement needs. NAACC data can be found at [https://naacc.org/naacc\\_search\\_crossing.cfm](https://naacc.org/naacc_search_crossing.cfm). The District is working with several partners to assist in replacing several culverts in the coming years.

## HYDROSEEDING

It was a slow start to the year, with not a lot of municipalities needing immediate hydroseeding done on the roads. However, it started picking up mid-summer. The towns we were able to seed were North Elba, Essex, Newcomb, Westport, Moriah, Chesterfield, and Schoon Lake. **Over the course of the year, we were able to hydroseed 16.15 miles of road.**



## Live Edge Plow Cost Share Program

Essex County SWCD once again offered a cost-share program to allow local municipalities to purchase live-edge plows for their trucks. These blades are segmented to provide more contact with the road surface, allowing for more efficient snow removal. This can reduce the amount of salt that needs to be applied. Municipalities have been enthusiastic about adapting this practice.



# PARTNERSHIPS



## NO-TILL DRILL

The no-till drill was utilized on several farms this year as well as on a DOT municipal project. The drill and other equipment are available for rent. See the District's website for more information.

## POLLINATOR GARDENS

The District partnered with Adirondack Action and NYSDOT to install pollinator display gardens at the High Peaks Rest Areas.



*District staff after a wet day of tree planting and event coordination.*

## BUFFER

In 2025 we hit the ground running and were able to complete all of our buffer maintenance locations within a month. That included a total of 17 properties maintained and recorded. We were also able to complete three new plantings, partnering with BRASS (Boquet River Association) for one large scale event. Funding for this was provided by the Lake Champlain Basin and NEIWPC.

**In total, we planted 775 stems and over 1,500 feet of riparian buffer over the course of 2025.**



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Essex County Soil and  
Water Conservation District

## 2025 DISTRICT STAFF

**Alice Halloran** *District Manager*

**Renee Clark** *Office Manager*

**Daniel Berheide** *Technician*

**Meagan Goff** *Technician*

**Mathew Severance** *Technician*

**Noah Weber** *Technician*

## SUMMER INTERNS

**Olivia Sayre**

**Marissa McLean**

**Emily Pinheiro**

## 2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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