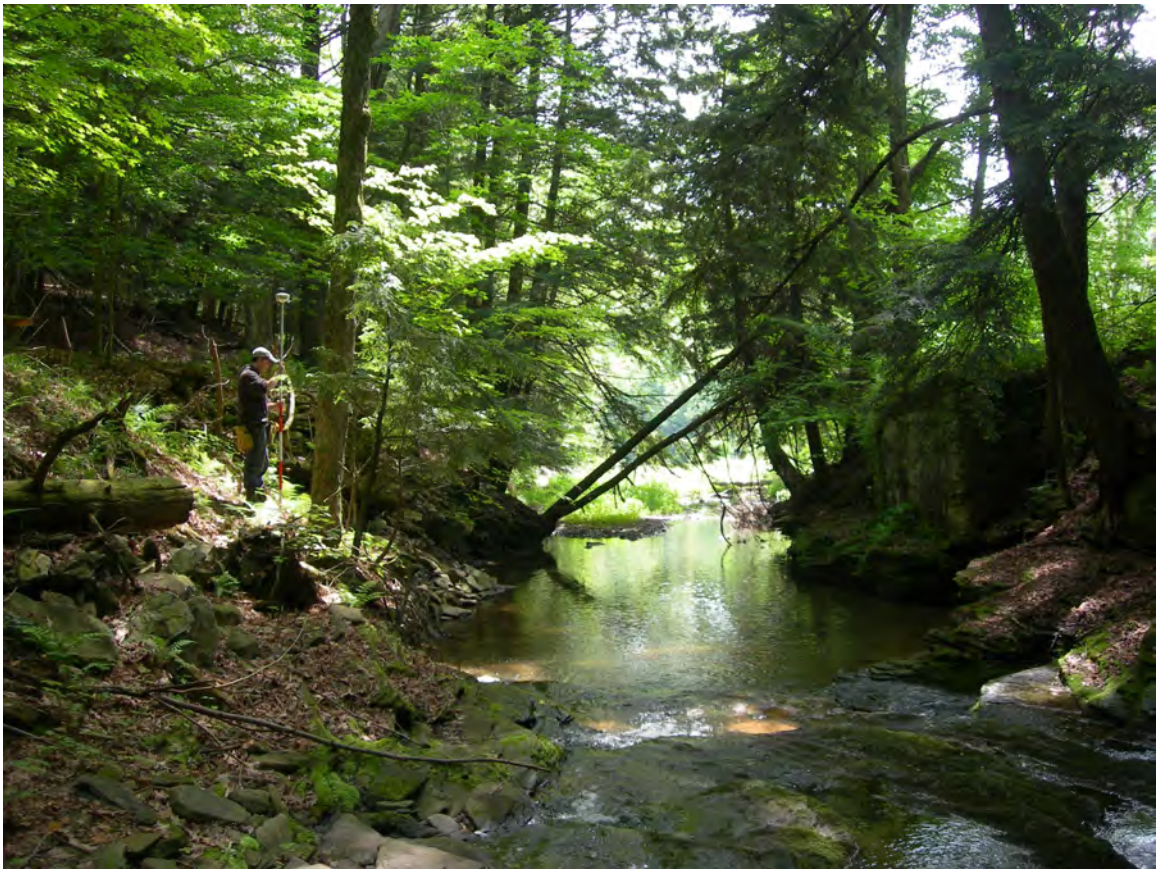


Susquehanna County Conservation District



2009 Annual Report

Susquehanna County Conservation District

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Peter Tarby, Chesapeake Bay Field Representative

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MaryAnn Warren, Leon Allen, Michael Giangrieco

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Mission Statement



The Susquehanna County Conservation District provides information and technical assistance to people and communities in the wise use of their natural resources.

Through partnerships among non-profit groups and public agencies, the District promotes a cooperative approach to natural resource issues.

Among the District's programs are Environmental Education, Erosion and Sedimentation Pollution Control & Waterway and Wetland Protection, Dirt and Gravel Road Pollution Prevention, Nutrient Management, Chesapeake Bay Program, Watershed Association support, No-till Program, and Agricultural Land Preservation.

The District is guided at the local level by a Board of Directors and at the state level by the State Conservation Commission. The Susquehanna County Conservation District is a member of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, a nonprofit organization that supports, enhances, and promotes Pennsylvania's Conservation Districts and their programs.

Our Mission

To conserve the natural resources of the county through an innovative and comprehensive conservation program based on total quality management, local leadership, a highly qualified staff, and mutual cooperation with our regional, state, and federal partners.

