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## Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP)- Newsletter

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## Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP)- Newsletter Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District Update

In this issue of the LINAP newsletter, we highlight the initiatives led by our partners at the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District to support LINAP.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**
- **Soil Health Testing Program**
- **Soil Health Equipment Loan Program**
- **Agricultural Environmental Management**
- **Native Plants**
- **Agriculture in the Classroom**
- **Grant Opportunities and Highlights- Funding Opportunities**

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### Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) is a program administered by the [Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District](#) (SCSWCD) and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) within the Peconic Estuary.

The RCPP provides funding and technical assistance to farmers within the Peconic Estuary to implement best management practices including but not limited to nutrient management, pest management, sprinkler systems, agriculture mixing facilities, cover crops, irrigation, mulching, composting, agrochemical mixing pads, roof runoff management, water and sediment control basins, and the use of slow or controlled release fertilizers limiting the nitrogen impact to surface and groundwater.

Applications will be ranked based on locally identified resource priorities and the overall benefit to the environment. For more information, contact the SCSWCD office at (631) 852-3285.

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### Soil Health Testing Program

The District works with farmers to reach their soil health goals. This is accomplished by analyzing their soil, discussing their lab results, and providing suggestions on what best management practices could be implemented. The District's Soil Health Testing Program uses the Cornell University Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health (CASH) Lab Test to analyze the physical, chemical, and biological components of the soil, which helps assess the overall soil health quality of the field. Once the soil health components of the farm are assessed, the District provides growers with lab results and recommendations for improving and maintaining soil health. To date, 140 growers had their fields tested.



Photo Credit: LIRPC

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### **Soil Health Equipment Loan Program (Soil HELP)**

The Soil Health Equipment Loan Program aims to support farmers in their efforts to preserve and enhance soil health by providing access to specialized agricultural equipment that promotes conservation practices. The program offers eight pieces of equipment (e.g., *Truax FLEX II No-Till Drill*, *Unverferth Zonebuilder 132 (2-shank)*, *Unverferth Zonebuilder 132 (4-shank)*, *New Holland 145 Box Spreader*, *Two ABI 50 cu. ft. Manure Spreaders with Ground Drive*, *Millcreek 406 Rowmulcher*) that growers can borrow for extended periods. In 2023 alone 15 growers have taken advantage of this opportunity and used the equipment extensively throughout the growing season. The equipment in the fleet is specifically designed to encourage Soil Health Best Management Practices, such as no-till, spreading compost and mulch. By reducing tillage, soil structure is preserved and soil disturbance is minimized, which helps to retain nutrients in the soil and reduce nitrogen leaching into groundwater or runoff into surface water.

Since its inception, the program has contributed to the improvement of over 750 acres of farmland. For more information about this program contact Agronomist Ann Marie Calabro, at 631-852-3288 or [annmarie.calabro@suffolkcountyny.gov](mailto:annmarie.calabro@suffolkcountyny.gov).

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### **Native Plants**

Native plants have a multitude of environmental benefits, including an extensive root system that absorb and filter polluted stormwater before it reaches local waterways, and a reduced need for fertilizer and irrigation. The District provides native plant technical assistance to Suffolk County property owners, including but not limited to private homes, businesses, religious institutions, and schools, on selecting appropriate species reflective of site conditions, plant

requirements/tolerances, and management goals for agricultural and habitat restoration practices. For more information, please call the SCSWCD at (631) 852-3285.



Photo Credit: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County

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## **Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM)**

AEM is a conservation planning program administered by the District through funding from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. AEM provides assistance to farmers to identify environmental resource concerns on their farms. Once identified, farmers can receive help with the planning and design, and financial assistance to implement best management practices. AEM includes funding for implementation projects, testing services for soil, water, compost, and manure, and reimbursement for technical assistance. Testing services can help farmers to make informed decisions about nutrient management.

By participating in AEM, farmers can document their environmental stewardship and further advance their positive contributions to their communities, our food systems, the economy, and the environment. Additionally, participation in the AEM program and developing a conservation plan opens the doors to local funding opportunities through the District. For more information about how to qualify and/or to learn about the AEM Conservation Planning process, please call (631) 852-3285.

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## **Agriculture in the Classroom**

Since 2017, the SCSWCD has administered and facilitated the [Agriculture in the Classroom](#) grant program to develop, sustain, and expand agricultural education programs in schools throughout Suffolk County. The program seeks to heighten students' knowledge and appreciation of local agriculture and foster a stronger connection to locally grown food while offering unique learning opportunities. This grant program is open to all K-12 schools in Suffolk County, with funding requests ranging from \$500 to \$3,000. Since its inception, the program has provided \$110,000 in funding and supported over 30 projects, including hydroponic and aquaponic systems, grow towers, raised garden beds, greenhouses, pollinator habitats, high tunnels, and hoop houses.

The 2023 winners of the grant awards included East Moriches Middle School, Eastport South Manor, Northport High School, Hampton Bays Middle School, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Shoram-Wading River High School, Half Hollow Hills High School and the Springs School. These awards totaled \$15,189.66.

## Funding Highlight

Resources to bookmark for upcoming grant information and announcements:

- 1.) The National Wildlife Foundation has created a searchable database of federal funding and technical assistance opportunities for nature-based solutions, including a multitude of natural infrastructure related opportunities. The database is designed as a resource for government entities, non-profit organizations and more. Each funding source has its own direct contact. Click [here](#) for more information.
- 2.) For information on the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act, click [here](#). New York State is scheduling an educational listening tour that will provide the public and potential funding applicants the opportunity to learn more about what the historic Bond Act supports directly from New York State experts. Attendees of this statewide tour will be able to engage in discussions about eligibility criteria for advancing funding. Check back regularly to see the schedule unveil!
- 3.) New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's [Funding Finder tool](#) and [Grant Applications page](#) are updated regularly with federal, state, and local funding opportunities.

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Basil Seggos, Commissioner

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