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Delaware County Soil & Water Conservation District Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Strategic Plan

2026-2030

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Background Information

The Delaware County Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Strategic Plan was authored by the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District with direction and guidance from the Delaware County AEM working group, representing the following agencies:

- Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District (DCSWCD)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County (CCEDC)
- Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC)
- Delaware County Planning Department/ Watershed Affairs

Mission Statement

The mission of the Delaware County AEM Program is to protect water quality, soil health, and climate resiliency by bringing the voluntary AEM process of farm assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation to farms in Delaware County, while promoting the economic sustainability of farms, forestry, and the agricultural community within the county utilizing climate smart technologies.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AEM	Agricultural Environmental Management
ANPSPACP	Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program
BMP	(Conservation) Best Management Practice
CCEDC	Cornell Cooperative Extension of Delaware County
CNMP	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
CRP/CREP	Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhanced Program
DCAP	Delaware County Action Plan
DCSWCD	Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FSA	Farm Service Agency
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NYC DEP	New York City Department of Environmental Protection
NYS DEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
USC	Upper Susquehanna Coalition
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WAC	Watershed Agricultural Council
WAP	Watershed Agricultural Program

Introduction

Agricultural Environmental Management, or AEM, is a voluntary, incentive-based agricultural program that assists farmers with making science-based decisions that protect and enhance New York State's soil and water resources while also meeting the business objectives of the farm.

This program, developed by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets in cooperation with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension, meets EPA requirements for addressing environmental issues on farms in the State of New York.

Delaware County has been very successful incorporating water quality goals and current technology to improve our soil and water resources. Over the past 30 years, Delaware County has enhanced its programs to avoid the necessity of strict environmental regulations imposed by federal, state and municipal (New York City) authorities. As a result, Delaware County is well prepared to meet current and future water quality goals.

This Delaware County AEM strategy encompasses the goals and missions of the Soil and Water Conservation District's AEM Program, the Delaware County Action Plan, and the Delaware County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The strategy is tailored specifically to help plan and implement agricultural programs to result in substantial soil and water quality benefits.

Historical Perspective

Delaware County Action Plan (DCAP)

In 1999, the Delaware County Department of Watershed Affairs was founded, becoming one of only a few county departments across the nation whose sole purpose is environmental issues. The Department of Watershed Affairs and partnering local, state, and federal agencies worked together in 2015 to revise the Delaware County Action Plan (DCAP), a county-wide comprehensive strategy to integrate, coordinate and address environmental and water quality initiatives in the county.

The DCAP's mission is "*to assist the county's municipalities, residents, farmers, businesses, and communities in meeting water quality parameters and objectives without loss of opportunities for economic vitality.*" It is stated within the DCAP revision that "*DCAP is demonstrating that a locally led watershed program is cost-effective and comprehensive in protecting water quality.*"

In 2018, the Department of Watershed Affairs was merged into the Delaware County Planning Department to enhance agency coordination and reduce operating costs.

DCAP Incorporates Water Quality Coordinating Committee Concept

Prior to 1999, the Water Quality Coordinating Committee was the lead for water quality efforts and goals within the county. Due to its comprehensive nature, these responsibilities have been incorporated into and enhanced by the DCAP Core Group who meets monthly and includes all County Agencies with environmental and economic responsibilities.

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

In December 2015, the Delaware County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board published the revised Delaware County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. It covers the rich history of agriculture in our county, stating that "Farming is the foundation upon which Delaware County is built." The plan also discusses the challenges facing our farmers and the increasing trend of farms going out of business. To that end, the Farmland Protection Plan emphasized the importance of "providing a business climate in Delaware County that works *with*, not against, farm businesses." The executive overview asserts that farmers need to be made aware of economic incentive programs that will help reduce the cost of farming to keep our farms in business, as agriculture is a "critical component of Delaware County's economic well-being."

The mission of the Delaware County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan is:
"to protect Delaware County farmland and natural resources, preserve its viable farmland, and enhance the stability and profitability of agriculture in this county so that current and future farm businesses and agribusinesses are able to thrive.

AEM is consistent with this mission by allowing farmers to voluntarily participate in environmental programs that will help them maintain clean water while maintaining economic viability.

AEM Working Group

Our AEM working group includes staff and members of the previously mentioned agencies and organizations. The table below lists in more detail what role(s) each group will play in implementing the strategy.

