Schoharie County Soil & Water Conservation District

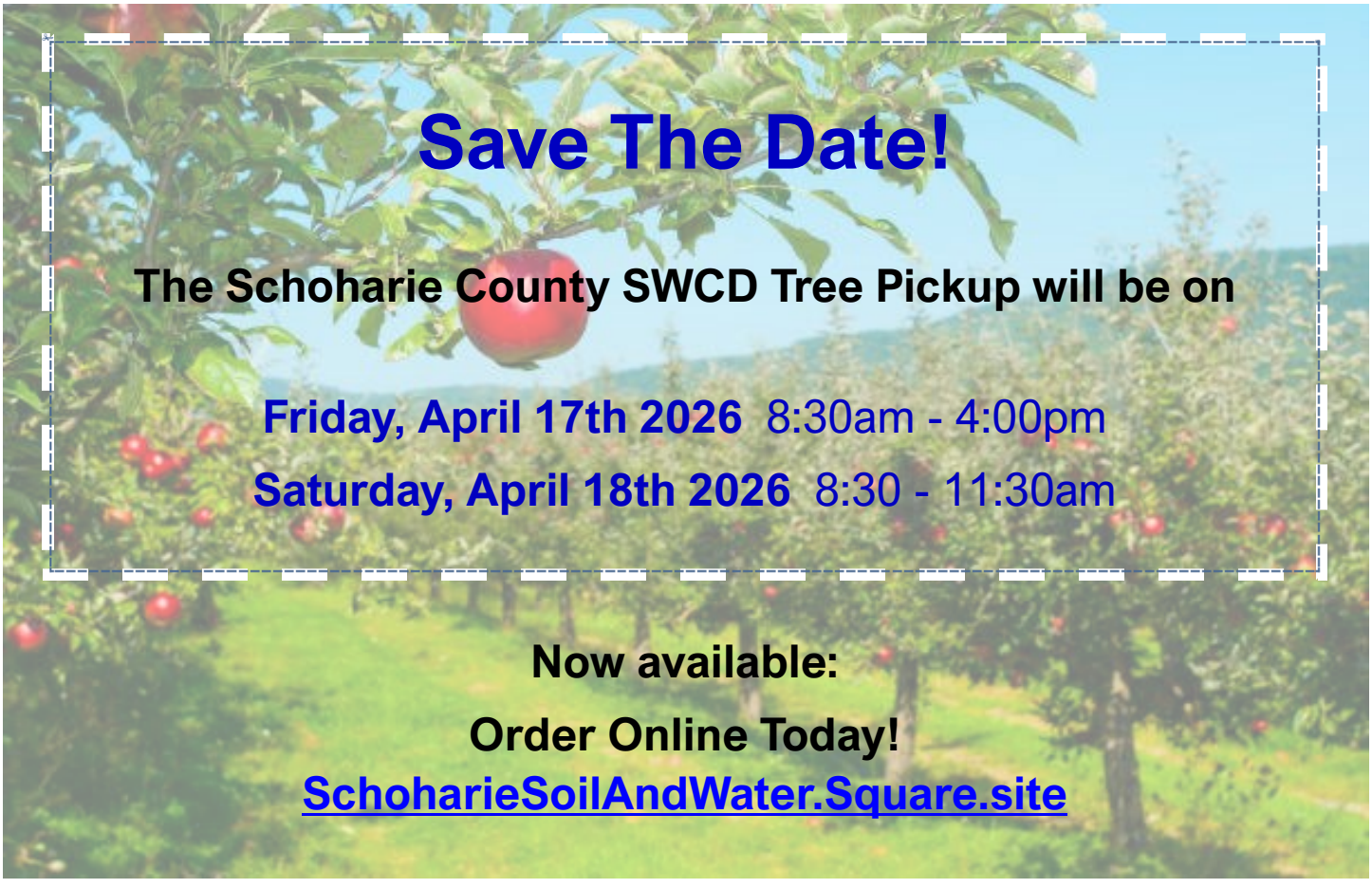
Online ordering has returned for 2026!

Now available:

Order Online Today!

SchoharieSoilAndWater.Square.site

Click the link above to be taken directly to our online store to view our selection and place your order.



Schoharie County Soil & Water Conservation District

Annual Newsletter 2026

What Your Soil & Water Conservation District Does

And Why It Matters in Schoharie County

If you're new to Schoharie County - or hearing about us for the first time - ***WELCOME!*** The Schoharie County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) works to protect the natural resources that make our county such a special place to live: our soils, streams, forests, farms, and the landscapes that tie it together.