Public Outreach

Outreach Programs

The District has a wide variety of outreach programs. Some of the programs in 2009 included an exhibit at the Harford Fair, Envirothon, Contractors Workshop, Woodland Resource Adventure camp, No-till Conference, No-till Walks, Grazing Conference, and Environmental Education school programs. The District also gives numerous press releases, maintains a web page, and hosts a weekly radio segment focusing on conservation issues and related events.



Susquehanna County State Representatives Sandra Major and Lisa Baker visit the Conservation District's booth at the Harford Fair with District Manager, Jim Garner

Annual Seedling Sale



The Seedling Sale was held at the County Recycling Center in South Montrose. District Directors were on hand to distribute the 6,404 seedlings, trees, ground covers and shrubs that had been pre-ordered. The total profit for this year's Seedling Sale was \$5,796.36. The Susquehanna Conservation District would like to thank everyone who placed orders and participated in this yearly event. Profits from this program provide funding for some of the District's environmental education contributions such as the local Envirothon Competition and the Annual Scholarship Award.

Environmental Education

The Susquehanna County Conservation District provides Environmental Education for groups of students and residents of Susquehanna County. In 2009, the District provided programs in soils, aquatic ecology, forest ecology, watershed cycles, agriculture, and erosion among others.

In collaboration with Wyoming County Conservation District, Susquehanna County Conservation District hosted an Educator Workshop for the Pennsylvania Department of Education “Energy Thinking” curriculum. In addition to gaining new lesson plans for the classroom and filling Continued Education requirements, teachers learned from various speakers and took part in hands-on curricular activities.



Teachers observe an electricity education demonstration put on by Claverack REC, Inc at the Energy Thinking Educators Workshop

Working with the Friends of Salt Springs Park, the District provided outdoor education for the Friends’ Earth, Ecology, and the Environment (E3) program. Students learn about soils, watersheds, and the ecology of streams and forests in the E3 series. The participating classes are visited in the schools and study natural cycles and energy prior to the outdoor hands-on explorations of several ecosystems at the park. Students keep field journals to record their discoveries. Through these hands on experiences students gain an appreciation of the delicate natural balances in our environment.



Friends of Salt Springs Park Environmental Education Coordinator, Nancy Wottrich teaches children about ecology

Watershed Specialist

Kathy Blaisure is going into her fourth year as Watershed Specialist at the Conservation District. In this time Kathy has provided guidance and grant assistance for the Watershed Associations of Choconut Creek, Martins Creek, Northern Susquehanna River, Snake Creek, Upper Tunkhannock, and Wyalusing Creeks. Kathy also provides watershed education activities throughout the County.



One of the main projects that Kathy has been involved with this year is a watershed assessment of Dubois Creek. This project was possible thanks to a \$74,000 DEP Growing Greener Grant that was provided to the Northern Susquehanna River Watershed Association. This assessment has provided important information on the condition of this watershed and the health of the aquatic ecosystem that will enable the watershed association to apply for future funding to do restoration projects within Dubois Creek watershed.

*DEP Bureau of Watershed
Management Secretary
John Hines, Susquehanna
Conservation District
Commissioner Director
MaryAnn Warren and
District Manager Jim
Garner review plans for
the Dubois Creek
Watershed Assessment*



Chesapeake Bay Program

The Susquehanna County 2009 Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) allocations include two small agricultural best management practices for \$19,000 and the planting of 1,000 acres of Fall No-Till Cover Crops for \$15,000. There were 79 requests for CBP Special Project funding and 22 requests for Nutrient Management Plans to be written. John Bencoter wrote five and referred the other 17 to other sources for assistance.

CBP Special Projects must be completed within two years of being allocated. For previously allocated CBP cost-share money there was \$29,091.38 paid out on five separate CBP Special Projects in 2009. John designed sixteen large agricultural projects, nine of which are still waiting for the availability of cost share money.

Construction Accomplishments for 2009 include: Six CBP Special Projects, one USDA-EQIP project, two CREP projects, one watering system for the DEP Fencing Program, and three projects installed with no cost share money.



Chesapeake Bay Program spring development

Under the DEP Stream Bank Fencing Program 3,600 feet of stream were protected in Susquehanna County in 2009 using 8,311 feet of animal exclusion fencing on three streams.