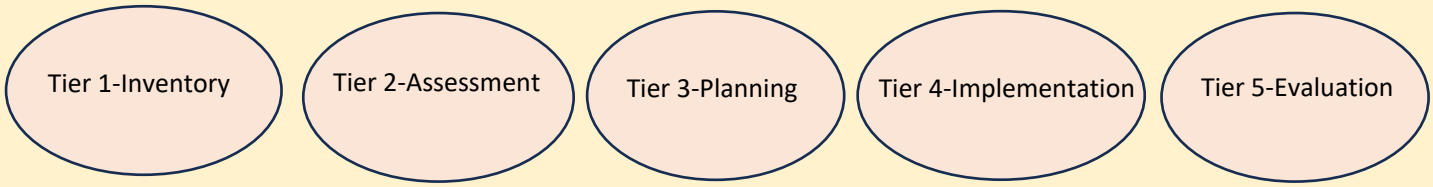
AEM WORKING GROUPS

Group/ Organization/ Agency	Roles
DCSWCD	• Administer and implement the AEM program through direct interaction with farmers • Secure funding to continue and enhance work in the Susquehanna, Delaware River Tailwaters and NYC Watersheds • Survey, design, and construction oversight of projects • Outreach and education support
CCEDC	• Lead agency for education and outreach • Primary local connection to land grant university (Cornell) research and faculty • Expertise in farm management, nutrient management, crop production and livestock management • Lead initiatives in precision feed management, soil health, and enhanced manure nutrient management
WAC	• Assist the DCSWCD in the administration and implementation of the AEM program through direct interaction with farmers in the New York City Watershed. • Outreach and education
USDA NRCS / FSA	• Assist the SWCD with implementing the AEM Strategy • Provide cost-sharing programs for implementation of projects on farms in the Susquehanna, NYC, and Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Watersheds • Outreach and education • Farm bill • Provide technical and administrative services for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
USC	• Help secure and administer grants and other funding for projects in the Susquehanna Watershed • Support the county with AEM data base development, including Best Management Practices (BMPs) documentation and tracking to ensure full credit for the implementation of projects that meet Chesapeake Bay Program Cap Allocations and Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) within the Susquehanna Watershed planning unit • Outreach and education

Delaware County Planning Department/Watershed Affairs	• Help secure, administer and coordinate grants and other funding for projects that meet the goals of this strategy • Keep the County Board of Supervisors up-to-date and aware of issues in each of the planning units, as needed • Integrate AEM efforts into DCAP • Administrative support to the County Ag and Farmland Protective Board • Performs NYS Certified Ag District Review • Coordinates Ag interests in Planning related reviews and actions.

Utilizing the AEM 5-TIERED Approach

AEM consists of a five-tier process:



This locally-led, watershed-based approach is the cornerstone of helping Delaware County farms assess and meet environmental objectives while maintaining agriculture as a vital part of Delaware County's economy.

Both CCEDC and the DCSWCD will partner with Cornell University, the Watershed Agricultural Council, USDA/NRCS, USDA/FSA and NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets in bringing both technical and financial assistance for the implementation of conservation practices on Delaware County farms. The DCSWCD utilizes the AEM Tiered approach to farm planning and to educate farmers on the importance of livestock exclusion and maintaining healthy riparian areas. The DCSWCD's ability to coordinate the USDA Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), along with the NYS Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program (ANPSPACP), has accelerated the implementation of riparian buffers and livestock access control throughout the Susquehanna and Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Watersheds.

The DCSWCD policy of controlled, limited livestock access through animal behavior modification, exclusionary fencing or riparian buffers has shaped the direction of the County's AEM Program.

