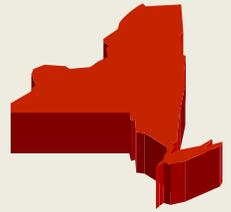


---

**Warren County Agricultural Environmental Management  
Program (AEM)  
Strategic Plan 2015-2020**

---



**Contact Information:  
Warren County Soil & Water  
Conservation District**

394 Schroon River Road  
Warrensburg, NY 12885  
Email: [nrowell123@nycap.rr.com](mailto:nrowell123@nycap.rr.com)  
Phone: 518-623-3119 Fax: 518-623-3519  
Website: [www.warrenswcd.org](http://www.warrenswcd.org)

## **Table of Contents**

I. Introduction	1
II. Vision	1
III. Mission	1
IV. Advisory Committee	1
V. Historical Prospective and Current Status	2
VI. AEM Overview in Warren County	2
VII. Priority Watersheds/ Issues	4
a. Upper Hudson River Watershed	6
b. Southern Lake Champlain Watershed	7
VIII. Agricultural Issues and Opportunities	8
a. Goals	8
i. Current Program Goals	8
ii. Economics and Community	8
iii. Environmental Factors	9
b. Existing Conditions	9
i. Soils and Nutrients	9
ii. Other Natural Resource Concerns	9
iii. Invasive Species	9
iv. Small Farm Concerns	10
c. Resource Recommendations (Objectives)	10
i. Outreach	10
ii. The Farm Talks “Growing Agricultural Knowledge”	11
iii. Education	11
iv. Technical Assistance	13
IX. Local Team Capacity	13
X. Agricultural Resources	14
XI. Evaluation Strategy	15
XII. Budgeted Activities 2015-2020	17
XIII. Quarterly Timeline 2015-2020	17

## **Introduction**

Over the past five years Warren County has been recognized for its small farms and growing farming community. The Adirondack Harvest Program, farmers market groups, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), SUNY Adirondack, the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee and Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are just a few of the active partnering agencies and community organizations that have worked to make this possible. In the past three years our Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program has seen a 200% growth and is continuing to progress in participation and agricultural conservation projects.

The AEM program has grown not only in Warren County but statewide as well. The AEM program is also recognized federally as being an important program for voluntary, sustainable farming. The following is a revision of the Strategic plan set forth for 2015-2020.

## **Vision**

The vision of the AEM program for Warren County has always been the sustained high quality of our agricultural lands and natural resources. Included is the health and productivity of our soils, integrity of the lakes and streams and the health of the over and understory vegetation. Our office and farms have the goal of growing Warren County agriculture, while protecting our natural resources.

## **Mission**

The mission of the AEM program for Warren County is to promote stewardship to increase the quality of natural resources and production on agricultural land within the County. By promoting stewardship of our land and water resources through education, outreach and implementing best management strategies for soil and water quality, we seek the enhancement of both traditional and non-traditional agriculture in Warren County.

## **Advisory Committee**

In 2015, members of the Warren County Water Quality Strategy Committee (WC WQSC) and the Warren County SWCD Board of Directors approved the AEM 2015-2020 strategic plan put forth by the Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District on behalf of Warren County. A designated subcommittee acts as the Agricultural Coordinating Committee (ACC) initiated in 2015 for the Agriculture Environmental Management Program. This core group of advisory members has grown to include Adirondack Harvest and Farmers markets representatives, the Greater Adirondack Resource Conservation and Development Council, Cornell Cooperative

Extension, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Warren County Planning Department, NYS DEC, the Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition NY, Warren County SWCD and other interested agencies, organizations and associations.

### **Historical Prospective and Current Status**

Warren County likely reached its peak in traditional agriculture during the mid to late 1800's and from that point agriculture continued to decline within the county. Since the 2005 AEM strategic plan development however, the number of small farms in the county has been increasing. The AEM program has seen its largest increase in farms from 2013 to the start of 2015.