<u>Landowner</u>	<u>Stream</u>	<u>Feet of Stream Protected</u>
Carl Lunde	Tributary to Beaver Creek	1,100
Rob Reyan	Summers Creek	1,200
Laurie O'Neil	Tributary to East Branch Tunkhannock Creek	1,300

Dam Safety and Waterway Management

Through a delegation agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Conservation District administers the Chapter 105 (Dam Safety and Waterway Management) Program. Earth disturbance in or near Waters of the Commonwealth requires some type of authorization to ensure the work is performed within Chapter 105 guidelines.

In 2009, the District's two technicians processed 32 General Permits and provided technical assistance to 211 individuals. The Conservation District received 6 complaints related to Chapter 105 regulations. District staff investigates these complaints and attempts to work with the property owners to achieve voluntary compliance if a violation is discovered.

Erosion & Sediment Control

The Conservation District is delegated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to administer the Chapter 102 (Erosion and Sediment Control) Program. Chapter 102 regulations require that Best Management Practices (BMPs) are utilized during earth disturbance activities in order to control sediment pollution. In certain situations, a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit must be obtained for discharges during construction.



Vegetative cover is the best soil erosion control

In 2009, the District's two Program Specialists responded to 298 individual requests for information and technical assistance related to Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control Plans and the NPDES permitting process. District staff performed 34 E&S Control Plan reviews for 67,578 total project acres, processed three General NPDES permits, and responded to 14 complaints. As part of the Chapter 102 Program, the District also conducted numerous site inspections and offered education and outreach to the regulated community.

Dirt and Gravel Roads

The mission of the Dirt & Gravel Road Program is to prevent the erosion of road material that results in the movement of sediment from dirt roads to streams and other Waters of the Commonwealth. Sedimentation pollution is the largest single pollutant of the state's waters. Dirt & Gravel Road projects use environmentally sensitive road maintenance techniques that reduce the volume and velocity of runoff in order to alleviate the erosion of road base material. Consequently, there is a drastic decrease in the need for road maintenance once projects are completed, as well as strong resistance to the excessive erosion caused by heavy rainfall events.



A new cross pipe on Mattes Road in Choconut Township helps to reduce erosion by breaking up the volume and velocity of runoff

Sections of unpaved roads are identified as potential worksites through a scoring system based on the severity of pollution entering the stream. Project funding to correct the problem is applied for by the municipality in which the road is located.

The applications are reviewed by a committee called the Quality Assurance Board (QAB). The QAB committee is made up of local representatives from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, the PA Fish and Boat Commission, and the County Conservation District. Recommendations from the QAB committee are submitted to the Conservation District Board of Directors for final approval.

Susquehanna County Conservation District was allocated \$134,721.00 to the District's Dirt and Gravel Road Program for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. The statewide program distributes \$3,528,000 annually to County Conservation Districts who administer the program at the local level. Susquehanna County Conservation District, which currently receives the 5th highest allocation of Dirt & Gravel Road Program funding in Pennsylvania, works with local municipalities in the county to correct pollution problems on unpaved roads.



A through-the-Bank pipe on Hall Rd in Forest Lake Township takes water off the road in order to reduce erosion

Susquehanna County has completed 52 projects to date with a total of \$1,051,336.81 in funding through the District. There are six sites currently under contract for \$73,359.03. Susquehanna County contains over 1,120 miles of dirt roads. Municipalities in Susquehanna County are encouraged to contact the Conservation District with any questions.

No-Till Program

Susquehanna County Conservation District (SCCD) offers the No-Till program to area farmers and landowners. The program's purpose is to prevent soil degradation and erosion from wind and water by encouraging the planting of crops with No-till equipment and the use of fall cover crops while discouraging the use of conventional tillage practices. Soil disturbance caused by tilling increases soil loss by erosion and hardpan layer formation due to soil compaction while also decreasing infiltration, water holding capacity, and soil fertility. Many non-farmers also take advantage of the no-till program as a Best Management Practice for wildlife habitat and quality deer management.

The SCCD owns two no-till corn planters, one no-till seeder, and leases another no-till seeder, all of which are rented out at low cost to promote no-till planting. Farmers take advantage of the no-till seeder for fall cover crop on corn stubble to prevent erosion throughout the winter and improve soil fertility and structure. In 2009, the seeding of No-till Fall cover crops were cost-shared through the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Conservation District, lowering the seeder rental price significantly.