We're proud to be the very first conservation district formed in New York State, *established on July 31, 1940*. Today, New York has 58 districts, each shaped by its own land, people, and priorities. No two are alike; and that's exactly the point! Each county has challenges and opportunities that are different, so each district crafts solutions that fit their communities.

What Conservation Districts Do

Across the country, over 3,000 conservation districts partner with landowners, farmers, municipalities, and residents to encourage responsible land use and protect soil and water resources. In New York districts work under state law and with guidance from the NYS Soil & Water Conservation Committee. Then the real work happens at the local level through hands-on support and practical, community-specific solutions.

What Makes Schoharie County's SWCD Unique

Schoharie's geography is a mix of steep slopes, fertile valleys, winding streams, and rural communities. That means our conservation needs are complex: we deal with everything from flood-prone waterways to productive farmland, from erosion on hillsides to ponds and wetlands scattered across the landscape. Our programs need, and do, reflect that diversity.

Why This Matters for Everyone

You don't need to be a farmer to benefit from our work. Clean water, healthy soils, and stable streams affect every resident; whether you live along the creek, manage woodlots, own a backyard with some drainage issues, or simply enjoy the scenery that makes Schoharie County home.

Our mission is practical: to help people care for the land. Whether you need guidance, expert assistance, or just want to learn more about conservation: we're here - a local and accessible resource. Neighbors helping neighbors protect the place we all call home.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS WE SERVE OUR COMMUNITY:

Farm & Agricultural Support
We work directly with local farmers to improve soil health, reduce erosion, and protect water quality. This includes planning conservation practices, encouraging cover crops, and supporting long-term land best management practices.

Stream, Drainage & Pond Support
Residents often face streambank erosion, drainage concerns, or pond planning needs. We provide site visits, project guidance, and design ideas.

Flood Monitoring & Watershed Work
With our history of major floods, monitoring local streams is essential. The District maintains stream gages and participates in watershed studies that support emergency planning and long-term resiliency.

Community Programs
Our annual tree and shrub sale, along with our fish stocking programs, gives residents affordable ways to improve their land and support wildlife. We also help towns and villages with stormwater planning, erosion control, and land-use questions.

Education & Youth Programs
We partner with schools, host field days, and support the Envirothon. These activities and programs help students learn about conservation and builds the next generation of environmental stewards.

Funding Opportunities for Best Management Practices

With support from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, the District offers funding opportunities throughout the year to help farms implement Best Management Practices (BMPs). These programs (listed below) are designed to improve water quality, reduce erosion, and support long-term farm stewardship.

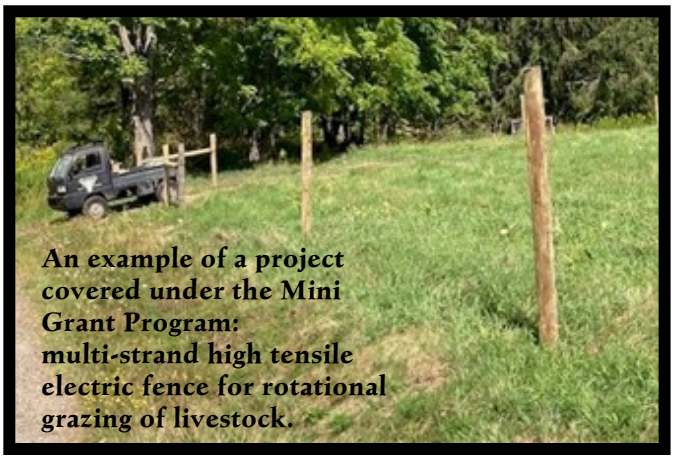
To be eligible:

Farms need to participate in the AEM (Agricultural Environmental Management) program and be able to cost-share a portion of the project.