The most recent USDA Census of Agriculture data from 2007 to 2012 shows that there are 31 additional farms in Warren County and the number of maple sugaring operations has more than doubled. Also, Christmas tree farms have increased 41% from 2007 to 2012 and Warren County has a large number of goats, in comparison to the rest of NYS.

New York State is a major point of entry for commerce including agricultural products entering and leaving the United States, which puts us at greater risk for the introduction of non-native species and diseases. The management and control of invasive plants, insects, diseases, and other can be facilitated by farmers. Farmers working daily with the land, plants and animals can assist in early detection and control.

In 2003, Governor Pataki signed legislation that called for an Invasive Species Task Force co-led by two New York State agencies the Department of Agriculture and Markets (DAM) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to explore the invasive species issue and to provide recommendations. NYS Agriculture and Markets Law, under Article 14, grants the Commissioner of DAM the authority to prevent, control and eradicate alien insects, noxious weeds and plant diseases at the State level. Through the County's contact with farms through the AEM program we are in a position to assist in this endeavor.

NYS Prohibited and Regulated Invasive Plants

[http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands\\_forests\\_pdf/isprohibitedplants2.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/isprohibitedplants2.pdf)

### **AEM Overview in Warren County**

Through AEM and the Adirondack Harvest programs we are showcasing our quality small farms, cheese and maple producers, wool and associated products, tree farmers, and other local produce. In recent history, Warren County was not known for a significant number of farms or other large agricultural enterprises. However, in the past 5 year our small niche farms have been expanding and increasing throughout the county.

Through the AEM program we have the resources to work with our farmers to develop conservations plans for minimizing soil loss, increasing water quality and protecting natural resources while working with the goals of the farm.

In 2015 in partnership with the Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board and 14 counties, we received a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant through NRCS that will provide project funds for conservation and farm systems with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) standards. This grant will assist our farms with agricultural conservation projects to benefit the natural resources and the farm.

Watershed associations for Lake George and Lake Champlain are very active in the basins and are valued resources for information and education. Watershed management plans exist for several of the sub-basins, including Halfway Brook, and several of the smaller lakes in the Upper Hudson Watershed that also maintain active landowner associations.

1) Tier 1&2

Fifty-five farms have participated in the AEM process since 2005.

Tier 3a and 4

Ten farms have Conservation Plans developed for implementation, several of whom we have provided detailed designs, construction oversight or inspection.

2) Regional Conservation Partnership Program Grant – The grant will provide funding and assistance for agricultural conservation projects on farms from 2015 to 2018.

3) Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

Two cooperating ranches were assessed in Hudson River Watershed, and both were funded for BMPs through AMA.

4) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

One farm has been funded to install new paddocks for rotational grazing in a native habitat. One farm has been funded for a high tunnel and one farm has been funded for buffer fencing around environmentally sensitive areas.

5) Warren County Horse Trail Assessment (2002)

Six horse farms were assessed in the Hudson River Watershed, four horse farms in the Schroon River Watershed, and three

farms in the Lake Champlain Watershed were assessed in regard to erosion on the horse trails.

6) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

All Champlain Basin agriculture was included in this program by the Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition of New York (CWICNY).

8) Soil Savers Grant (2014)- Held a Soil Health and Nutrition training and Farm Conservation training. The grant also provided soil testing supplies.