SCCD No-Till Specialist, Wayne Oakley coordinates the program and provides technical assistance in the effective use and calibration of the No-till equipment. In 2009, there were 1,820.9 acres planted with the no-till equipment including 857.7 acres of corn planted and 963.2 acres of grains and grasses seeded through the District's No-Till program. Of the No-till acres seeded in 2009, 606.7 acres were planted as Fall cover crops.



Conventional tilling mixes organic matter from the surface to the plow depth. The plow horizon is darker because it contains more organic matter.



Cover crops send roots deep into the soil preventing erosion, improving tilth, and adding organic matter to the soil.

Nutrient Management

Plan Development Incentives Program

This program cost shares the development of an approved Nutrient Management Plan. Landowners can apply for cost share dollars when a plan is written and receive payment after the plan is reviewed and approved by the Conservation District.

Nutrient Management Plan Reviews

Nutrient management plans written by private industry and certified farmers are reviewed by the District to make sure they meet the requirements of The Pennsylvania Nutrient Management Law and then approved by the local Conservation District at a public meeting. There was one nutrient management plan reviewed by the Conservation District in 2009.

Nutrient Management Grant Program

The State Conservation Commission in conjunction with the PA Department of Agriculture accepts applications for the Nutrient Management Plan Implementation Grant Program. The purpose of the Grant program is to provide funding to qualified applicants for the implementation of Best Management Practices. The Conservation District works with landowners who apply for this funding.

AgriLink Loan Program

The AgriLink Program provides low interest loans for the construction and implementation of Best Management Practices listed as part of an approved nutrient management plan. District personnel provide information to many landowners in this program.



Willie Keeney helps farmers utilize various procedures to accurately determine the nitrogen requirements of their crop. Funding for this study was provided through the Northeast No-till Committee.

Agricultural Land Preservation Easement Purchase Program

Pennsylvania leads the nation in total number of farms and total number of acres preserved for agriculture. The program was developed to strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy and to protect prime farmland from being lost. The Farmland Preservation Easement Purchase Program enables state and county governments to purchase conservation easements through a joint fund. The Susquehanna County Conservation District administers the Agricultural Land Preservation Program for Susquehanna County.

To be eligible, farms must be located in an agricultural security area; be contiguous acreage of at least 50 acres; 50% of soils available for agricultural production must be class I through IV; the land must contain 50% harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land and must be part of a normal farming operation generating farm income.

Currently there are 26 farms preserved in Susquehanna County with the Clayton and Elizabeth Swartz farm entering the program in 2009. With the addition of this farm, Susquehanna County now has 5,563 acres preserved.

The Swartz farm consists of 70 acres and is used by Louis Hawley, brother of the landowners. This farm is primarily used for hay production and to pasture dairy and beef animals. This farm is considered part of the family farm.



Back row L-R: Jim Garner, Conservation District Manger; Michael Gathany, Susquehanna Co. Solicitor; Ain Welmon, NRCS District Conservationist; MaryAnn Warren, County Commissioner representative to the Ag Preservation Board; Eleanor Kurosky, member Ag Preservation Board;
Seated L-R: Clayton Swartz, Landowner; William Hawley; and Elizabeth Hawley; Landowner

Award Banquet



The Susquehanna County Conservation District 2009 Annual Awards Banquet was well attended. Held at the Summit Tea Room, the Banquet started with a social hour followed by a family-style dinner. Mike Stevens, host of *The Pennsylvania Road* on WNEP-TV, was the keynote speaker. A live auction fundraiser was held to acquire funding for a local food bank charity. The Banquet was concluded with the presentation of awards in recognition of conservation efforts.

The award given this year went to Allen and Kim Scott for Outstanding Cooperators of the Year.

Contractor Workshop

The Susquehanna County Conservation District hosted its annual Contractor Workshop March 17th at the Montrose Bible Conference. Breakfast was served to near one hundred contractors and vendors. Following breakfast the workshop was held in the main conference room where vendors displayed their wares and programs.

After an introduction by District Manager Jim Garner, District Erosion & Sediment Pollution Control technicians Robert Fearnley and Willie Keeney provided information about relevant permits and elements of Erosion & Sediment Control plans. Vinnie Cotrone of Luzerne County Cooperative Extension gave a presentation on low impact development and streamside buffers. Mark Santayanna of PA One Call spoke about the importance of informing the proper authorities before digging and the services available.

After a break in which attendees were able to interact with vendors and network with agencies and other contractors, Pennsylvania State Police Officer Rion Stann gave a presentation on requirements for motor carrier vehicles in commerce in Pennsylvania. The subject proved to be very useful to attendees in addressing questions and relevant updates to the law.