Photo Highlights from Delaware County AEM Program Projects

Streambank Stabilization

Stream Crossing

Watering system

Bedded pack

Manure storage

Barnyard

Watershed Planning Units

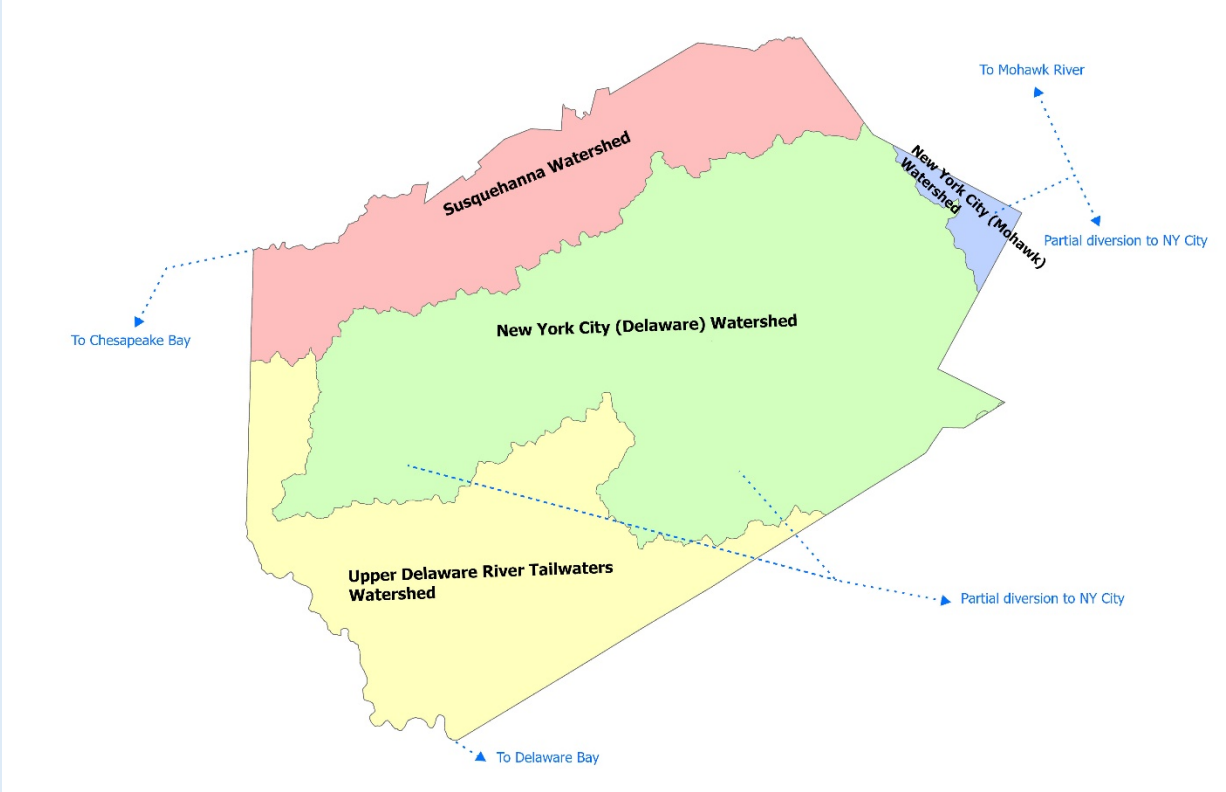
Delaware County's AEM Strategy identifies four watersheds as the planning units in the County.

