



# Conservation News

Newsletter of the Merrimack County Conservation District — Fall 2010

## The Mike Lynch Story

After nearly two decades as Merrimack and Belknap Counties' Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist, Mike Lynch is pulling up stakes for a new job in a new office.

In his role as statewide Resource Conservationist Lynch will draw upon his natural mentoring abilities to provide support, guidance and technical assistance to NRCS personnel throughout the state. Assistant State Conservationist Jim Spielman told *Conservation News* "We wanted to tap into his experience. We have a lot of young people and Mike has a lot of experience."



*Mike Lynch's career path in conservation began in 1981 when he started as a soil conservationist.*

While he looks forward to the challenge of new duties and expanded contacts, Lynch is clear in that he will miss his colleagues and landowners from Belknap and Merrimack Counties. "It's always about the people you work with," he says.

Lynch grew up in North Andover, Massachusetts in what was then a fairly rural setting. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in history at Holy Cross College in Worcester, following which he sold electrical supplies in Boston for several years.

Tiring of city life, he moved to the Connecticut River Valley to earn Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry at University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

In 1981 "it was my wife's turn" so the Lynches moved to Concord, NH so she could attend

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Local Foods: Focus on Farmers

MCCD's Local Foods initiative shifted focus this summer to the county's need for improved agricultural infrastructure. Speaking of last fall's Local Foods forums, District Manager Stacy Luke observes "Infrastructure was a big rallying cry in the two areas (of the county) that are the most agriculturally oriented—Loudon and Warner."

A grant from Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) enabled the District to survey farmers online, by mail and at farmers' markets throughout the county. MCCD staff queried over 50 farmers to

determine what they need to improve their productivity.

Results will be reported in the next *Conservation News*.

### Round Table Discussion

Initial results have prompted the District to schedule a free listening session and lunch for farmers and service providers Tuesday December 7 at NH Audubon Society's PSNH Conference Room. The District's goal is to provide an opportunity for service providers to learn from farmers what providers can do to help farmers increase their productivity. The event is designed as a safe space in which farmers can discuss candidly

their goals, current physical infrastructure, barriers and resources necessary to improve local food production.

All issues are on the table and service providers will be on hand to hear what participants have to say. The event is funded by SARE and USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), with guidance from Cheshire County Conservation District (CCCD) and Southern NH Resource Conservation & Development (SNHRC&D).

MCCD Manager Stacy Luke is looking for 12 to 15 farmers who operate farms of varying sizes, types and from different

*(Continued on page 5)*

# District News Round Up

## Composting workshops

Vermiculturist Joan O'Connor and composting maven Ayn Whytmare shared the dais at two *Four Seasons Composting* workshops September 19 and October 3 in Hopkinton and Pembroke, respectively.

The workshops entertained and informed attendees. Joan's Famous Worms wriggled their way into the compost bins, if not the hearts, of several families. The second session included a hands-on tour of Ayn's hot and cold compost piles at Found Well Farm in Pembroke.

Learn about vermicomposting at [www.joansworms.com](http://www.joansworms.com). You can research native plants at [www.foundwellfarm.com](http://www.foundwellfarm.com) □



*Participants learn how to install an erosion control blankets at the District's Field Day.*

## Erosion Control Field Day

MCCD held its first Erosion Control Field Day on July 15 at Concord's Carter Hill Orchard. About 100 participants from northern New England listened to presentations by experts on seeding, then moved to seven

field stations to learn about various issues and strategies in erosion control. □

## Muster Field Farm County and State Co-operator of the Year

The Sutton farm fields where militia once mustered are used now to demonstrate traditional NH farm equipment and techniques. The will of owner Robert Bristol established Muster Field Farm as a working museum, with more than 200 of the farm's 250 acres in conservation easement.

MCCD honored Muster Field Farm as the county's 2009 Conservation Co-operator of the Year at the District's annual meeting June 29. In a similar vein, NH Association of Conservation Districts named the farm State Co-operator of the Year at its November annual meeting.