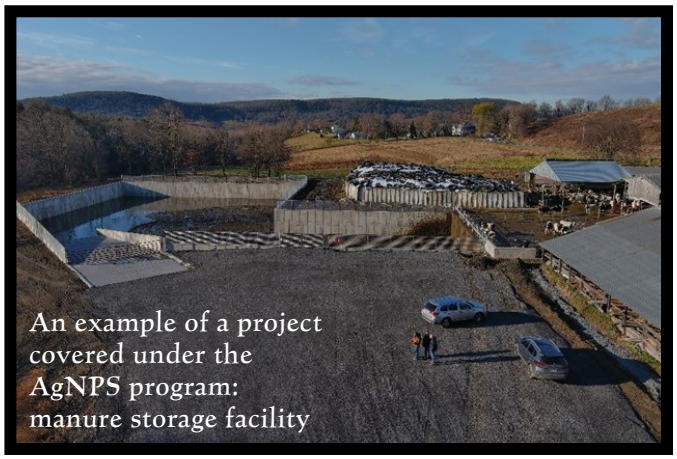
AEM (Agricultural Environmental Management)

This program is locally-led, voluntary, and confidential. It addresses watershed-based water quality concerns, farm-specific conservation practices, and the farm's business objectives.

AEM has been active in our district for nearly 20 years. The program partners with farms to manage the environment, protect Schoharie County's soil and water quality, and help ensure farm viability for many future generations.



An example of a project covered under the Mini Grant Program: multi-strand high tensile electric fence for rotational grazing of livestock.



An example of a project covered under the AgNPS program: manure storage facility

Available Funding Programs Through Schoharie SWCD

Mini-Grant Program

This program is a locally led initiative administered by the District to help farms implement agricultural best management practices (BMPs) that reduce sediment, erosion, and nonpoint source pollution in Schoharie County waterways.

The funding for this program is provided by Schoharie SWCD for Schoharie county farmers. Several practices are eligible for funding, and applications are currently available.

For any additional information or assistance, please contact the Schoharie SWCD District office.

(CRF) Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program

CRF helps increase the resiliency of New York farms while also reducing agriculture's impact on climate change.

The program offers 4 funding tracks:

1. reducing methane emissions through improved manure management;
2. increasing climate resiliency with better water management;
3. improving soil health to reduce nitrous oxide and increase carbon sequestration;
4. supporting healthy, productive forests and afforestation on farm landscapes for carbon sequestration and long-term sustainability.

This is a competitive grant program, with applications submitted through the District and funded by the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.

(AgNPS) Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program

This program provides funding to prevent and address water quality issues caused by various farming activities.

It supports using environmental planning and best management practice systems including:

- nutrient management through manure storage
- vegetative stream buffers
- conservation cover crops

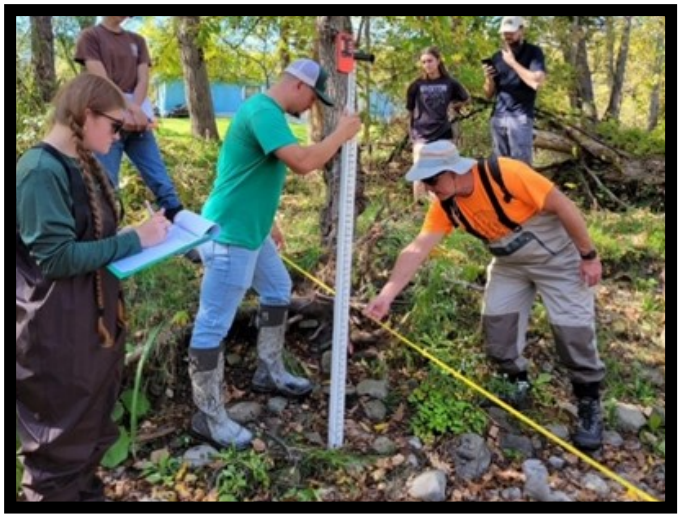
This competitive grant program is administered through the District, with funding supplied through the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.

Making Sense of Streams:
Schoharie Helps Educate on River Dynamics

Each fall, Soil & Water Conservation Districts from across New York State gather for **Conservation Skills Week** - a hands-on opportunity for staff to share expertise and sharpen field techniques.

This year, our very own District Manager, **Pete Nichols**, teamed up with Tioga and Tompkins Counties to lead a packed training session on the topic of **Stream Assessment Basics**.

The class focused on the science of **Natural Channel Design**, often referred to as *Rosgen Training,* aptly named after **Dave Rosgen, Ph.D.,** a hydrologist and geomorphologist*, whose 50 years of river restoration experience (including 20 with the U.S. Forest Service) have shaped how many professionals approach stream health nationwide.



