



# Press Release

June 2008

## **UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TENT**

Obtain information on programs offered by the United States Department of Agriculture and view demonstration plots planted with native grasses on West Seneca Acres and West Pencil Pusher Ave. Inside the tent, USDA and Soil & Water Conservation Districts highlight opportunities for all New Yorkers.

## **USDA AND SWCD SHOWCASE NY AGRICULTURE AT EMPIRE FARM DAYS**

“New York Grown, New York Known” is the theme for the U.S. Department of

Agriculture and the NYS Soil & Water Conservation District’s exhibit at this year’s Empire Farm Days. These partners in agriculture will highlight the diversity and success of New York’s agriculture and the people who provide products and services consumed and enjoyed throughout the state and the world.

Agency personnel will also be available to answer questions and provide information concerning federal and state agricultural programs and issues. Stroll through the 200 square foot garden created by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), which features native warm season grasses and wildflowers. In addition, staff will hand out free Sunflower seed packets and tattoos for children.

The USDA tent is located on West Seneca Acres and the garden is in on West Pencil Pusher Avenue. The following agencies will be represented in the tent this year:

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)--The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS, provides leadership in ensuring the health and care of animals and plants, improving agricultural productivity and competitiveness, and contributing to the national economy and the public health. The Veterinary Services (VS) division of APHIS works to control and ultimately eradicate diseases in animals such as scrapie, a fatal, degenerative disease affecting the central nervous system of sheep and goats. The Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) division of APHIS inspects agricultural goods and issues the necessary plant health certificates to send them overseas.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)—is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s chief scientific research agency. The ARS is finding solutions to agricultural problems that affect Americans



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every day, from field to table. The ARS works to ensure high-quality, safe food, and other agricultural products; assess the nutritional needs of Americans; sustain a competitive agricultural economy; enhance the natural resource base and the environment, and provide economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities, and society as a whole (<http://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/AboutUs.htm>). The Plant Genetic Resources Unit (PGRU) division of ARS preserves and maintains a diverse collection of apples, tart cherries, grapes, tomatoes, onions, cucurbits (squash), broccoli, cauliflower and other vegetable crops. The Grape Genetics Research Unit (GGRU) works to reduce losses to crop yield and quality that result from diseases like powdery mildew, pests like the root-knot nematode, and lack of environmental adaptation.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)-- The New York FSA field offices help to ensure the well-being of American agriculture, the environment, and the American public through efficient and equitable administration of farm commodity programs; farm ownership, operating and emergency loans; conservation and environmental programs; and emergency and disaster assistance.

Finger Lakes National Forest (U.S. Forest Service)--The Finger Lakes National Forest is New York State's only national forest--one of over 100 national forests across in the United States. The forest covers 16,000 acres and offers a wide variety of activities and features for guests to enjoy. These include grasslands, hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding snowmobiling, and timber sales. The U.S. Forest Service is a multi-use agency that tackles many issues, including livestock grazing and wildlife habitat management.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)--American agriculture is continually counted, measured, priced, analyzed, and reported to provide the facts needed by people working throughout this vast industry. Each year, the employees of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conduct hundreds of surveys and prepare reports covering virtually every facet of U.S. agriculture -- production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, and farm labor and wages.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) -- NRCS programs demonstrate how cooperation between government and land users can yield environmental benefits for millions of people. At USDA, farming, water quality and environmental protection are compatible activities. As in past years, NRCS is pleased to feature our Plant Materials Center semi-permanent garden exhibit. Find it by taking a walk through the "backyard" of the USDA exhibit. The garden is an



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intensive teaching display that will evolve over time as plantings mature and new items are added.

NYS Soil & Water Conservation Districts--These are special purpose districts created to develop and carry out a program of soil, water and related natural resource conservation by providing technical assistance. Soil & Water Conservation Districts are located in each county or borough and are governed locally by a board of directors.

Rural Development--Rural Development is a "mission area" under USDA which serves as the lead federal entity for rural development needs. Rural Development consists of three services: Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS), Rural Housing Service (RHS), and Rural Utilities Service (RUS). Together they cover a wide range of services to people in rural New York communities. Rural Development has 15 field offices located across New York State ready to offer technical and financial assistance (loans and grants) to rural individuals, businesses and municipalities.

## **SWITCHGRASS DEMONSTRATION PLANTING BY USDA-NRCS**

Switchgrass is being looked at nationally as well as in the Northeast as a potential plant for use as a biofeedstock for cellulosic ethanol as well as for co-firing with coal for electricity and for space heating by pelletizing. The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plant Materials Program in cooperation with Cornell University and the New York Farm Viability Institute has established a small plot of Cave-In-Rock switchgrass for attendees of Empire Farm Days to look at and observe its course of establishment over a 2 year period. The switchgrass was established on 5/15/07 using a Truax no-till drill following a year of no-till corn and soybeans. Switchgrass has the advantage of producing more biomass in a one cut system with less fertilizer than cool season forage grasses. There are challenges in slow establishment and weed competition. Also see switchgrass and other warm season grasses in a conservation garden behind the USDA tent.