

Conservation Times

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2018

Developing Community to Support Urban Farms and Eating Local

What do Middletown farmers, community organizers, educators, conservationists, food and nutrition consultants, and municipal staff have in common? The Middletown Urban Agriculture Project! What started as a grant project funded by the National Association of Conservation Districts has taken on a life of its own as everyone involved has recognized the value of meeting at the table, and building a collaboration with the many people and groups that comprise, or have an interest in Middletown's urban agriculture community.

The project addresses several different aspects of urban farming: on the conservation side, planning and implementing sustainable agricultural practices; and on the education and outreach side, promoting backyard gardening and eating healthy local fresh produce.

Primary project partners include Long Lane Farm, a cooperative student run vegetable farm at Wesleyan University; Forest City Farms, an organic vegetable farm on City land; Middletown Regional Agriculture Science & Technology Center, a high school program drawing students from a 17 town area; North End Action Team, a community organization focused on the North End neighborhood, that has two community gardens and runs a farmers market; the Family Resource Center, which serves at-risk families at Macdonough and Farm Hill elementary schools, and runs school gardening programs; the Middletown Food Corps program, connecting kids to real food and promoting health through food/nutrition education, gardening and cooking activities, and access to farm-fresh food; a food and nutrition consultant who works on early childhood health issues; and the City Dept. of Planning, Conservation & Development, which supports local agriculture by leasing land to farmers, and through its Commission on Conservation and Agriculture. Other project collaborators include the Community Health Center, St. Vincent de Paul Middletown, and Café 56.

Accomplishments include working with Long Lane Farm and Forest City Farms to develop conservation plans focused on protecting natural resources and enhancing productivity. These plans lay the groundwork for implementing management practices, such as conservation cover to improve pollinator habitat; crop rotation for soil health; cover crops to prevent erosion; seasonal high tunnels to extend the growing season; mulching to conserve moisture, prevent soil compaction, reduce runoff, and control weeds; and nutrient management to ensure optimum levels and prevent nutrient run-off. The plans also make the farms eligible for funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and CT Farmland Restoration Program.

We planned and held a variety of community activities: *Meet the Experts Gardening Q&A* at the North End Action Team Erin Street Community Garden; *Put Local on Your*



Planting beans, snap peas, and cukes in CT's own CowPots to take home at the Forest City Farms *Spring Discovery Day*

Plate, a three-part cooking series with demonstrations led by local chefs focused on using fresh seasonal local produce; spring and fall family-friendly educational farm days at Forest City Farms, with soil health, composting and beekeeping displays and resources, hands-on planting activities, crafts, tastings of foods made from farm produce, live music, a farm stand and tours (with additional support from a grant from The Rockfall Foundation). As part of our educational outreach, we also developed a flyer on lead-safe urban gardening for distribution at events.

Working with our diverse group of partners has been energizing and rewarding, and has resulted in many productive, positive connections. We look forward to keeping this effort going, and are already planning for next spring's activities!



On the menu at our Summer Veggies *Put Local on Your Plate* cooking demo with Chef Sabrina Cortes of Café 56: French onion soup, kale and watermelon salad, and ratatouille.



District staff met with Wesleyan Long Lane Farm students to discuss farming practices and possible improvements as part of a preliminary assessment

Coginchaug River Watershed Update

Progress on the District's ongoing work to address high *E.coli* bacteria levels in the Coginchaug River watershed in 2017 includes completing two water quality improvement projects with farms, funded by CT DEEP through US EPA Clean Water Act §319 grants; and continued water quality assessment through our citizen monitoring program.

At Deerfield Farm in Durham, we completed a project to address milk room waste in collaboration with the town and dairy farmer. The project consisted of designing and constructing a subsurface disposal system for milk room wastewaters. The photograph below shows the trenches installed, with distribution boxes. We also conducted an assessment of nutrient management needs with recommendations for improved practices, which will form the basis of future improvement work at the farm.



At the town-owned Northern Heights property in Guilford, which is currently leased by Mountain Valley Farm for grazing, we worked with the town to develop an alternate water source for agricultural use. The project consisted of a drilled well and associated components to provide water to cows pastured in the field from April to November; and a



heavy use area around the watering facility to prevent erosion. A new water source was needed due to a previous project that had excluded cows from the stream to protect water quality.