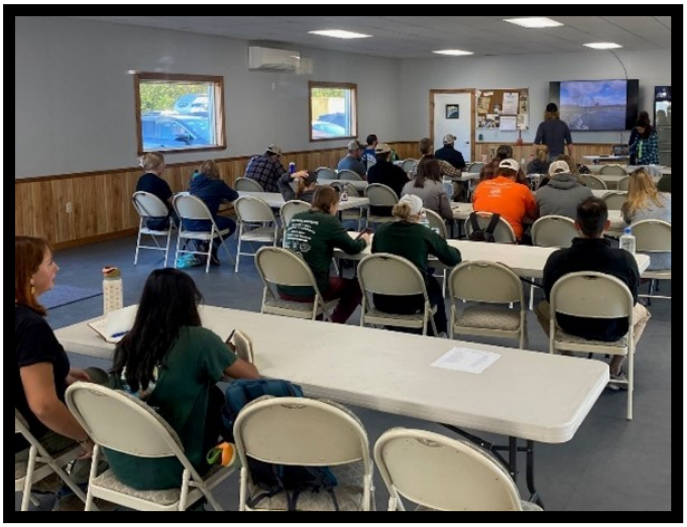
While Rosgen's full course typically spans several days, Pete and his co-instructors condensed the essentials into a single intensive day.

The result? **Standing-room-only attendance**, especially from newer district staff eager to build foundational skills.

Thanks to ideal October weather, attendees were able to take their learning to the field. The class visited a nearby stream, rolled up their sleeves, and got their boots wet as they all put their new skills to work in real time.

***A Geomorphologist** studies the formation, evolution, and change of Earth's landforms and landscapes

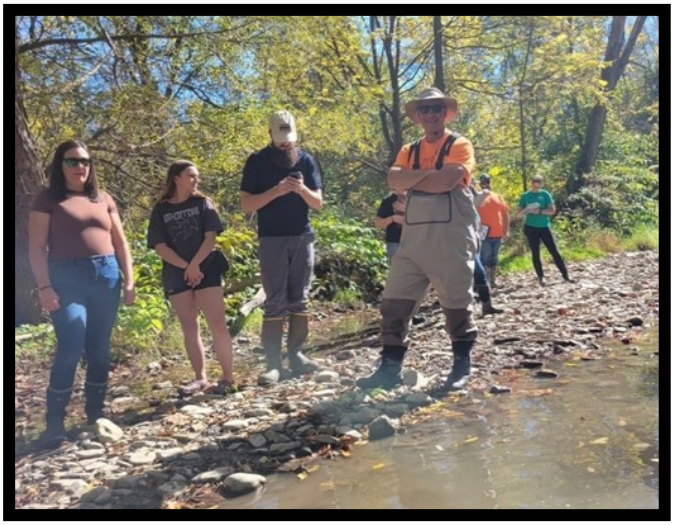
As Pete put it: "*Learning is doing.*"
And this training proved just that.



Participants received a crash course in:

- Stream classification and vocabulary
- Field procedures for assessing upstream conditions
- Techniques like measuring **sinuosity** (stream curvature), **slope**, and conducting **pebble counts** to identify dominant streambed materials

These methods may seem unusual, but together they paint a detailed picture of stream dynamics, helping staff determine



2026 Tree Descriptions

Our popular program gives residents access to affordable, high-quality, bare-root trees, shrubs, berries, and conservation plants to support healthy soils, clean water, wildlife habitat, and beautiful landscapes.

Plants are sold in pre-sorted bundles only, with seedling sizes listed on the included order form.

Extras This Year!

This year's sale also includes:

- Eastern Bluebird houses
- new-for-2026 bat houses
- fertilizer tabs (now in new bundle sizes!)
- marking flags (also in new bundle sizes!)

How to order:

Scan the QR code to visit our online store, view photos of this year's selections, and place your order online.

If online ordering isn't for you:

completed order forms *with payment*, can be mailed or dropped off at our office. We accept cash (in person only), check, or card.

Order Deadline:

ALL orders must be received by March 5, 2026, 4:00 PM. Any remaining inventory after preorders will be available for purchase on a first-come, first-served basis during the pickup window.

Scan or click to go to our online store!