The workshop concluded with door prizes being given out thanks to the gracious donations of several vendors. Financial and other support for this project was provided by the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Chesapeake Bay Program.



Pennsylvania State Police Officer Rion Stann tells heavy equipment operators how to stay out of trouble with the law.

Envirothon

The Susquehanna County Conservation District is pleased with the success of the 2009 Susquehanna County Envirothon competition. Twenty-nine teams with approximately 145 students from Susquehanna County High Schools participated in the event.

This year's champions were a team from Blue Ridge. Advisors Ed Price and Trudy Hepler helped students Scott Sienko, Eric Onyon, Sarah Parsons, Tim Esposito, and Ben Hepler, bring in the win. This win earns them the opportunity to compete in the statewide Envirothon competition held at Bald Eagle State Park, PA.



The Envirothon allows students to demonstrate their knowledge of environmental issues by being tested in the areas of Aquatics, Forestry, Soils, Wildlife, and a current environmental issue, which was Biodiversity in a Changing World. Envirothon advisors credit the Envirothon competition as a resource which increases the students' interest in eventually pursuing college degrees in various natural resource studies.

Representatives from partnering agencies including the Pennsylvania Department Environmental Protection, Department of Conservation of Natural Resources-Bureau of Forestry, Fish and Boat Commission, Game Commission, and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service run the testing stations. Watershed Specialist, Kathy Blaisure, coordinates this event. The Conservation District annual Seedling Sale helps provide funding for this event.



Students gather on the grass at Camp Archibald for the 2009 Envirothon Competition

Special thanks goes out to our sponsors: The Honorable Sandra Major, Susquehanna County Commissioners MaryAnn Warren, Leon Allen, and Micheal Giangrieco, Brigadoon Bee Products, Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, Elk Mountain VFW Post 8488, Karen's Kut & Kurl, Lewis Tree Service, Montrose Auto Parts, Ron Kowalewski Construction, Pennsylvania Trappers Association District 9 and Robinson's South Town Market, whose generous donations helped make the 2009 Envirothon a success.

PARTNERSHIPS



*Pennsylvania Game Commission
Wildlife Biologist, Rich Fritsky
instructing Envirothon teams at Salt
Springs Park*



*Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of
Forestry Service Forester, Jake
Scheib instructing Envirothon teams
at Salt Springs Park*

Some of Our Partners

Countryside Conservancy
Cornell University
DCNR Bureau of Forestry
E. L. Rose Conservancy
Endless Mountains RC&D Council
Farm Service Agency
Florence Shelly Preserve
Forest Landowners Association
Friends of Salt Springs Park
Northern Tier Coalition, Susquehanna County
PA Association of Conservation Districts
PA Department of Environmental Protection
PA Department of Agriculture
PA Environmental Council
PA Fish and Boat Commission
PA Game Commission
Penn State Cooperative Extension
Rail-Trail Council of Northeastern PA
Susquehanna County Commissioners
Susquehanna County Council of Governments
Susquehanna County Farm Bureau
Susquehanna County Planning Commission
Susquehanna County Townships Association
Susquehanna County Recycling Center
Susquehanna County Rural Development
Upper Susquehanna Coalition
USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service
Watershed Associations of Choconut, Martins,
Northern Susquehanna River, Snake,
Tunkhannock, & Wyalusing Creeks
Willary Water Discovery Center, Keystone
College

The USDA-NRCS Montrose Field Office personnel administered Farm Bill Programs focusing on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

In Susquehanna County, 2009 was the sixth year CREP funding was available. The Montrose Field Office has 5,440 acres under contract providing \$436,015 in rental payments. In addition to the rental payments, \$283,172 was paid to assist in the cost of seeding acreage to suitable grassland and tree cover. The benefits of CREP include reduction of soil erosion, improved water quality, improved wildlife and fisheries habitat, and increased farm income on marginal land. (Farm the best, CREP the rest!)

The EQIP program continued to be active with 22 new applicants. EQIP promotes practices that reduce erosion, water, and air pollution and benefit at-risk species. The target areas included livestock, grazing, cropland erosion, conversion to no-till, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

Once again funds were obligated to the WHIP program. The Montrose Field office had 11 applications and many inquires concerning the program. WHIP encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats and provides cost-share payments for development and protection of upland, wetland, riparian and aquatic habitat areas.

The months of November and December found the NRCS office gearing-up for two new Farm Bill programs; The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI). It is anticipated both programs will provide an opportunity to work with both traditional and non-traditional Susquehanna County landowners.

