

On January 4, 2010, Heidi Nelson joined the New England RC&D family as the newest RC&D coordinator on the Maine team. Heidi is no stranger to NRCS – she worked as AmeriCorps water quality and rural development coordinator, and later served as soil conservationist in Presque Isle and Machias. She has come back after having been County Executive Director for FSA in Machias since 2001.

With her background in serving the needs of rural farmers and landowners, Heidi is bringing a new perspective to the RC&D Program. She is looking forward to bringing in new projects. The Council is excited to have her on board! Feel free to contact her at (207) 546-2368, [heidi.nelson@me.usda.gov](mailto:heidi.nelson@me.usda.gov).

### Sustainable Tourism in Down East Maine Down East RC&D

Down East's Vacationland Resources Committee developed the DESTINY 2010 Strategic Plan (Down East Sustainable Tourism Initiative Year 2010) and has been working diligently to bring some of DESTINY's goals to life, focusing specifically on nature-based tourism, education, and communication/outreach.

The Down East Fisheries Trail is an educational trail that showcases active and historic fisheries heritage sites such as fish hatcheries, aquaculture facilities, fishing harbors, clam flats, processing plants and other related public places in an effort to educate residents and visitors about the importance of the region's maritime heritage and the role of marine resources of the area's economy. The trail builds on these local

resources to strengthen community life and the experience of visitors. The VRC is expanding the trail to include two counties and working on marketing it as a way to truly connect the visitor to the place.

A team of consultants, working with the committee has identified the nature based tourism gems in the region. These sites have the infrastructure necessary to receive visitors and will receive directional and interpretive signage as part of the Maine Office of Tourism's Nature Based Tourism Initiative.

In an effort to connect stakeholders in the region, the committee has begun a new quarterly email newsletter titled, *VRC Outlook -- A Voice for Sustainable Tourism Down East*. In addition to highlighting committee projects, it features upcoming training activities, green business tips, news from partners and a feature article each month. It also invites participation by anyone who would like to be involved. The newsletter goes out to over 1200 contacts in the region.

On the education front, the committee has been working with partners to survey local tourism business stakeholders and identify what training needs they have. Regional Destination Training, Customer Service Training for Management, and Customer Service Training for Frontline Staff were identified. The Committee is now developing appropriate delivery mechanisms for these topics. With its broad-based approach, enthusiasm for its mission and collaboration with multiple partners to reach its goals, this committee has captured the spirit and breadth of the RC&D Program.

For additional information or to receive the newsletter, contact Down East RC&D at (207) 546-2368 or by email [Barbara.maurer@me.usda.gov](mailto:Barbara.maurer@me.usda.gov).

**For additional information or to obtain any of the brochures mentioned in the Brief Sheets contact the appropriate RC&D office:**

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- Berkshire-Pioneer RC&D - (413) 256-1607  
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- Eastern Connecticut RC&D - (860) 774-0224, Ext. 105  
139 Wolf Den Road, Brooklyn, CT 06234-0327
- Heart of Maine RC&D - (207) 368-4460  
Route 2, P.O. Box 370, Newport, ME 04953-0370
- King's Mark RC&D - (203) 284-3663  
900 Northrop Road Suite A, Wallingford, CT 06492-1900
- North Country RC&D - (603) 527-2093  
719 North Main Street, Room 220, Laconia, NH 03246-2772
- Northern VT RC&D - (802) 828-4595  
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- Patriot RC&D - (978) 692-1904  
319 Littleton Road, Ste. #302, Westford, MA 01886-4133
- The Pilgrim RC&D Area - (508) 295-1317  
15 Cranberry Highway, West Wareham, MA 02576
- Rhode Island RC&D - (401) 826-2409, Ext. 210  
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 45, Warwick, RI 02886
- St. John-Aroostook RC&D - (207) 764-4126  
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- Southern New Hampshire RC&D - (603) 223-0083  
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- Threshold to Maine RC&D - (207) 657-3131  
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# New England Association of RC&D Councils