Description Chart Key

Growth Rate: S, M, F = Slow, Moderate, Fast
Light Preferences: FS, PS = Full Sun, Partial Sun/Shade

Species	Mature Height (ft)	Growth Rate	Light Pref.	Soil Type	Soil Moisture	Characteristics
~ Conifers ~						
American Arborvitae	40 - 60	S/M	FS	Various	Well-drained	Great for windbreaks and privacy barriers. Enjoyed by a variety of animals.
Concolor Fir	30 - 50	S/M	FS/PS	Sandy	Moist, well-drained	Tolerates a wide range of conditions, including drought, heat, and cold.
Colorado Blue Spruce	50 - 75	S/M	FS	Various, Acidic	Well-drained	Versatile, deer-resistant evergreen with blue foliage. Good for windbreaks and privacy screening.
Norway Spruce	40 - 60	F	FS	Various, Acidic	Well-drained	Fast growing and tolerant of many soil types. Popular for windbreaks.
Douglas Fir	40 - 80	M	FS/PS	Various, Acidic	Moist, well-drained	Popular Christmas tree, deer resistant.
Fraser Fir	30 - 50	S/M	Fs/PS	Loamy, Sandy	Moist, well-drained	Popular Christmas tree known for its symmetry, fragrance, and strong needle retention.
White Pine	50 - 80	F	FS/PS	Loamy, Sandy	Moist, well-drained	Valuable commercial lumber species. Provides excellent wildlife habitat.

Species	Mature Height (ft)	Growth Rate	Light Pref.	Soil Type	Soil Moisture	Characteristics
~ Deciduous ~						
American Plum	10 - 20	M/F	FS/PS	Acidic, Clay, Loam	Moist, well-drained	White, fragrant spring flowers followed by edible late-summer fruit. Tends to sucker. Twigs may have short spurs. Zones 3–8.
Black Cherry	50 - 80	F	FS/PS	Loamy	Moist, well-drained	Clusters of dark berries suitable for jams and jellies. Attractive foliage from spring through fall.
Common Lilac	6 - 8	M	FS	Various	Moist, well-drained	Classic hedgerow shrub with showy, fragrant purple blooms in early spring
Downy Serviceberry	15 - 25	M	FS/PS	Various, Acidic	Moist, well-drained	White spring flowers, small red fruit in summer, and excellent fall color. Fruit is quickly eaten by birds.
Persimmon	30 - 80	S	FS/PS	Various	Moist, well-drained	Female trees produce large orange-brown fleshy fruit that are edible after the first frost.
Pussy Willow	6 - 15	F	FS	Various	Moist, Wet	Soft, fuzzy catkins emerge in early spring. Naturally found in wet meadows and streambanks
Shagbark Hickory	60 - 80	S	FS/PS	Various	Moist, well-drained	Long-lived shade tree with straight trunk; produces edible nuts.
White Oak	50 - 80	S/M	FS	Various	Moist, well-drained	Produces acorns and provides valuable wood for lumber, furniture, and barrels. Supports a wide range of wildlife.
~ Berries & Fruit Trees ~						
Jostaberry Currant	3 - 6	M/F	FS	Slightly acidic, Loamy	Well-drained	Thornless, vigorous hybrid of Black Currant & Gooseberry. Highly resistant to blister rust, leaf spots, and mildew. Zones 3–8.
Chippewa Blueberry	3 - 4	F	FS/PS	Sandy, Loamy	Well-drained	Self-fruiting but benefits from cross-pollination. Ripens mid-summer. Zones 3a–7b
Blue Sunset Blueberry	3 - 4	S/M	FS/PS	Sandy, Loamy	Well-drained	Requires cross-pollination. Hardy plants with good disease resistance. Zones 3–7.
Arkansas Black Apple	15 - 20	M	FS	Loamy	Well-drained	Requires cross-pollination. Fruit is sweet-tart with good resistance to rust and fire blight. Zones 5–8
Dolgo Crab Apple	15 - 20	M/F	FS/PS	Sandy, Loamy	Moist, well-drained	Excellent pollinator for other apple varieties. Cold tolerant with high disease resistance. Zones 3–9
Empire Apple	12 - 20	M	FS	Neutral-Alkaline, Loamy	Well-drained	Requires cross pollination. Sweet-tart fruit; very cold hardy (to –30°F). Zones 4–8
Liberty Apple	12 - 20	M/F	FS	Loamy	Well-drained	Requires cross pollination. Highly resistant to common apple diseases. Zones 4–7.
Reliance Peach	10 - 15	F	FS	Slightly acidic, Loamy	Well-drained	Self-fruiting and very cold hardy (to –25°F). Produces large, freestone yellow fruit. Zones 4–8.

A Full House! Installing Bluebird Houses

Bluebird houses are a simple, effective way to support local wildlife-and they offer wonderful backyard enjoyment. Whether you install one or a pair, the right placement and care make all the difference.