### **Priority Watersheds**

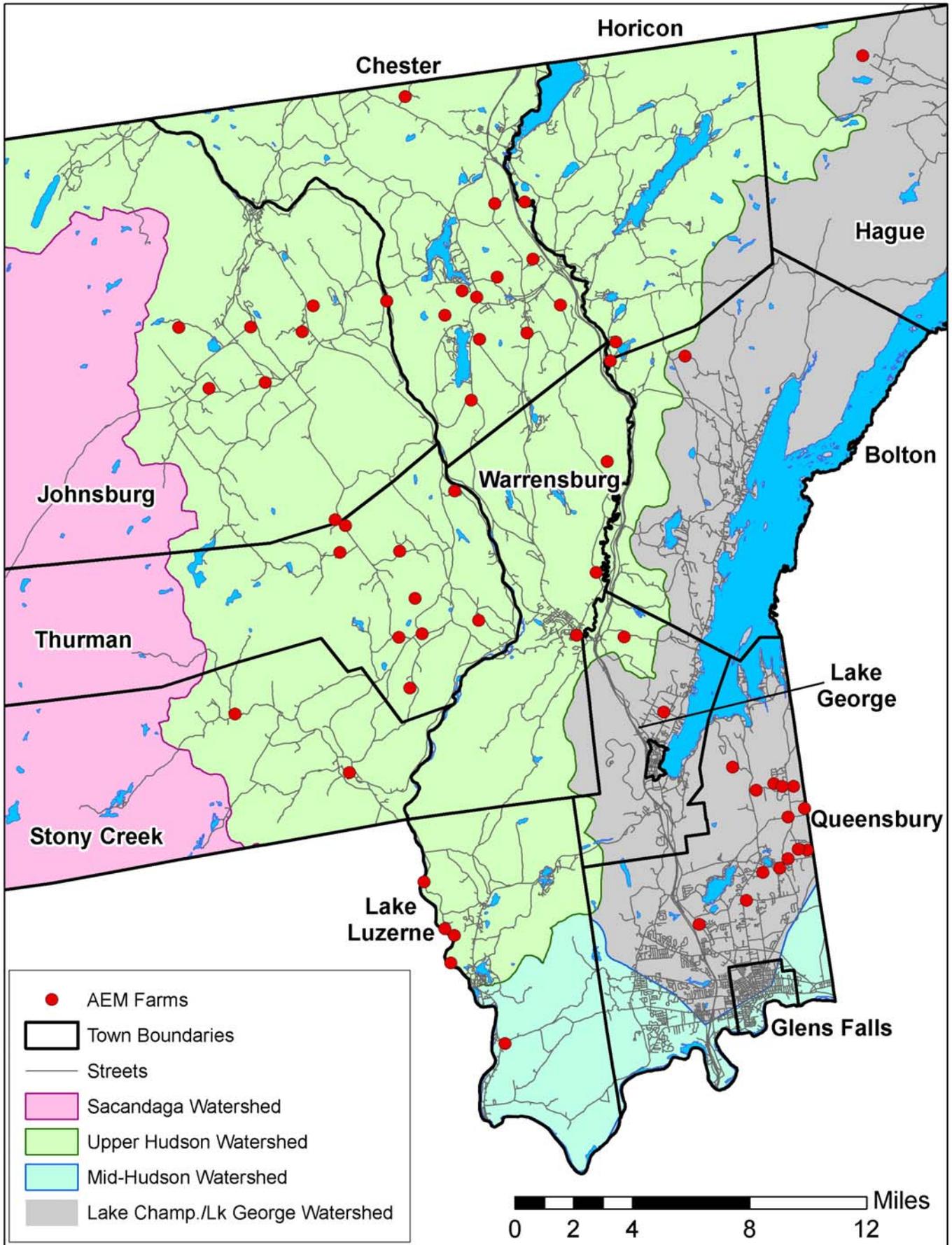
Most of the farms in Warren County fall into one of the two major watersheds: the Southern Lake Champlain and Upper Hudson River. These watershed planning units have been prioritized based on their geographic location which encompasses most of Warren County. The majority of the farms in the Southern Lake Champlain Basin of Warren County are located in the Halfway Brook sub-basin primarily in the Town of Queensbury and for the Upper Hudson River Basin in the Towns of Thurman, Chester and Johnsburg.

The number of farms located in the Northern Hudson River Basin has made this watershed a priority in this strategy. However the PWL listing, public interest and needs have also played a part in ranking these watersheds.