Spring 2010

### An RC&D Incubated Business: Bonnie CLAC invited to Obama's Oval Office

*"If Bonnie CLAC can help working people purchase cars and manage their finances in New Hampshire, then they can probably do it in Vermont or all across New England, or all across America."*

- President Obama, June 30, 2009

President Obama highlighted innovative programs that are transforming communities across the nation. In a press conference on June 30, 2009, he called on foundations, philanthropists, and the private sector to invest in community solutions. Such groups, Obama said, hold the promise of finding solutions to persistent problems and to meeting unprecedented challenges because government can't do everything. The president paid tribute to leaders and staffers of nonprofits. "The hours are long and the pay could be better, let's face it," he said. But, he added, "You teach us there's no such thing as a lost cause."

Nate's Story: Nate is a Native American who was frank with Bonnie CLAC (Car Loans & Counselling) about his lifelong struggle with alcohol. He had been homeless and trying to get sober when the tent he was living in caught fire and he was seriously burned. His medical bills were staggering. He spoke with us about his readiness to gain financial and health stability so he could move forward with his life.

By the time he enrolled with Bonnie CLAC, Nate had gotten a job as a busboy at a Friendly's restaurant, but desperately needed transportation. He started work on his "Steps to Success," which included financial literacy training and credit repair.

He was placed in a Bridge car and proved to be an excellent student in his Financial Fitness class. By the end of the class, he had been promoted to a higher

paying position and was using his Bridge car to attend job-related management training.



Nate with his new Toyota Corolla, Chester Vermont

With Bonnie CLAC's help, Nate's life transformation has been profound with demonstrated lasting effects.

Nate continued to work on his substantial medical debt, and graduated the program into his own new car in October 2006 (about a year after he started). Nate has also stayed sober since he enrolled with Bonnie CLAC. Nate has continued to enjoy professional success and is now a District Training Manager based out of the Friendly's North Lebanon, New Hampshire, store.

To find out more about Bonnie CLAC's success in breaking the chain of poor financial decision making and their environmental efforts toward pounds of carbon saved, visit [www.bonnieclac.org](http://www.bonnieclac.org) or contact them at 1-866-455-CLAC (2522).



Council Chair Christine Kaiser (r) bids farewell to Julie Lawrence, RC&D secretary for 19 years, who has been relocated to NRCS field operations due to funding shortfalls.

### Celebrating 35 Years!

To celebrate 35 years as a not-for-profit organization, the Northern Vermont RC&D Council hosted a BBQ picnic and free airplane rides to friends, partners, and board members at their Berlin office. The group enjoyed Vermont-raised beef from Stony Pond Farm with all the trimmings, and salads catered by the Chelsea

Country Store. For more information, visit our website at [www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/rc&d/](http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/rc&d/).



**The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program Exceeds Its Goal of 1 Million kWh With Assistance from Berkshire-Pioneer RC&D & Patriot RC&D**

The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program (MFEP) is a statewide collaborative effort to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, and increase profits for farmers – supporting the long-term viability of state-wide agriculture. The program is administered and implemented by Berkshire-Pioneer and Patriot RC&Ds. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provide funding and staffing. These primary partners have formed a larger partnership with public utilities across the state, other USDA agencies, state agencies, and other nonprofits.

Two years into the program, MFEP has assisted farmers in *implementation* of energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy, saving the equivalent of over 1,000,000 kWh and producing over 100,000 kWh annually, exceeding energy goals set for the program. In addition, at least 5 jobs were retained with construction and additional indirect economic benefits of the annual energy savings over the life of the systems.

MFEP's energy auditors have performed 17 farm energy audits to date, and have referred more than 50 farmers to their public utility for a free electric audit. MFEP incentives have been paid for recommendations from both MFEP and public utility audits for thermal screens, greenhouses, reverse osmosis for maple syrup operations, plate coolers for dairy, lighting upgrades, high efficiency boilers, and refrigeration upgrades.