Both organizations cited the farm for its dedication to conservation practices. The farm produces vegetables, flowers, hay, eggs and cordwood. Volunteers cut ice from nearby Kezar Lake, storing it in a traditional sawdust-lined ice house for summer. "The museum ties agriculture with teaching the cultural heritage of the county," says District Conservationist Michael Lynch. □

## Nature Fest

District staff welcomed families at the Little Nature Museum's two-day Nature Fest held at Hopkinton's Gould Hill Orchard in September. Children followed the life cycle of a water droplet from the clouds to the earth in the *Incredible Journey* activity. Special exhibits, hayrides and other activities rounded out the event. You can find the Little Nature Museum at [www.littlenaturemuseum.org](http://www.littlenaturemuseum.org). □



*A wagon waits at Sutton's Muster Field.*

## CONSERVATION NEWS



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THE MISSION OF THE MERRIMACK COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT IS TO PROMOTE AND ACHIEVE CONSERVATION OF THE LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE OF MERRIMACK COUNTY.

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## 2011 Conservation Stewardship Program Deadline Extended to January 7

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has revised and expanded its Conservation Security Program. In its new incarnation, the renamed Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a significant shift in how NRCS provides conservation assistance. "It has been totally revamped and made available nationwide," says Soil Conservationist Katherine Swain. "It is significantly different. I'm excited about this program."

Unlike other NRCS programs, CPS rewards overall efforts on a five-year contract basis instead of sharing costs of a specific project or paying a price-per-acre. Payments are weighted—better performance translates into higher payments. CPS is unique also in that acreage of cropland, grassland, private forest land or improved pastureland can be of any size.



*NRCS Soil Conservationist Katherine Swain digs into her work.*

Another unique facet of CSP is the fact that the program considers an owner's entire holdings, not merely the land qualifying for payment. This results in a more comprehensive plan for the property. As Swain points out "It gives me the opportunity to work holistically with the land owner, to look at their entire picture. I'm excited about this program."

There are two payment possibilities: annual payments of up to \$40,000 per annum (not to total over \$200,000 in the five-year contract) and supplemental payments for use of specified resource conserving cover crops in rotation. These supplemental payments can pay a land owner's seed costs. "Cover crop seed is expensive," says Swain "but it's a good thing for them to do."

Both participant and land must meet specific criteria. An applicant must have control of the land for the five year period in question and fall within generous income guidelines.

The land must have some conservation measures in place and show no signs of erosion. Owners whose land does not meet these criteria are encouraged to work on these issues via other NRCS programs before moving into the CSP. "Oftentimes the CSP applicant will discover there are opportunities in other NRCS programs," says Swain. "We would love to work with them."

Once basic conservation measures are in place, the owner must commit to implementing new measures, selected from a large list of possible conservation enhancements, and maintaining them throughout the contract period.



*Timberland owner and CSP participant Greg Lemay hugs a tree at his Christmas Tree Farm.*

The list covers a wide variety of activities from establishing pollinator habitat to creating wildlife structures on forestland to altering haying methods and timing. "A popular measure I've had people do is plant a cover crop that will scavenge residual nitrogen," says Swain. Enhancements may be grouped into a synergistic bundle which carries greater weight when formulating payments.

Since there is significant paperwork involved in this program, NRCS staff provide assistance with documentation and the application process in addition to technical assistance in conservation planning.

You can try CSP on for size with no obligation by filling out the Self-Screening Checklist at [www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov).

To discuss the program and explore your CSP options contact Swain at the Concord NRCS office (603-223-6025). □

# NRCS Expands High Tunnel Regs, FSA Unveils Loan Program



*Growers can upgrade their high tunnels, thanks to a recent NRCS ruling. An FSA conservation loan can help with cost sharing.*

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will now allow participants in its high tunnel program—including those who have an existing NRCS tunnel—to use electricity, mechanical ventilation and heating. Producers who want to add these components to their tunnel need to do so at their own expense. NRCS will not provide cost share and the payment rate will not change.

This decision opens the door for two important additions to high tunnels: double poly with an inflation fan and electric ventilation fans. Double poly with an inflation fan uses very little energy and keeps tunnels a few degrees warmer longer. Electric ventilation fans help reduce disease pressure in the warmer months, particularly in wider tunnels where air circulation in a **dense canopy can be a problem.** □

Conservation Loan Program  
If you've been scratching your head trying to figure out how to afford to put up your high tunnel or begin some other NRCS cost-share conservation program, a new Farm Services Administration (FSA) loan program might get you off the dime.