Planning Units and individual farms have also been ranked in Geographic Information systems (GIS) according to resource concerns identified in the Tier 2 AEM planning process to identify specific issues of concern for each watershed and farm. (See page 6 map)

As a result of analyzing the last three years of AEM visits and assessments, pasture, soil, manure and stream and floodplain management rank the highest in our Tier 2 priorities. Addressing these priorities with our farmers can help to increase the amount of pasture and soil productivity through a custom designed rotational grazing plan, timely manure spreading for maximum uptake of nutrients and in turn, lessen nutrient and soil runoff to nearby waterbodies.

# Warren County AEM Priority Watershed Map



## **Upper Hudson River Watershed**

### ***Water Quality:***

According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation PWL the Hudson River is impacted immediately below Warren County. Preemptive measures to ensure water quality in the Hudson River in Warren County are essential to diminish overall impacts to the riparian system as a whole. The Schroom River is a sub-watershed within the Upper Hudson River Watershed and is a C(T) classified trout stream. According to the NYS DEC PWL, siltation causes precluded fish propagation and stressed survival.

Sources of the pollutants are unknown, but are suspected to be de-icing materials, urban runoff, agriculture, silviculture and construction

### ***GOALS / Desired Future Condition:***

Assessing the condition and needs of farms in this watershed will serve to educate farmers on best management strategies in order to help their farms grow in a sustainable way while mitigating future impacts.

### ***Accomplishments to Date***

Grants and funding for programs such as AMA and EQIP have been implemented for the Upper Hudson Watershed through NRCS programs. WCSWCD continues to work together with NRCS specifically through the development of the AEM program. Watershed Management plans have been developed on sub-basins throughout the Upper Hudson Watershed. Several active landowner associations are involved with the WQSC and have been working directly with WCSWCD. Through the AEM program we have conducted an inventory of agricultural concerns from farms that participated in the program, as well as the AEM advisory members and other cooperating members of the WQSC. Most of the farms in the Upper Hudson River Basin of Warren County are located in the Towns of Thurman, Chester and Johnsburg. Nine Conservation plans (Tier 3a) have been developed for farms in this watershed. Many of these plans have been successfully implemented over the last 3 years.

## **Southern Lake Champlain Watershed**

### ***Water Quality:***

The South Lake Champlain drainage basin includes both the Lake George and Halfway Brook sub-basins which are also listed individually on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Priority Waterbodies List (PWL). This section of the Champlain Watershed is listed as impacted for a wide variety of uses.

Contributing sources of sediment and pollutants come from combined sewer overflow, deicing materials, agricultural runoff, stream bank erosion, urban runoff, habitat modification, storm sewers and construction.

### ***GOALS / Desired Future Condition:***

Assessing the condition and needs of farms in this watershed will serve to educate farmers on best management strategies to help their farms grow in a sustainable way while mitigating future impacts.

### ***Accomplishments to Date***

Grants and funding to date for programs such as CREP, detailed in the *Historical Perspective* section, are few for the Southern Lake Champlain Watershed. Active partners such as watershed associations for Lake George and Lake Champlain are valued resources for information and education. These groups are actively engaged with the WCSWCD and are involved through the WQSC with the AEM program. Concerns regarding the health of the streams and lakes in the basin have led to a history of cooperation among these watershed partners. Through the AEM program we have conducted an inventory of agricultural concerns from farms that participated in the program, as well as the AEM advisory members and other cooperating members of the WQSC. The majority of farms in the Southern Lake Champlain Basin for Warren County are located in the Halfway Brook Sub-basin primarily in the Town of Queensbury. Conservation plans (Tier 3a) have been developed for farms and implemented.

## **Agricultural Issues and Opportunities**

### **Goals**

The main goal for agriculture in Warren County is an increase to sustainable production of local goods and services, while minimizing impacts to our natural resources. What is good for the land is good for the farm.

