

42nd Annual Plant Sale Held at Fairgrounds



Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District's watershed program specialist Will Marlier has planned conservation projects for seven lakes in Orleans County this summer. The goal is to improve water quality and improve habitat management. (Photo by Ed Barber)

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BARTON - Last Saturday the Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District (OCNRCD) hosted their 42nd annual plant sale. The event at the Orleans County Fairground is more than selling plants. There were a variety of workshops held at the event, some featured farmers that are engaged in conservation programs who shared how their conservation management efforts have brought positive results. The Future Farmers of America representing North Country Union High School sold plants for a fundraiser as well.

OCNRCD Executive Director Sarah Damsell said the plants can be pre-ordered,

and there are extra plants available at the day of sale. Damsell said the most popular plants are apple and nut trees, and medicinal plants. The plants are culled from several nurseries, including from other states.

Four farms that participated in conservation programs were present. The Allsted Farm in Hardwick gave a workshop on hay land management, water management, drainage tile, and improving forage.

These farms participate in the Marketing Conservation Pilot Program. Along with sharing their stories, they are provided guided, grant-funded marketing support that amplifies the voices of local farmers.

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Activation

Plant Sale

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“By focusing on professional storytelling, visibility on social media, and farm webpages, we aim to show the public and fellow farmers that critical, on-the-ground work is being done to protect our soil and water,” Damsell stated.

These four farms have considered how conservation informs the choices made on their farms. Staff and consultants meet with each farmer virtually to refine their “unique conservation narratives,” Damsell stated.

At the event, The Express interviewed Damsell and Will Marlier, OCNRCD’s lake watershed program specialist. They gave some updates on upcoming plans and other news from the district.

Watershed Program

Marlier explained he is currently working with seven lakes focused on water quality and habitat management. This includes planting buffers, reducing nutrient loading, bank stabilization, and flood plain reconnection practices.

“At Lake Caspian there’s an incised channel where the water can’t get out,” Marlier said. “We grade it to let sediment fill it in.”

They also use in-stream structures to capture sediment. Marlier said it’s similar in concept to using beaver dams to capture sediment and filter water.

Volunteers Wanted

Volunteers are needed in June to participate in three volunteer programs. These are riparian planting projects. Volunteers will visit three sites to check on the plantings, remove unwanted competition, and add more plantings if necessary.

Funding Proposal

In other news, OCNRCD has applied for a \$250,000 funding proposal to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the next fiscal year (2027). Projects will focus on soil health, water security for non-livestock small farms (blueberry farms and apple orchards), and invasive species management. This news was shared in the district’s newsletter

New Quarters

Damsell had some other news to announce. OCNRCD has been located at the USDA building at the Waterfront Plaza in Newport, however, the organization has moved to 41 School Street, Suite 101. The move was made possible



Students who participate in the Future Farmers of America program at North Country Union High School hosted a plant sale of their own at OCNRCD’s 42nd annual plant sale this past Saturday. From left are Emily Farrar, Kierstin Moulton, Ava Leblanc, Sloan Nelson, Annie Locke, and Paige Runne. (Photo by Ed Barber)



with support from the Vermont Community Foundation, and the Vermont Housing Conservation Board.

“Moving into our office, in the heart of the community, will increase our visibility and accessibility, allowing us to better serve landowners and other clients and showcase our local identity,” Damsell said in the newsletter. “The independent location strengthens our partnership flexibility and enables a more welcoming, tailored environment for landowners to access our conservation assistance.”

Photo Left: Participants took red oak tree trunks about six inches in diameter and drilled holes in them. A mix of sawdust, and the mycelium of the Shitake mushroom is formed into a plug and hammered into each hole, and sealed with wax. The mycelium is the vegetative part of the Shitake mushroom which is crucial for its growth and development. The log is placed in a shady location and kept moist during the dry months. In two years shitake mushrooms can be harvested. This is one of several demonstration projects that were presented at the plant sale. (Photo by Ed Barber)