Strengthening Agriculture’s Role in Protecting Water Quality in the Owasco Lake Watershed

Presented by:
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Agriculture’s Significant Economic Impact

• Estimated value of ag products sold from farms in the watershed is more than $36 million
• Farms create jobs in the community
• Every dollar earned in agriculture turns over four times before it leaves local community
• Other benefits (tourism, open space, locally available fresh food)
Why is Agriculture well positioned in Owasco Lake?

- Soils are deep, well drained and high in calcium
- Over 55% of the watershed is in agriculture creating a critical mass
- Readily accessible markets
- Excellent support services
Results from Farm Interviews: Common Themes

• Personal Interviews with 10 farmers range in size and type of operation
• All had adopted some type of conservation practices
• Wanted to have a positive impact on keeping water clean because their operation depended on clean water and want to be a good neighbor and steward
Results from Farm Interviews: Conservation Practices Adopted

- Conservation Tillage and Strip Cropping
- Tile Drainage and Ponds
- Nutrient Management Plans
- Changed from row crops to grazing
- Fencing cattle from streams
- Barnyard Runoff Improvements
- Laneways for animal movements
- Buffers along streams
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
Agricultural Environmental Management

• Voluntary, incentive-based program that helps farmers operate environmentally sound and economically viable businesses using a 5 tiered assessment approach to develop and implement comprehensive, site-specific farm plans.

• 89 farms totaling 31,765 acres have participated in AEM in Cayuga Co’s section of the watershed.

• 24 have completed the process through implementation (Tier 5)
Conclusions to Date (Preliminary Findings)

• Farmers interviewed want to “do the right thing” to protect water and the environment; yet they need to balance this with being profitable in a often volatile economic climate.

• There is a communications disconnect between the farm community and non-farm community

• Continue to brainstorm ways to overcome barriers to either the adoption of conservation practices or implementing the practices they want to.
Conclusions to Date
(Preliminary Findings, cont.)

• Those closely related to Owasco Lake, support well managed farms and want to work with the farm community to help them implement conservation practices to further protect water quality in Owasco Lake.

Your ideas and suggestions are most welcome!
THANK YOU