Planning unit 1 - Susquehanna Watershed

Planning unit 2 - New York City (Delaware) Watershed

Planning unit 3 - Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Watershed

Planning unit 4 – New York City (Mohawk) Watershed



Priorities within the Watersheds

SUSQUEHANNA WATERSHED

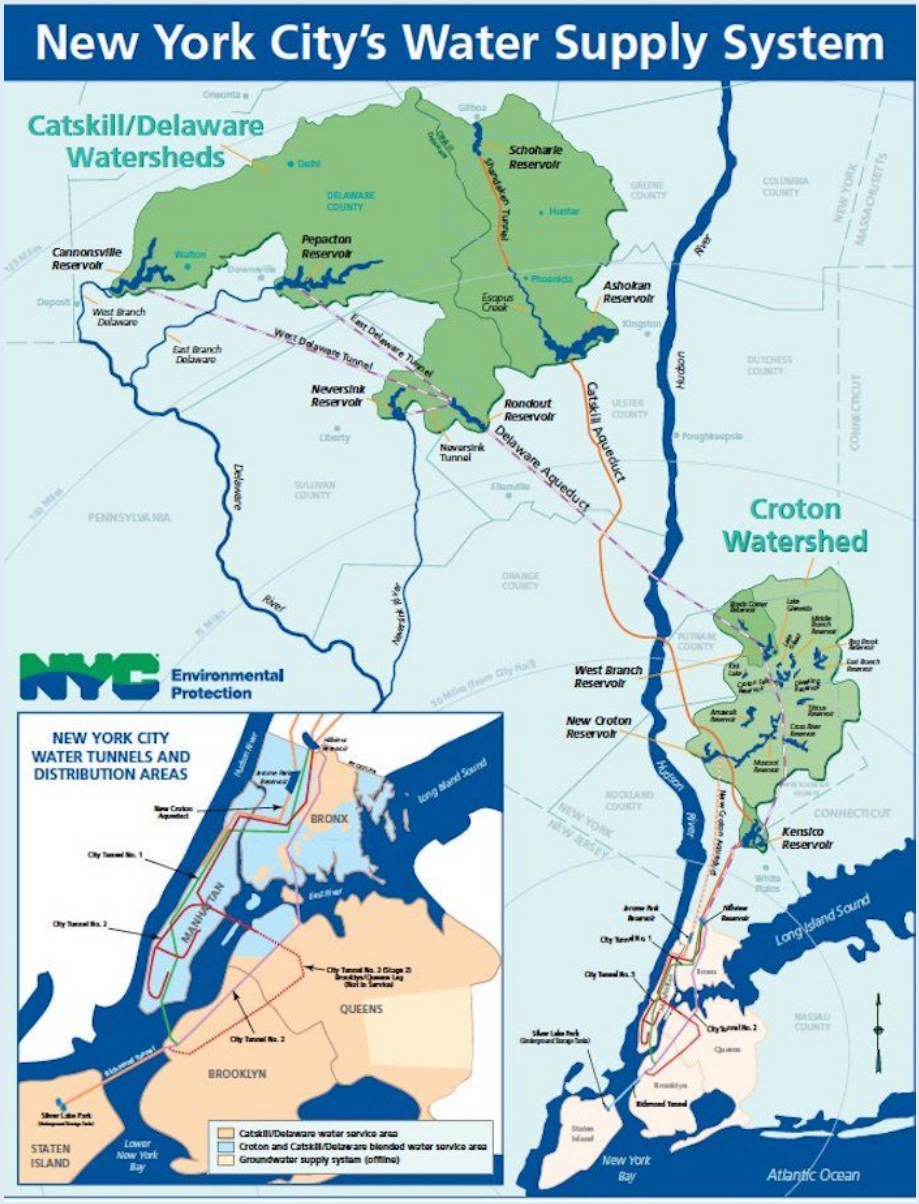
The Susquehanna River Watershed consists of about 19.5% of Delaware County. Flow from the watershed travels west leaving the county eventually traveling south to the Chesapeake Bay. In 1999, the Chesapeake Bay was placed on the USEPA's list of impaired water bodies under authority of the federal Clean Water Act. To improve water quality and protect the declining fisheries, President Obama signed an Executive Order in 2009 that recognized the Bay as a national treasure and empowered the EPA to oversee its cleanup in the watersheds of seven states, including New York.

The EPA has set specific pollution reduction milestones, or a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), for each state that must be met by 2025. To keep states on track, the EPA required each state to meet 60% of its 2025 mandate by 2017 or face new regulatory consequences prior to 2025. These new regulations could include enhanced stormwater regulations, sewage treatment plant upgrades, and various agricultural restrictions.

To help ensure that these milestones are met, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition and the NYS DEC have developed a Watershed Implementation Plan which outlines New York State's strategies to meet identified goals. It is anticipated that the acceleration of conservation practices on farms in this watershed will likely assist Delaware County in meeting nutrient and sediment loading milestones set forth by EPA. This would prevent the need for future regulations which could trigger undesirable economic burdens. In contrast, the USEPA has determined that the New York State 2017 Goals were substantially met and additional regulations will not be forthcoming at this time.

NEW YORK CITY (DELAWARE) WATERSHED

The New York City Watershed comprises 54% of Delaware County and provides roughly 50% of the drinking water for nine million people in New York City. As a result of the Safe Drinking Water Act, New York City was ordered to either filter this surface water source or enact programs and regulations to maintain drinking water quality. The latter path was chosen and, as a result, DCSWCD and CCEDC petitioned the State of New York to broker an agreement between the City of New York and watershed counties. This resulted in New York City paying 100% of the cost of all agricultural conservation practices that enhance and protect water quality that are not required by state or federal regulations. From this agreement, the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) was formed to represent farmers in the Watershed. The WAC now administers the Watershed Agricultural Program (WAP) and contracts with the DCSWCD and CCEDC to provide conservation planning and implementation assistance to farms in the Watershed.