The purpose of these conservation loans is, says NH Farm Loan Manager Sherrill Harris, "very specific. It's not a

safety program. It's an incentive to use good conservation practices."

The project for which the loan is sought must be approved and funded by NRCS and be part of an NRCS conservation plan. Interest rates vary—in October it was 4.75%—but the loan is a fixed, 20-year real estate loan with no prepayment penalty.

Borrowers can refinance project-related debt if they've already taken a higher rate loan elsewhere. It is also possible to get these loans through a local bank, guaranteed by FSA. □

*Contact Harris at 603-223-6003 for more information. FSA provides on-site service so you won't have to trek to Concord to apply.*



## Lynch (Continued from page 1)

a University of Connecticut social work program. Lynch applied to, and was hired by, the Soil Conservation Service, forerunner of today's NRCS.

Lynch started his NRCS career as a Soil Conservationist in Belknap County in 1981. After three years in the Lakes Region, he stepped up to the position of District Conservationist of Washington County, based in Machias, Maine.

1986 saw the Lynch family back in Concord as Lynch began a six-year stint as Strafford County District Conservationist. When his current job opened up in Concord he jumped at the chance for a shorter commute.

Lynch is well regarded by his colleagues. Soil Conservationist Katherine Swain observes "He

focuses on landowners. He's exemplary in how he has put the landowners first. I guess that's the conservation ethic."

Fortunately for Lynch's colleagues he won't be moving very far. His new office will be on the fourth floor of The Concord Center, in Southern NH Resource Conservation & Development's suite.

In his new role as Resource Conservationist Lynch will support field operations in the state's NRCS offices. Since it's a new appointment he will have a hand in shaping the position. When asked for details Lynch said "I won't describe it until I've done the job for at least six months."

MCCD Treasurer Rob Larocque consoles himself with the thought "You're always going to be able to

get ahold of Mike, so it's not like we're losing him." Echoes Swain, "He's not leaving forever. We'll still have access to him."

Landowner Ollie Fifield, one of Lynch's first customers in the Concord office is happy for Lynch but will miss working with him. "He's been a huge resource for Merrimack and Belknap Counties" says Fifield.

While he'll greatly miss the landowners of Belknap and Merrimack counties, Lynch is looking forward to less stress, more travel and deepening his relationships with staff in field offices across the state. After 27 years with NRCS he's upbeat as he embarks upon a new chapter in his career. "It's a chance to work in different parts of the state and to see new things," says Lynch with a smile. □

## Wildlife News

**Habitat Stewardship Series**  
**U**NH Cooperative Extension offers a series of brochures to help landowners conserve wildlife habitats on their land.

The Habitat Stewardship brochures cover a variety of critical habitat types for at-risk species in NH. The brochures focus on grasslands, marsh/shrub wetlands, floodplain forests and vernal pools. Look

for northern hardwood and hemlock forest brochures to come.

The brochures describe habitat types, major habitat threats and information protecting wildlife dependent on each type of critical habitat.

You can download a set at [www.nhwoods.org](http://www.nhwoods.org) or contact UNH Forestry Information Center (800-444-8978) for a set of printed brochures. □

**Free Topo Maps at NHF&G**  
**N**H Fish & Game Dept. has created free downloadable topographic maps of the entire state. The maps, available at [www.wildnh.com/maps](http://www.wildnh.com/maps), are a boon to hikers, farmers, loggers, bird watchers, hunters and anyone interested in spending time outdoors. Each map is a quarter of a USGS quad map, optimized for quick download. □

## NH Farm Energy Project Hosts Alternative Energy Tours

**N**H Farm Energy Project and MCCCD co-sponsored two recent alternative farm energy tours. The first tour, co-sponsored by Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) took place at Cider Hill Farm in Amesbury, MA.