#### Current Program Goals

In 2015, a major goal for our AEM Program is to develop a grant application to develop an agricultural needs watershed assessment for Warren County farms. Additional goals for our growing program are to secure funding to assist our farms with planned conservation projects and to implement Tier 3A plans.

#### Economics and Community

It is important that the community perceives farms as good neighbors and that there is a high level of support for agriculture in our region in order to ensure the continuation of these local goods and services. It is also important that the community is aware of the environmental benefits of agriculture and its importance.

The community benefits of agriculture range from self reliance on local products, reducing shipping costs and fossil fuel usage, to exposure to invasive species from foreign produce. In addition, local agriculture adds an economic viability to the region while adding to the appeal of an area through open space, that agriculture can provide for wildlife and recreational opportunities at a farm.

The Warren County Economic Development Council in partnership with the Adirondack Gateway Council is part of a multicounty plan that is currently in the process of being developed. The council is recognizing agriculture as part of the economic development in our area and is incorporating agri-tourism in the plan. This plan will help develop and recognize agriculture and its importance to our economics, tourism and healthy communities. Growth of our farm markets and roadside stands are providing additional local products in many of our communities. In addition to growing farmers markets, the markets are now becoming year-round operations and combined with our numerous roadside stands; local produce is easily accessible and readily available throughout the populated and rural areas of the county. Once the report is completed, the data and research will be useful when applying for agricultural grants.

SUNY Adirondack is becoming the main location for agricultural events, business and education. Along with agricultural courses and internships, they

are pursuing efforts towards a food hub for the community and are making progress towards expanding grants and assistance.

### Environmental Factors

Protecting environmental resources such as streams, groundwater, fertile farm lands and forests goes hand in hand with protecting aesthetic resources. Improved management of both farm and urban lands can reduce the potential for nutrient runoff and soil loss to nearby waterbodies. Sustainable farming can add both to the recreational attractions in the area and to the community's ability to support its needs such as local products and clean water and air.

## **Existing Conditions**

### Soils and Nutrients

Soils in both the Southern Champlain and Upper Hudson sub-watersheds have been identified as highly erodible, well-drained silts and sands. These sediments can aggrade into nearby streams and lead to delta formations in lakes. Nutrification, exotic species, salts, metals and pathogens are listed on the PWL as pollutants from potential sources such as agriculture, silviculture, construction and other urban runoff sources.

### Other Natural Resource Concerns

Natural resource concerns for Warren County agriculture stem from overgrazed land, improperly installed skid and access roads, lack of knowledge on the use of rotational graze systems and cover crops and stream side buffers. All of these can result in excessive erosion, decreased crop production, decreased soil productivity and poor pasture. These factors can contribute to degraded water quality in nearby lakes and streams.

### Invasive Species

Another concern is the introduction and control of invasive species including plants, insects and diseases. These pests can live in packaging when items are shipped from one region to another as well as take over in disturbed or highly managed lands. These species are not only problematic to deal with, but can be a threat to the ecosystem's balance with native species. Invasives can warrant herbicide, pesticides and biological controls to keep at bay, adding yet another level of concern and expense.

Education and outreach of invasive species is an important part of the AEM Program due to the distribution of products. It is important that landowners do not introduce invasives to their farms possibly leading to time and monetary expenditures. It is equally important that the farm recognize any invasives currently on the farm to prevent distribution unintentionally to other areas.

### Small Farm Concerns

There have been issues locally and throughout NYS, according to the Cornell Small Farms Task Group in obtaining an easily accessible, clear and reasonable set of rules for guidelines and licensing for small farms and markets. This includes small farms maintaining their businesses, looking to expand or diversify, as well as promote their products.

The rising cost of feed has also been identified by farmers as a concern, which is attributed to the increased demand for corn in ethanol production.

### **Resource Recommendations (Objectives)**

Outreach, education, public participation and technical assistance are key components that the AEM Advisory Committee has encouraged in the building of the AEM team capacity.