Where to Install

Bluebirds tend to prefer open areas with shorter grass: large lawns, pastures, hayfields, or even meadow edges. Mount the house **4 - 6 feet high** on a metal pole or post, facing away from the prevailing wind if possible. Place it in an open spot with a small tree or shrub **25 - 100 feet away** where fledglings can land safely.
Avoid: wood edges, barns, brushy fields, and heavily traveled areas, which tend to attract competitors and/or predators.

Why Use Two Boxes Together?

Bluebirds are very territorial! They will only allow one pair within about **100 yards** of their nest. However, installing **two boxes about 5 feet apart** is a proven method to reduce conflicts with other native birds - especially tree swallows.

In a paired setup, bluebirds will typically take one box and tree swallows choose the other. Both species coexist peacefully, and overall nesting success increases.

Male Eastern Bluebird
Photo: Justin Hill

Predator Protection

Raccoons, cats, and snakes are the most common threats. Mount boxes on smooth metal poles and apply **grease or a pole baffle** to keep predators from climbing. Keeping bird houses away from dense woods also reduces the chances for problems with squirrels and wrens.

Monitoring & Maintenance

Check boxes weekly during the nesting season. Remove old nests after each brood to keep the box clean and inviting. A full cleaning in early spring helps prepare for the arrival of bluebirds, which begin returning in **mid-March**.

With the right setup, a bluebird house, or pair, can host multiple broods each year and bring beautiful wildlife activity right to your backyard!

DID YOU KNOW!

- Little Brown Bats can eat 300 to 1,000 insects an hour!
- Their preferred prey are mosquitoes!
- Little Brown Bats typically weigh less than a quarter!
- A mother bat carries her baby like a koala while she flies!

Going Batty!

Supporting Nature's Mosquito Patrol

Little Brown Bats are the most common bats in Schoharie County, and they're hugely beneficial: *1 bat can eat thousands of insects in a single night!* Installing a bat house is an easy way to support this native species while enjoying natural pest control.

Where to Mount

Bat houses should be placed on a **building or pole**, not a tree. Trees stay too shaded, and branches give predators access. Mount the house **12 to 20 feet high** in a spot that receives **6 or more hours of direct sun** each day, ideally facing **south or southeast**. Keep the area below and in front of the house clear so bats have an open flight path.

Ideal Locations

Bats are more likely to use houses placed near **open water**, fields, or areas with plenty of insects. Houses installed on barns, garages, or tall posts often have the best success.

Be Patient

It may take a year or two for bats to move in, but a well-placed house can provide long-term habitat for this helpful, hardworking and important species.

Agricultural Assessments: What You Need for 2026

What Is the Agricultural Districts Law?

New York's Agricultural Districts Law (1971) helps protect active farmland by limiting assessments for agricultural land to its active **agricultural value**, not its market value, which can reduce property taxes for qualifying landowners.

Why You May Receive a Letter

Town Assessor offices often request updated **agricultural assessments** or **soil group worksheets**, if it's been more than 7 years, but, especially when:

- a parcel is sold or divided (even within a family!)
- rental agreements change
- land use practices change

SWCD's Role in the Process

Soil & Water Conservation Districts are responsible for preparing **soil group worksheets** as required by New York State law. *These worksheets must come from the District.* Town Assessors cannot accept substitutes, create their own maps, or use documents prepared elsewhere. Each parcel listed on a town's assessment roll must have its **own worksheet** as requested by your Town Assessor.

IMPORTANT:
The Assessor Makes the Final Decision

Any completed soil group worksheet(s) **does NOT** guarantee an agricultural assessment or a reduction in property tax bills. All eligibility determinations are made by your **Town Assessor**.

Eligibility Requirements for a Property Tax Reduction with an Agricultural Assessment

To potentially qualify for a tax reduction under the Agricultural Districts Law:

- **7 acres or more:** minimum **$10,000** in gross agricultural income
- **Under 7 acres:** minimum **$50,000** in gross agricultural income
- **A 2-year cropping history** is required
- Rental agreements *must* match acreage reported
- **Rented land cannot include woodland**
- Land switching from owner-farmed to rented may lose eligibility

Please contact your Town Assessor if you feel your property qualifies for an Agricultural Assessment.

Completed soil group worksheets are due March 1, 2026 to your Town Assessor.

District Highlights 2025

- Over **12,000** feet of road ditches hydro-seeded
- **1,000** feet of stream buffer plantings
- **10** ponds evaluated for physical/chemical health
- **300** feet of streams stabilized
- **10** Environmental permit assists for towns and landowners countywide
- **26** landowner assists for technical guidance with erosion and drainage issues