UPPER DELAWARE RIVER TAILWATERS

The AEM Working Group has categorized the watershed below the Cannonsville and Pepacton Reservoirs (26.5% of the County) as AEM Priority 1. Although farming is still prevalent in this watershed, there are fewer farms in operation than in either the Susquehanna or New York City Watersheds. At present there is no enhanced regulatory threat. However, the Tailwaters maintains a world-class, self-sustaining Brown and Rainbow Trout fishery and is home to a scenic and recreational river corridor. A unique concern within the Tailwaters refers to the impact of the reservoirs on stream flow. Controlled flow released from the Cannonsville and Pepacton Reservoirs reduce the high peak flows in rivers that play a critical role in moving sediment and maintain river cross-section dimensions. Streambank Corridor and Shoreline Management Systems are a high priority system for this watershed.

NEW YORK CITY (MOHAWK) WATERSHED

It should be noted that although the vast majority of the New York City watershed in Delaware County is part of the Upper Delaware River system, roughly 2% of the county drains to the Schoharie reservoir in Schoharie County, which is also within the New York City watershed, and then northward into the Mohawk River. After several years of initial watershed analyses and evaluations, in which the DCSWCD played an active role, a Mohawk River Watershed Management Plan was adopted by the State in 2015. Goals from this plan are to protect and restore the quality and ecological function of water resources, protect and enhance natural hydrologic processes, promote flood hazard risk reduction and enhance flood resilience, while promoting agriculture and increasing watershed awareness.

AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

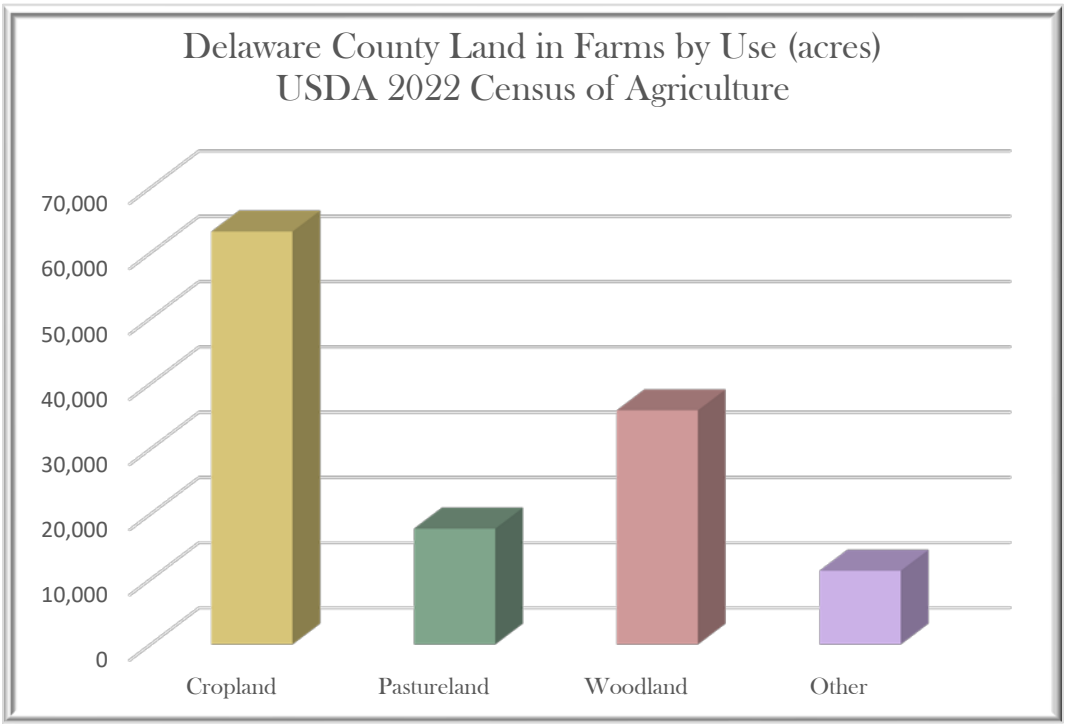
Inventories

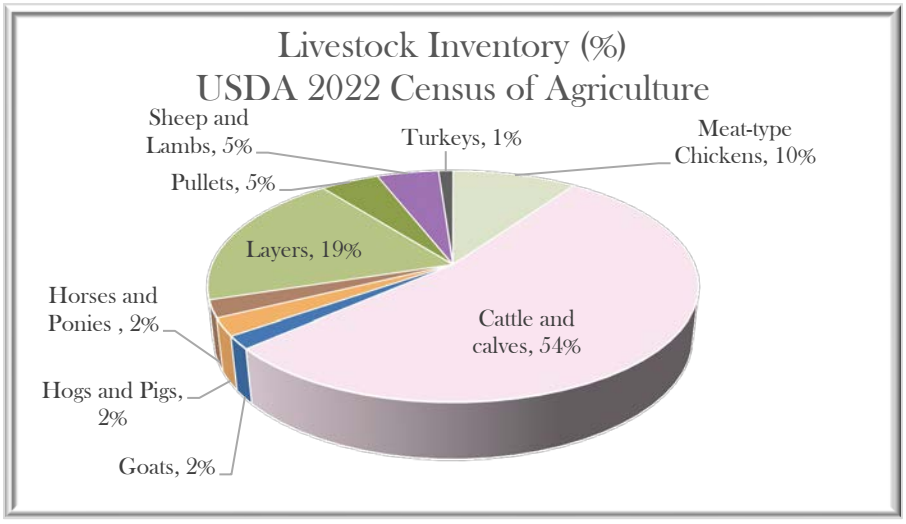
According to the USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture, 128,232 acres of land currently in use across 579 farms within Delaware County, 49% is utilized as cropland, 14% is pastureland, 28% is woodland, and 9% is used in other practices. Alternatively, our livestock inventory shows that 54% of the total animals across all farms are cattle, 19% are layers, 10% are meat-type chickens, 5% are pullets, 5% are sheep and lamb, and the remaining 9% are goats, turkeys, hogs and horses. The value of these livestock products alone account for 75% of the overall market value of all agriculturally related products sold in the county. The market value of these livestock products sold is primarily cattle related, with 85% accumulated from dairy sales, and 13% coming from cattle and calves. The other 2% is a mixture of poultry, eggs, goats, sheep, hogs and other animal products.

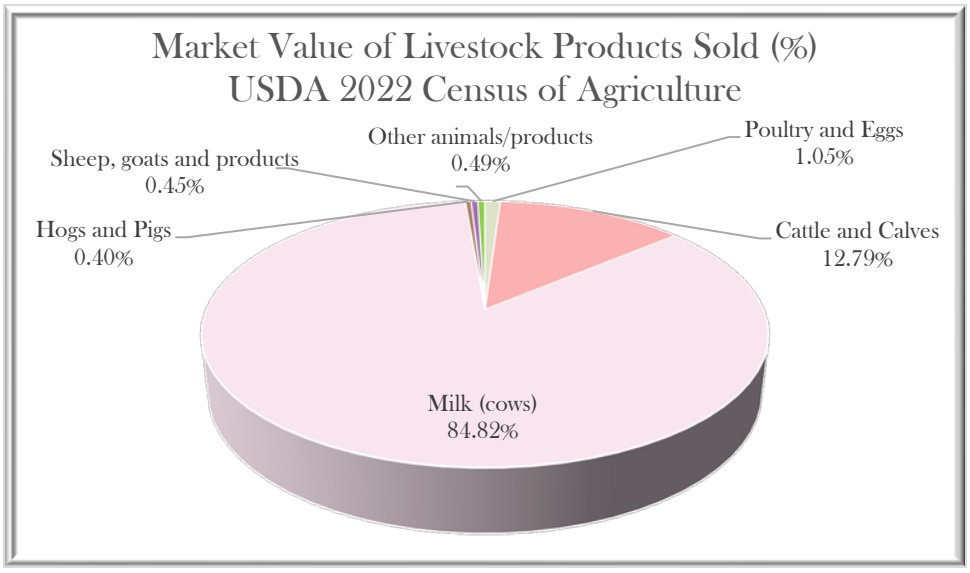
Of the 63,275 acres of cropland utilized in the county, 77% are forage hay/haylage, 18% are silage corn, 5% are grain corn, and 0.5% are vegetables.