### Outreach

#### *The Growth of the AEM Program*

A complete database for farms in Warren County did not exist before the start of the AEM program in 2005. One of the first efforts of the Warren County SWCD was to locate and contact possible participants to the program. This entailed driving around the county to identify potential farms and develop a mailing database.

In 2005 the AEM committee sent out a series of informational request letters by mail to approximately 72 identified farms. Phone calls were made as a follow up effort and the committee has had some success through newspaper coverage of the program and sign award press releases. Of the informational request, 54% of the farms we have contacted now participate in the AEM program.

The committee created a brochure for our County AEM program which was mailed and made available at local events such as the Adirondack Waterfest and the Warren County Fair. Additionally, AEM hats were embroidered and purchased and given to our Tier 3a farmers.

#### *New Efforts*

The local AEM brochure for our County should be updated on a timely basis to reflect new photos and current information for farmers. Keeping media relations with the local newspaper on current events and accomplishments are another effective way to communicate the importance of sustainable agriculture within the community.

The promotion of our local products and the AEM program can also be done through our partners at the farmers markets and the Adirondack Harvest program, as well as working with CCE, County Planning, RC&D and SWCD. Getting the information out that AEM helps farms, protects the environment and benefits the community is a high priority.

### The Farm Talks: "Growing Agricultural Knowledge"

The AEM Program in Warren County has grown exponentially from Year 9 to Year 10. The program has seen a 200% growth and the District is working yearly with quadruple the number of active farms. A large part in the expansion our AEM Program is due to our outreach and educational series called *The Farm Talks*. We created *The Farm Talks* in January of 2014 and the series has been a great success in bringing education to our niche farms and communities. Our four talks have had over 190 attendee with numerous organizations attending and requesting to use the series design. Throughout the series we've partnered with SUNY Adirondack, five SWCD's, USDA-NRCS, the NYSDEC and numerous farms within and outside Warren County. The program is designed to bring in new and successful Warren County farm subjects by having experts from our area present on these agricultural topics such as, year-round high tunnel production, starting a hop yard and soil health and nutrition. At each talk we also give a presentation on the benefits of the AEM Program to farms of all sizes and types and how the program provides farm conservation plans, technical assistance and grant funding opportunities. From *The Farm Talks*, additional agricultural groups have been created through the opportunity for farmers to network during talks which has led to Warren County farms partnering in business and knowledge.

The series has become the main educational and outreach portion of AEM with multiple newspapers and websites gladly posting and printing every talk the District holds. This has been a great way to not only get AEM into the media but has also been an excellent outreach for the District as a whole, winning the NYS CDEA 2015 Special Project Award.

### Education

Only through the involvement of all the stakeholders, both farmers and government alike, can we come to develop a working relationship that will ensure all of our success and the protection and longevity of our natural resources.

Having assistance available to farmers within the community and providing seminars on guidelines, regulations and licensing for farms and sales to the public should be an ongoing occurrence. Farmers may benefit from courses on

reducing their direct dependence on grain by making better use of grasslands and rotational grazing to get more benefits from the pasture.

SUNY Adirondack currently offers agricultural courses and is building agriculture into the curriculum as of 2014 & 2015. Many Warren County farmers have taken courses at the college. Along with Cornell Cooperative Extension's small farm classes and The Farm Talks bringing in local experts for free presentations, agricultural education in Warren County has become exceptional and very popular. The programs provide education on multiple aspects of farming including business, best management practices and current topics.

Through the cooperation of the AEM advisory committee we have agreed to have AEM pamphlets and information available at display tables at local events such as farmer's markets, County Fair, SWCD activities, the Adirondack Waterfest as well as numerous other activities that each of the stakeholders are involved.

Educational articles in the newspaper and outreaching through many of CCE and RC&D's educational events are all ways to communicate with our stakeholders. School events can be an effective way to bring the message home to interested family members as well as educate the next generation of farmers.