Water quality monitoring continued with the help of ten community volunteers through our Connecticut River Watch Program. Volunteers were trained in water sampling protocols and provided with sampling supplies, and collected samples at seven main stem and tributary sites throughout the watershed on nine days from mid-July to early September. Samples were analyzed at the State Health Department Lab for *E.coli* bacteria in collaboration with town health departments, and results were compiled and analyzed by the District. 2017 results show ongoing concerns with bacteria levels in the watershed, with the overall highest levels in Fowler Brook in Durham, and Lyman Meadow Brook in Middlefield.



RCPP Grant Award Provides Resources for Technical Assistance to Farms

The District is excited to be participating in the Long Island Sound Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a six-state initiative to reduce nitrogen pollution from storm water funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Last spring, we applied for and were awarded a three-year grant to assist farmers with soil health and nutrient management in our 26-town area in collaboration with NRCS, and work is now underway.

Through development of conservation plans we are helping to address natural resource concerns such as soil erosion, uncovered manure storage, excessive or year-round manure spreading, animal access to streams, exposed soil in pastures, minimal or no vegetated buffers around farm ponds and other water resources, lack of gutters on farm buildings, and storm water runoff and drainage concerns. Once plans are in place, we will certify implementation of practices.

Contact our office if you are interested in learning more or obtaining assistance for your farm!

District Publications Available

Did you know that the District has a variety of educational publications available to promote stewardship of natural resources, appropriate for students and adults? They can all be downloaded from our website, or feel free to stop by our office for copies. Most would be great for classroom use and are available in quantity. Please check our website or contact our office for more information.

Backyard Water Resources Guide: A Guide to the Stewardship and Protection of Backyard Wetlands, Ponds, Streams, Lakes, Rivers and Estuaries, includes background information on watersheds and water quality, and provides simple, safe and sound practices to protect the health and quality of backyard water resources. It covers lawn care and landscape management, septic system maintenance, hazardous household products, and drainage and storm water runoff.

Invasive Plants In Your Backyard! A Guide to Their Identification and Control, provides detailed identification and control information for eighteen common backyard invasives with recommendations for native alternatives to plant in their stead, and provides background on invasive plants and why they are a concern.

How to Create a Streamside Buffer Garden explains why streamside buffer gardens are important to water quality, stream health and wildlife, and provides how-to guidance on sizing, designing and planting a buffer garden, including a list of good choices for trees, shrubs and perennials.

Pet Waste, Water Quality & Your Health is a tri-fold brochure about the detrimental environmental and health impacts of uncollected pet waste, and how to pick up and dispose of the waste properly. Copies of the brochure are not currently available, but we have applied for a grant to reprint it. Pet waste materials also include an attention-grabbing postcard that summarizes the information in the brochure.

70th Annual Meeting Held at Forest City Farms as part of Fall Harvest Day

District board members, staff, family, friends, and partners gathered for our 70th annual meeting at Forest City Farms in Middletown, and were treated to a walking tour of the farm and lots of family-friendly activities! A fun and educational time was had by all. Following our brief business meeting and a report on the year's conservation successes, we celebrated our Conservation Award winners (below), then enjoyed refreshments and Fall Harvest Day activities.



Forest City Farms, owned and managed by Gabe Russo with support from many family members, is a small farm located along the Connecticut River, producing organically grown food and contributing to the local sustainable food community. A wide variety of heirloom produce and culinary herbs is grown at the farm, and sold at farmers markets and to local restaurants, distributed in farm shares, and donated to the city's soup kitchen and food pantry.

Gabe Russo led us on an extensive tour and spoke about the farming operation; efforts to enhance the farmland for agriculture, like building the soil fertility, clearing invasive plants and pollinator plantings; beekeeping at the farm; their recent certification as an organic farm; and their plans to expand and diversify crops, and develop educational facilities and offer programs to engage local families and children in the farm.

Many thanks to Forest City Farms for hosting our annual meeting at the farm, and including us in the first annual Fall Harvest Day. And kudos to Gabe for his Cooperator award, given in recognition of his many accomplishments that have transformed his leased land into a productive, sustainable organic vegetable farm; his dedication to the community; and his commitment to promoting farming and healthy eating.

Popular Environmental Film Series Continues

Now in its third year, *The Elements: An Environmental Film Series* has developed quite a following! Film attendance has risen at this popular film series that brings together diverse community members and constituents of the five partner groups to see and discuss films with experts on the topic, and learn more about critical environmental issues and individual actions that we can take to help address them.

