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FYI ...

April 2004

NACD Spring Legislative Conference

Joe Gergela NYACD President, Vinny Tamagna, Association Secretary and Rich Lewis the Association's new Executive Director participated in NACD's Spring Legislative Conference in Washington. They met with staff of 10 Congressional Representatives and the State's two US Senators.

One of the issues discussed was NYACD's concern that New York's farmers aren't getting their fair share of Farm Bill Conservation Program funds. For example EQIP funding this year was increased by 40% nationwide yet New York's increase was less than 2% even though we had a backlog of roughly 785 farms requesting \$55 million in EQIP funding. With help from our congressional delegation we can still increase the final program allocations for New York through supplemental appropriations expected later in the federal fiscal year or in program allocations for next year, which are being discussed now.

AEM Congressional Earmark

NYACD working in cooperation with NYSDA&M has helped secure a \$750,000 Congressional Earmark for implementing AEM in New York. The funding would come through NRCS to NYSDA&M/NYSSWCC. How these funds will eventually be distributed to SWCD's is now part of negotiations between the 4 Way Conservation Partnership and Ag and Markets.

Save the dates:

- May 26-27 NYS Envirothon, SUNY Morrisville
- July 14 Four Way Conservation Partnership Meeting, Albany New York
- Aug 2-4 NACD Northeast Meeting, Burlington Vermont

Stormwater Funding for SWCDs

In this years Governor's proposed EPF budget is an additional \$500,000 in reimbursement funding to SWCDs for activities related to stormwater management. This proposed increased funding is a direct result of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment lobbying the Governor's Office on the need to raise the Phase 2 Stormwater Construction Permit fees based on the amount of acres disturbed. If passed by the Legislature the new fees will generate more revenue for the State.

NYACD and the NYSCDEA participated in the discussions explaining how Districts are becoming more involved in assisting contractors, municipalities and DEC on stormwater issues and that the Districts ability to meet this somewhat new and expanding workload will be dependent on additional funding.

The proposed additional reimbursement means the \$30,000 cap will be exceeded. As a result a one-time exemption was included in the Governor's 30 day amendment appropriation bill (S.6055/A9555A).

State Legislative Visits

Thirty-two Soil and Water Conservation Districts participated in NYACD's 2004 State Legislative Day. Our three priority issues this year were: removal of the reimbursement cap (SWCDs had almost \$11 million in reimbursable expenses, yet were only eligible to receive \$1.86 million statewide because of the \$30,000 cap per district); dedicated, non-competitive funding for AEM; and an increase in the EPF funding levels proposed by the Governor for the Non-point Source Pollution Program. The EPF nonpoint source program includes funding for agricultural non-point source pollution control and abatement projects on farms.

NWTF's Wheelin' Sportsmen Program

NYACD at their March board meeting endorsed Soil and Water Conservation District participation in the National Wild Turkey Federation's Wheelin' Sportsman Program. The Wheelin' Sportsman Program was created by a merger between the Alabama based Wheelin Sportsmen' and the NWTF. This national effort is aimed at providing the disabled with opportunities to get out and enjoy outdoor activities.

The NWTF would enter into an MOU with a SWCD to host two events per year at no cost to the District. These events could be a nature walk for special needs children or a presentation on watersheds to a senior or disabled veterans group. The main idea is to get the disabled mentally and physically back out into the great outdoors. This program will provide an opportunity for Districts to reach out to a group of people they normally would not reach.

For more information on how your District can participate contact:

Shawn Rybka

National Wild Turkey Foundation

Northeast Wheelin' Sportsmen Event Coordinator

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Conservation Security Program (CSP)

NYACD co-sponsored with American Farmland Trust an informational meeting on the CSP proposed rules. The meeting involved representatives from 17 agencies, agricultural organizations and environmental groups who were concerned how NRCS was proposing to implement this new Farm Bill program. Four members of NYACD 's Board participated in these discussions.

In 2003 Farm Services Agency (FSA) made \$270 million in subsidy payments to New York's farmers. CSP is envisioned to eventually replace those payments. The concern is if NRCS implements the new program in a way that discourages farmer participation it could significantly affect the agricultural industry in New York.

The Association also provided written comments to NRCS on the proposed rules. Our comments emphasized that: CSP needs to be an entitlement program available to all farmers; CSP needs to be equitable and fair; CSP needs to have programmatic flexibility (farmers shouldn't have to meet water and soil quality criteria before applying and CSP should complement New York's AEM Program); CSP should have significant financial incentives to –" reward the best and motivate the rest"; CSP should not require work without payments; CSP needs to motivate farmers but not set standards too high; and finally CSP needs to achieve defensible conservation benefits.