According to *The Key Opportunities and Strategic Investments to Enhance Small Farm Viability in New York, Report and Recommendations* from the 2006 NY Small Farm Summit and the Cornell Small Farms Task Group:

"The following were identified as major opportunities to enhance the viability and sustainability of New York's small farms:

1. Marketing innovations to connect consumers with local and regional producers
2. Renewable energy technologies, energy crops and energy conservation
3. Enhanced utilization of grasslands resources for economic development and environmental protection
4. Integrated farming systems using appropriate technologies
5. Improved processing regulations, infrastructure and technologies for small farm meat and dairy products
6. Beginning farmer support"

More information is available at

<http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/>

<http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/files/2012/03/SummitReport12.17.12-1pz8dd0.pdf>

## Technical Assistance

As a voluntary program, we are only as powerful as the participation of our stakeholders, primarily the farmers working the land and making the decisions. Farming with environmentally sound methods can increase production and decrease costs. Farmers that are aware, willing to participate and understand the benefits of sustainable farming will be more willing to take initiative to improve areas of concern.

Through the program techniques such as: rotational grazing, manure spreading and storage, proper pesticide and fertilizer use and storage, skills in surveying, drafting, GIS, knowledge of stream buffers and stormwater drainage from barns and other structures are available. Through these techniques, the AEM program can help the farmer meet their needs through Conservation Planning (Tier 3a) and Implementation (Tier 4) by coupling the concerns of the farmer with increased soil and water quality.

Best management practices to prevent erosion and sediment from skid trails and other access roads should be implemented during silvicultural practices. In addition, the use and storage of chemicals in any of the agricultural practices including Christmas trees, nursery, greenhouse, and field crops should continue to be considered.

As partners with the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP), we can work together with our farmers to reduce the spread of exotic plants on fallow ground by planting cover crops. Using native stream side buffers and encouraging the use of native species in farming were early detection through educated landowners can prevent a degradation of our waters, decreased maple and crop production and destruction of our forests and forest products.

Through outreach, education and technical assistance farmers can become aware of what it takes to grow in a way that will ensure that the resources they depend on are intact for generations to come.

## **Local Team Capacity**

There are many partnerships that have been forged through the years, particularly through the WC WQSC. The ongoing, long term partnerships have been fostered through continual cooperation among both agencies and organizations for betterment of the County's resources. The core subgroup of this organization has expertise ranging from education and grant writing to survey, design and construction oversight.

With one CPSEC certified staff member and two in the certification process at

the District, we are able to address the concerns of the farmer and can increase soil and water quality, native plantings and stream buffers and agricultural runoff from barnyards and paddocks. Agricultural Best Management Practices continue to increase the health of our farm lands, production and natural resources.

The District Conservationist at NRCS has expertise on proper rotational grazing techniques, timely manure spreading and storage, and proper pesticide and fertilizer use and storage.

The District and NRCS staff are also skilled in surveying, drafting, GIS, and have access to soil, wetland and stream information and archive aerial photographs that can help the farmer to meet their needs.

The Adirondack Harvest program is heavily involved with the farm markets in the Adirondack Park and have taken the initiative help promote the local goods in the region and are a tremendous resource for forming and continuing relations with local farms.

The Warren County Planning Office operations can act as a resource and the Economic Development Council is part of a new plan that is incorporating agricultural. A small business program at SUNY Adirondack is offering a class where existing and potential small business operators can receive one-on-one technical assistance with a Warren County Planning staff person. Also, SUNY Adirondack is developing an Agricultural Program and is currently offering classes in multiple agricultural fields. With a new agricultural coordinator, the college and the District have been partnering on various programs.

The NYS DEC is a resource that can be utilized for wildlife, wetland and forestry information, as well as permitting. The District works with the DEC often and has a General Permit that can be utilized on private lands under SWCD supervision and project approval.