2017 films included *Merchants of Doubt*, an expose of the hired guns who create doubt about well-studied, serious public and environmental health threats, like cigarettes, flame retardants and climate change; *Racing to Zero*, about San Francisco's efforts to achieve zero waste; *Forgotten Farms*, about the New England dairy industry and the significant role our dairies play in sustaining the local farm economy; and *A Plastic Ocean*, an exploration of the detrimental effects of ocean plastic pollution.

Winter and spring 2018 screenings include *Just Eat It*, about food waste and food rescue; and *Comfort Zone*, about what climate change means locally, in our own backyards. Check our website and Facebook page for information about upcoming films.

Congratulations 2017 Conservation Award Winners!

Cooperator

Gabe Russo, Forest City Farms

Special Merit

Chapmans Pond Fishway Design/Construction Team:

Howard Pfrommer & Matt Carrol, Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates

Kevin Foreman & Scott Hines, Schumack Engineered Construction

Steve Gephard & Tim Wildman, CT Dept of Energy and Environmental Protection



(L-R) Howard Pfrommer, Scott Hines, and Steve Gephard, with District Vice-Chair Alison Guinness



Gabe Russo and District Executive Director Jane Brawerman

Photo: David Bauer

Certificates of Appreciation

Lorraine Jalbert, CRCCD Board

David Richards, Clinton Nurseries

Gloria Priam, Priam Vineyards

Mark & Mindy Yuknat, CT River Expeditions

Mary Kay Brown, Organic Vintages

Pierre Bennerup, Sunny Border Nurseries

Rob Merritt, R2 Graphics

Tanger Outlets, Westbrook, CT

Thomas D. Comer, CPA, Comer & Company, LLC



District News & Events

MANY THANKS TO OUR RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

Several long-time members retired from the Board of Directors this past fall: Mark Yuknat, from Haddam, who was on the board for 13 years; Gary Crump, from Marlborough, also on the board for 13 years; and Eric Davison, from Chester, who joined the board three years ago. We are grateful for their many contributions to the District over the years, and hope that we will still be able to benefit from their unique skills and perspectives in a board advisory capacity.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST CONSERVATIONIST!

A big congratulations to District Natural Resource Specialist Kelly Starr and her husband Scott Giavarini on the birth of their son, Charlie. Our newest conservationist, now a one-year old, has been learning about pollinators from Kelly, and even has play farm, complete with sheep, cows, horses, and goats. We expect that Charlie will be ready to assist his mom with farm assessments and conservation planning very soon! We missed Kelly while she was out on leave and we are very happy to have her back, picking up where she left off, providing technical assistance to our farms and municipalities.

13TH ANNUAL RIVER CRUISE FUNDRAISER ENCHANTS ALL

This year's Tree Swallow Cruise and Wine Tasting to benefit the Connecticut River Watch Program must have been the lucky 13th! Everything conspired for a perfect evening: beautiful weather (even though it had been threatening to be wet and windy); a very friendly and fun-loving group of people; a spectacular tree swallow show, the best we have seen in a long time; and, as always, delicious and plentiful food and wine, and stunning scenery. We are already looking forward to next year's cruise.

We are very grateful for our generous sponsors—CT River Expeditions, Priam Vineyards, Organic Vintages, and R2 Graphics—and everyone who joined us on board or made a donation in support of our citizen monitoring program for the Connecticut River and tributaries. A heartfelt thank you to all!



27TH ANNUAL PLANT & SEEDLING SALE: April 27-29, 2018 Old Saybrook Shopping Center, Old Saybrook, CT



Winter is the perfect time to plan for a spring renewal of your yard! We have an exciting assortment of CT native shrubs, ground covers, evergreen tree seedlings, flowering perennials, ferns, grasses, and culinary herbs to choose from in our 2018 sale. Offerings include new plants, such as fragrant sumac, and favorite standbys, like winterberry, red

chokeberry, and summersweet. Once again we will have expanded ground cover and perennials sections; two gardens in a box (bird and pollinators); and Collins Organic Compost. We recommend ordering early for the best selection!

Advance orders are due **by April 6, 2018**. For a brochure and order form phone (860) 346-3282 or go to www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal.

January 2018

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sound use and management of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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The District serves the towns of Berlin, Chester, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Hebron, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, Marlborough, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Rocky Hill, Salem and Westbrook.

The Board of Directors holds public meetings every fourth Tuesday, 6:00 PM, at deKoven House Community Center in Middletown. All programs and services are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

Conservation Times is published by:

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