In addition to the full workload the Montrose Field Office welcomed Ain Welmon, District Conservationist. Mr. Welmon replaced Bruce Baessler who retired in June.



A newly planted CREP Riparian Buffer



Ain Welmon, D.C. inspecting an established CREP Riparian Buffer



The Susquehanna County Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers Federal Farm Programs. Farm programs are designed to assure a stable food supply at reasonable prices. The public pays the cost of these programs through their tax dollars and reaps the benefits through low prices at the supermarket. Program administration within FSA is unique when compared to other federal agencies. A locally elected farmer committee provides oversight of program administration. Arthur Cole, Levi Ransom, Mark Tompkins, and Jean Castrogiovanni served the agricultural community of Susquehanna County in the year 2009.



*2009 Susquehanna County Farm Service Agency County Committee
Members (L to R): Arthur Cole, Donna Williams, Jean
Castrogiovanni, Mark Tompkins*

FSA promotes the Conservation of natural resources through a variety of programs. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) provided \$463,015 in rental payments to farmers in return for devoting cropland and marginal pastureland acreage to conserving uses. FSA also paid \$283,172 to assist in the cost of seeding acreage to suitable grassland or tree cover. Sportsman and others benefit from this approximate 5,440.5 acres of land, which provides a multitude of benefits in preventing soil erosion and improving water quality. Signup Incentive Payments for the CREP program totaled \$5,748. Practice Incentive Payments for the CREP program were disbursed in the amount of \$149,087.

FSA administers the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program (DCP). DCP provides farmers with a price safety net for acreage devoted to corn, wheat, oats, soybeans, barley, and grain sorghum. Benefits under this program are designed to increase as commodity prices decrease. USDA calculates the average price received by farmers during the marketing year to identify exact payment amounts. In 2009 the Farm Service Agency issued approximately \$102,706 to the grain producers of Susquehanna County under the DCP Program, consisting of 317 farms.

Growers are also encouraged to increase profits through the development of marketing strategies. FSA makes loans to farmers for grain placed in storage. The loans allow growers to hold grain for higher prices, which usually come several months after harvest. During times of low grain and wool prices farmers may forego the loan program and elect to receive a direct deficiency payment. The payment amount is calculated by comparing the daily market price to the loan rate for each eligible crop. FSA made \$214 available to wool producers under this program in 2009.

Congress authorized USDA to administer disaster programs for years 2005 – 2007. The causes of the disasters ranged from drought and excessive heat to flooding and too much precipitation. The Dairy Disaster Assistance Program III (DDAP-III) disbursed \$9,757 to producers that had a greater than 20% loss of milk production in 2005, 2006 or 2007.

FSA also administers a variety of lending programs designed to help with the purchase of a farm, meet farm operating expense, and to construct grain storage facilities. The loans generally carry interest rates below normal commercial lenders and are available to those unable to procure a loan from a bank. Farm Storage Loans to construct bins and silos are available to any farmer having inadequate farm storage. FSA loan programs are designed to help small family farmers with their lending needs. FSA disbursed \$29,070 for farm storage facility loans.

During times of low milk prices FSA makes direct payments to dairy farmers under the Milk Income Loss Contract Program (MILC.) During 2009, FSA paid \$1,257,656 to support dairy producers in Susquehanna County. This program allows the farmer to meet his feed and operating expenses when milk prices are low. The goal is for a stable consistent milk supply. Due to the decreased milk prices that have consistently remained low all year, an additional program was enacted and payments were issued to dairy producers as a supplement; the Dairy Economic Loss Assistance Program (DELAP) provided \$444,793.

FSA also administers a variety of lending programs designed to help with the purchase of a farm and meet farm operating expense. The loans generally carry interest rates below normal commercial lenders and are available to those unable to procure a loan from a bank. FSA loan programs are designed to help small family farmers with their lending needs. FSA loaned \$1,081,700.00 to Susquehanna County producers via the direct loan program and an additional \$409,623.00 in farm loan guarantees.

The efforts of FSA provided a significant boost to Susquehanna County farm income in 2009. All the programs administered by FSA are a result of Congressional action to maintain the viability of the American Family Farm. Program success assures that all of us will continue to benefit from the safest, most inexpensive, and abundant food supply in the world.

More information on federal farm programs may be obtained by visiting the office in Susquehanna County Agricultural Service Center or by calling (570) 278-1197 extension #2 or <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.