### **Agricultural Resources**

- Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District [www.warrenswcd.org](http://www.warrenswcd.org)
- USDA-NRCS Natural Resource Conservation Service [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS) <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip>
- Cornell Cooperative Extension [warren.cce.cornell.edu](http://warren.cce.cornell.edu)
- Adirondack Harvest [www.adirondackharvest.com](http://www.adirondackharvest.com)
- SUNY Adirondack [www.sunyacc.edu](http://www.sunyacc.edu)

- Agricultural Value Assessments- Contact Warren Co. SWCD  
[www.tax.ny.gov/research/property/assess/valuation/ag\\_overview.htm](http://www.tax.ny.gov/research/property/assess/valuation/ag_overview.htm)
- Forestry [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4972.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4972.html)
- Farmers Markets: [www.glensfallsfarmersmarket.com](http://www.glensfallsfarmersmarket.com),  
[www.boltonlandingfarmersmarket.com](http://www.boltonlandingfarmersmarket.com),  
[chestertownfarmersmarket.com/](http://chestertownfarmersmarket.com/), [www.northcreekfarmersmarket.com](http://www.northcreekfarmersmarket.com),  
[www.lakegeorgeguide.com/events/farmers-markets](http://www.lakegeorgeguide.com/events/farmers-markets)

## **Evaluation Strategy**

Being able to quantify results and effectiveness of a program can be an effective way to illustrate its value to stakeholders and funding sources. Some of the fundamental successes are hard to measure, such as community support and encouragement of local agricultural enterprises or buying local products that have been produced in an environmentally friendly manner.

Farmer's sales and participation of the community in farmer's markets, farm tours and natural resources awareness are all valuable ways to judge a programs accomplishments.

AEM sign awards are a crowning achievement for the farmers and a chance for them to be recognized for the work they have accomplished to become an environmentally sustainable farm. The extent that best management practices are implemented can also be a measure of success, such as Tiered assessments completed or the comparison of current program participation levels versus previous years.

Each year the results from the Tier 2 evaluations are compiled, helping to set priorities for the following year. Tier 4 conservation plan implementation and effectiveness of the best management practices are also conducted through Tier 5 follow-up. In addition, farms and the tier achieved are then recorded in a GIS map database that can assist with resource concern prioritization within each watershed.

Follow up phone calls and site visits to assist landowners with their plans can help assure that a quality program is being delivered. A review of programs being implemented compared to watershed needs is an assessment tool that can result in making changes in farming practices to fit the local conservation needs.

Other feedback and evaluation mechanisms include conservation program education attendance, inquiry and participation levels with the AEM program. Time permitting, a sampling of nutrients and the physical observation of sediment in nearby waterbodies, can help to mark the success of AEM implementation over the program years.

Each year the Warren County SWCD Annual Report announces the accomplishments of the AEM program that were achieved. AEM presentations are also given to the District Board of Directors, Warren County Board of Supervisors and the Water Quality Strategy Committee as well as continual updates throughout the year. These kinds of presentations get the word out to all our partners that farming sustainably through AEM is a benefit to our local community.

**Budgeted Activities 2015-2020** *(See Annual Action Plan for yearly budget breakdown)*

Tier 1 and Tier 2 - initial contact, goals and farm assessment

Tier 3a - Conservation Plan Development to reach goals

Tier 4 - Implementation, survey, design installation, construction oversight and inspection of practices.

Tier 5a - Follow up reevaluation

Education

Outreach

Program Evaluation

Partnership Activities

Reporting

**Quarterly Timeline 2015-2020**

Quarter 1 (May -August)

Site visits, surveying, Tier 1, 2, 3a, 4 and 5a assessments, outreach and education, media, partnership activities

Quarter 2 (September - November)

Site visits, continue assessments, work with Adirondack Harvest and Farmer's market activities and other partnership activities

Quarter 3 (December- February)

Educational Efforts, reporting, updating databases, program evaluation

Quarter 4 (March-May)

Outreach, mailings, brochures, phone calls, 3a Plan writing