What distinguishes MFEP from other farm energy audit programs is that MFEP provides financial incentives and leverages other funding to help farmers *implement* audit and renewable energy recommendations. MFEP has provided \$27,910 in incentives to 8 farmers who installed the energy efficiency improvements – equaling annual savings of 146,550 kWh, 9,667 therms, and 14,547 gallons of oil – just the beginning of a planned \$100,000+ in reimbursements. In addition, MFEP incentives paid to-date have helped farmers save anywhere from \$2,000-29,500 per year in energy costs, contributing to improved profits for Massachusetts farms and indirect economic benefits.

Farm sectors helped by the MFEP incentives include dairy, greenhouse, vegetable growers, maple oper-

Farm sectors helped by the MFEP incentives include dairy, greenhouse, vegetable growers, maple operations, livestock, cranberry growers, and many diversified farm operations.

In 2010, the MFEP will continue to provide

- referrals to public utilities for electric audits and renewable energy contractor's audits for fuels such as oil and propane, and electric audits to farms who are not served by public utilities
- incentives to farmers who implement audit recommendations for energy efficiencies
- technical assistance to farmers who are applying to the USDA/Rural Energy for America (REAP) Program, building on our experience with the 2008 and 2009 REAP cycles, as well as NRCS' EQIP Air Quality program and several state funding opportunities



**Providing Local Food to Low Income Residents of Southern Vermont**

Residents of some Vermont towns may not have heard of George D. Aiken RC&D Council, but they have benefitted from the programs ... Recently, the Randolph Area Family Farms Project was completed under budget. The remaining funds (which were administered by the council) were divided – with half going to purchase locally grown food for the Randolph Elementary School Lunch Program, and half to purchase 3 shares at a new Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. The shares were purchased for the Randolph Area Food Shelf so low income residents could obtain fresh, nutritious, locally grown food at no cost. As a result of the council's activities, 225 students benefitted from the school lunch program, and 255 low income residents received fresh food.

In 2009, Vermont instituted a *Grow an Extra Row Program* to encourage residents to grow extra food in their garden/farm to donate to local food shelves. The Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL) organization, (a project of the council), decided to expand on it and developed the *Grow the Longest Row Program*. Throughout the summer and into the fall, RAFFL collected food left over after farmers markets or donated by families and distributed it to food shelves throughout Rutland County. The RC&D Council obtained an excess platform scale from the USDA Grain Inspection and Packers and Stockyards Administration that was no longer in use and transferred it to RAFFL to weigh the produce –10,000+ lbs. of locally grown food was donated to low income residents.



**North Country RC&D Awarded RGGI Grant To Expand Biomass District Energy Systems in New Hampshire**

North Country RC&D Area Council was awarded a Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative Grant in a competitive process administered by the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission. The purpose of the grant is to create a decision making tool (*roadmap*) that will help guide a community (which may be a municipality, educational institution, industrial park, housing project or other candidate) through the host of issues attached to planning for and implementing a district heating and/or combined heat and power system. A successful *roadmap* tool will result in greater local/regional energy self reliance, ability to contain rising energy costs, provide energy reliability, maintain markets for local wood biomass, provide local economic and social benefits, and reduce greenhouse gases.

District heating, employed as a wood-fired system to distribute thermal energy to institutions, industries, and individual homeowners, is a proven and efficient technology, widely adopted in European countries and select U.S. locations. It can be cost-effective, provide economic benefits, and stimulate the local economy while offering new and expanded markets for woody biomass. A coordinated series of actions is needed at the federal, state, and local community level to expand the adoption rate of woody biomass as a heating fuel, and the ability to transform our nation into an energy independent country should be enough incentive to move us in this new direction.