Two weeks later 38 people and two horses gathered at North Family Farm in Canterbury. Farm owners Tim Meeh and Jill McCulloch led the group on a tour of the farm's biodiesel operation, wind turbine, solar and passive solar panels and energy-efficient home. The family's horses, who reside in an adjoining pasture, joined in on the biodiesel tour.



*Sunset at North Family Farm's alternative energy tour. "If you don't want maintenance, go solar," says Tim Meeh.*

As the sun set participants gathered in the farm house to discuss the use of alternative energy technology and

conservation measures (including clotheslines) to lower operating costs and local farm produce prices.

The evening ended with a short presentation of "solar raisings" by Steve Lundahl of Energy Action NH. The group uses old fashioned barn-raising techniques to solar hot water installations as part of its mission of educating the public about the costs and benefits of alternative energy.

The horses were the only neigh sayers in the crowd. □

*To learn more about NH Farm Energy Project contact Ann Bowes at So. NHRC&D (223-0083 or visit their snazzy new website [www.nhrcd.net](http://www.nhrcd.net)).*

### Local Foods *(Continued from page 1)*

Merrimack County towns to take part in the discussion.

Space is limited, so please contact her at 223-6023 or [info@merrimackccd.org](mailto:info@merrimackccd.org) if you would like to attend.

#### KAEL Winter Market

One of the success stories in the county's local foods movement is the Warner-based Kearsarge Area Eat Local (KAEL) group. The grassroots organization organized an Eat Local Week in September with activities such as farm tours and markets, movies, cooking lessons

and an edible wild foods walk. The week was capped off with a pot luck featuring dishes made with local foods.

Response was encouraging and prompted KAEL to make plans for the town's first Winter Farmers' Market. "The winter market came out of that energy," says member Linda Hartman.

The market, co-sponsored by MCCCD, will be in the Town Hall Saturday December 11. A concurrent Warner Holiday Shopping Tour will ensure lots of activities and a relaxed shopping experience for visitors. □



*Squash on display at a recent Warner Farmers' Market.*



## Conservation News

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### In This Issue

The Mike Lynch Story .....	1
Local Foods: Focus on Farmers .....	1
District News Round Up .....	2
NRCS: CSP Deadline Extended .....	3
FSA Unveils Conservation Loan Program .....	4
Wildlife News .....	5
Alternative Energy Farm Tours .....	5
Calendar of Events .....	Back Cover

### *Coming Events...*

- ◆ Tuesday November 30, 10:30 to Noon *Rollover Protection System (ROPS) Retrofit Rebate Program*, John Deere dealerships in Kensington, Walpole, North Haverhill. Learn more/register at [www.rops4u.com](http://www.rops4u.com) or 1-877-767-7748.
- ◆ Friday December 3, 10:00 to 3:00 *High Tunnel Crop Production Basics*, Common Man Restaurant, Plymouth. Second of a two-part series, this session covers production. Call 603-862-3200 for information. Online registration at <http://extension.unh.edu/Agric/Agric.htm>. \$25.00
- ◆ Saturday December 4, 10:00 to 3:00 *High Tunnel Crop Production Basics*, Hillsborough County Extension Office, Goffstown. Same as December 3 workshop.
- ◆ Tuesday December 7, 10:00 to Noon *MCCD Agricultural Infrastructure Round Table Discussion*, NH Audubon Society, 84 Silk Farm Road, Concord. Free, includes lunch. (See story, page 1)
- ◆ Saturday December 11, 9:00 to Noon, *Kearsarge Area Eat Local (KAEL) Winter Market* (See story, page 5), Warner Town Hall, Warner.
- ◆ Wednesday December 15, Deadline to enter *NH Macaroni and Cheese Bake Off* (to be held Jan. 15 in Concord). Free to enter, Cabot will supply the cheese; three categories. Visit [nhdairypromo.org/mac-cheese-contest.htm](http://nhdairypromo.org/mac-cheese-contest.htm) for details, registration form and tips.
- ◆ 2nd & 4th Saturdays in January, February & March, 10:00 to 2:00, *Concord Winter Market*, Cole Gardens, Concord. Info at [www.joanconnornh@yahoo.com](http://www.joanconnornh@yahoo.com). □