Lessons learned over the past couple of years (the Community Scale Wood Biomass Project, Groveton Distributed Energy and District Heating Feasibility Study, the energy component of the Coos County Economic Action Plan, Sustainable Energy Initiative of the Northern Forest Center, and the formation of the New Hampshire Wood Biomass Heat and Power Task Force) have identified several critical topic areas that communities need to better understand in order to pursue these combined heat and power opportunities. Those topic areas include: technology/ equipment and suppliers; systems installation/operation and management; funding opportunities; air quality regulations and benefits; fuel sources and availability; and public policy and regulations. North Country is working in collaboration with Coos Economic Development Corporation, Northern Forest Center, Plymouth State University's Center for Rural Partnerships, UNH

Cooperative Extension Service, and many others to implement this project. For more information, contact Rick DeMark at (603) 527-2093 or visit the New Hampshire RC&D website at [www.nhrcd.net](http://www.nhrcd.net).



**Howard M. and Mary C. Hayward Memorial Scholarship**

The Pilgrim RC&D Council proudly provides financial scholarships to deserving, graduating high school seniors who will be pursuing further education in agriculture, aquaculture, or a related science. The Council has awarded the scholarship annually for the past 11 years.

The Hayward Scholarship Fund was established to honor the memory of Howard and Mary Hayward who were devoted Massachusetts farmers, land stewards, and dedicated environmentalists. Mr. Hayward was a founding member of the Pilgrim RC&D Council and served as an active member for 20 years. After his passing in 1997, his wife Mary completed his term as RC&D Council Director.

Scholarship applicants are asked to write an essay on one of several topics including the importance of agriculture, forestry, or aquaculture to the future of Massachusetts; benefits of farmland management and conservation; natural resource conservation; or benefits of agricultural based economic development in their community. Essays are scored by the Scholarship Committee (comprised of Pilgrim RC&D Council directors, a Farm Bureau representative, and Howard and Mary Hayward's son).

Scholarship winners are graduates of private and public high schools from throughout the RC&D area and one from a home school program. Awardees have gone on to study aquaculture, environmental sustainability, environmental engineering, natural resources, forestry, and marine safety/environmental protection.

The scholarship, though modest at \$500, has proven to lift the spirits of young minds, and encourages and motivates high school graduates to pursue their chosen area of study.

Although these economic times have proven challenging for the fund, students' need for financial assistance is greater than ever. Pilgrim RC&D Council is proud of all Hayward Scholarship winners and looks forward to continuing for many years.

## St. John Aroostook RC&D Hosts Second Wind Power Conference

The *Growing Wind Power Generation in Maine Conference* provided relevant guidance in the generation of wind power of all scales including residential, farm, municipal, utility, locally owned community scale wind farm development, and corporate sized wind farm development.



Council Chair Paul Bernier served as moderator.

Development descriptions included private, public, and hybrid ownerships. More than 200 people from throughout the nation attended. Presenters included nationally recognized individuals from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Windustry, the American Corn Growers Foundation, the Institute for Local Self Reliance, and many others.

Morning agenda items included local ownership as an economic development tool; State of Maine wind policy and initiatives; status of statewide wind project development; corporate wind farm project updates; wind farm permitting; regional electricity transmission; and the benefits of locally owned wind turbine facilities. The afternoon included breakout sessions covering municipal perspectives, community/locally owned wind, and small residential/farm wind. Afternoon agenda items included property values; sound, ordinances; community planning; descriptions of local ownership; primer for policy makers; experiences from the Midwest; leasing vs. ownership; state and federal incentives; net-metering; and the basics of residential/farm sized wind turbines. The conference also addressed numerous environmental benefits.

Many of the presentations can be found at [www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SJAWindConf08.html](http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SJAWindConf08.html)

The Northern Maine Development Commission and Community Energy Partners assisted in conference planning.

## St John Aroostook Council in Maine Organizes Woodchip & Pellet Heating Forum

Fifty participants attended the forum at the University of Maine at Presque Isle to learn ways in which businesses, schools, hospitals, municipal buildings, and other facilities can replace expensive fossil fuels with local wood resources.

Forum speakers covered numerous topics including the benefits of local energy through community-scale woodchip and pellet heating and power; rural development biomass programs through which schools, municipal buildings, and hospitals can benefit when considering converting to biomass for heat; and a description of the area's biomass availability, woodchip production, transportation, species composition, and general costs.

Forum partners included NRCS, Rural Development, the Northern Maine Development Commission, Leaders Encouraging Aroostook Development, the Biomass Energy Resource Center, and Boralex.

## Soil Health and Food Production

There's still time to register for and attend Heart of Maine's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Soil Health Conference in February. The 2-day event will feature well known author and proponent of locally grown foods Joe Salatin, of Polyface Farms, in Virginia.

Also featured will be highly regarded experts: Dr. Paul Hepperly, author, scientist, agricultural manager and recent director of the Rodale Farming Systems Research Program. His work is devoted to the global need of repairing agriculture and our environment using advanced scientific and practical composting methods, organic no till systems, bio-char application and remediation, and vermiculture. He has worked closely with USDA researchers to prove the capacity of mycorrhizae to reduce greenhouse gasses. Dr. Norman Uphoff, Professor Emeritus, Cornell, New York, serves as Director of the International Institute for Food and Agriculture. He has developed a grain intensification system that has become one of the most successful grass roots movements know worldwide. His insight and successes in sustainable cropping systems are something that can be adapted to Maine and New England's crops and growing conditions. For more information or to register, visit [www.heartofmaine.org](http://www.heartofmaine.org)

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on October 18, 2008, to celebrate the completion of phase one of the construction of a multi-use trail along the South Branch Park River in Hartford. Speakers included Hartford Mayor Eddie



South Branch of the Park River  
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Perez; Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Gina McCarthy; NRCS State Resource Conservationist Jan Dybdahl, Eastern Connecticut RC&D Board Representative Rebecca Augur, and others.

The multi-use paved trail is 1,690-ft long, 12-ft wide, and has trail head plazas located at each end. Steel benches, trees and shrubs line the trail and provide rest areas for visitors and wildlife. This is a component of a \$500,000 grant from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

### Dairy Manure Composting at Laurel Brook Farm

Eastern Connecticut RC&D received a Clean Water Act Section 319h Nonpoint Source Grant to conduct the North Canaan Nutrient-Dairy Manure Composting Project. The goal of this project was to demonstrate how ecologically sensitive dairy manure composting can be accomplished on the state's dairy farms.



Laurel Brook Farm hoop  
house structure.

In this project, Laurel Brook Farm installed two roofed hoop houses and composted inside these structures. The roof will keep out rainwater, which will eliminate the potential for polluted runoff. The structure was purchased

from a farm building supply company and met all building codes. The floor and piers that act as a foundation for the building were designed by NRCS.

In a pilot project that could help better manage the planet's strained natural resources, space age technologies are helping five RC&D Councils nationally deal with local natural resource issues. In 2008, Threshold to Maine RC&D Area was selected as one of four RC&D areas nationally to participate in the NASA Solutions Network which would, among other things, allow NASA satellites and sensors to provide the information needed to making sound natural resource decisions at the local level.

The original project, called the *North Olympic Peninsula Solutions Network*, is lead by the North Olympic Peninsula RC&D Council and supported by the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and others. The other four councils are working with North Olympic Peninsula Solutions Network leaders to determine how NASA technologies can best address their different challenges.

The purpose of the Threshold to Maine's project is to develop specific remote sensing capabilities and accompanying decision support tools to address critical issues in the agriculture and forest industries located in southern and western Maine.

With the popularity of buying local and consumer concerns about food safety and security, agriculture in southern Maine is experiencing renewed expansion. Maine's food policy has also established a goal that the agriculture sector should be able to produce 80% of the calories consumed by the state's citizens by the year 2020. With remote sensing and accompanying decision support tools, this project intends to determine if the agricultural land base and associated infrastructure in southern and western Maine can support the expansion of local food consumption to meet that goal.

The team is currently working on the project scope and methodology, and identifying funding sources to move ahead. It is anticipated the project will be implemented in 2010. The project is funded by a \$1.6 million grant from NASA.

More information can be found online at the North Olympic Peninsula Solutions Network website <http://pcnasa.ctc.edu/>.