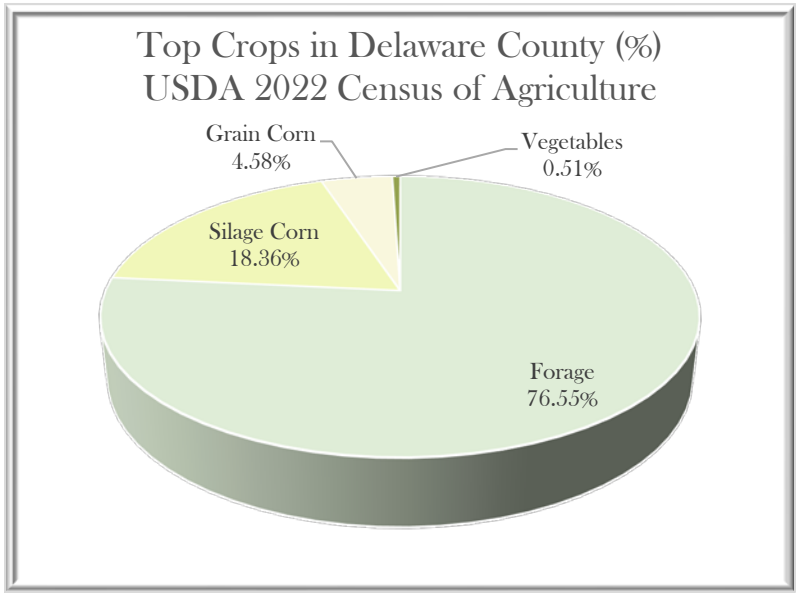
Land Use Practices

Across Delaware County, 30% of the total 579 farms utilize some form of conservation management on their crop fields, such as cover crops and reduced or no tillage.




Livestock Inventory (%)
USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture
Sheep and Lambs, 5%
Turkeys, 1%
Meat-type Chickens, 10%
Pullets, 5%
Layers, 19%
Horses and Ponies , 2%
Cattle and calves, 54%
Hogs and Pigs, 2%
Goats, 2%


Market Value of Livestock Products Sold (%)
USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture
Other animals/products 0.49%
Poultry and Eggs 1.05%
Sheep, goats and products 0.45%
Hogs and Pigs 0.40%
Cattle and Calves 12.79%
Milk (cows) 84.82%


Top Crops in Delaware County (%)
USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture
Grain Corn 4.58%
Vegetables 0.51%
Silage Corn 18.36%
Forage 76.55%

Natural Resource Concerns

Water Quality

Water quality is generally rated good to excellent within Delaware County; thus, water quality efforts generally focus on maintaining the watershed to the highest superiority. Delaware County's drinking water supplies, exceptional trout fisheries, and the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay drive our water quality programs. Although farming has decreased in recent years, it still has a significant influence on the amount of nutrients, sediment and pathogens entering the water. As a result, the farming community's best interest to address water quality issues to a high degree or face the potential of regulations.

Some of the primary threats to water quality in Delaware County include nutrients, sediments and pathogens leaving farm fields and entering streams and rivers during runoff events. Nutrient transport can lead to algae production in waterbodies and sediment delivery, as a result of erosion, has deleterious effects on trout and the microinvertebrates they depend on. Pathogen transport can also lead to parasites like Giardia and Cryptosporidium entering unfiltered drinking water supplies, resulting in intestinal disorders in humans.

Another threat to water quality is the accumulation of nutrients on the farm from imported, purchased feeds. Precision Feed Management (PFM) assists farmers in balancing animal diets and improving the quality and quantity of homegrown forages and grains. This results in preventing and reducing overfeeding of nutrients, which reduces manure nutrient excretions and decreasing purchased feed nutrient imported on to the farms. These nutrient management concerns exist on farms in all watersheds in Delaware County, but presently only the NYC Watershed Agricultural Program is funded and actively addressing feed management on dairy and beef farms in the NYC Watershed.

Management of manure storages on farms in Delaware County is also a nutrient resource concern. In general, we have seen our smaller farms struggle to manage their manure storages in a timely manner, largely due to limited labor resources on their farms. This has resulted in manure nutrients often applied during times of year that present higher risk of nutrient loss to the environment. Manure storages remain a beneficial management practice despite challenges of managing them, and continue to be a priority for implementation on farms that need and desire them for nutrient management.

Delaware County resource concerns also include better utilization and reduced risk of loss of manure nutrients through improved manure application methods. Specifically, this can be accomplished by reducing ammonia nitrogen volatilization loss and reduced phosphorus run off loss by incorporation or injecting manure using disc coulter injection into the soil profile at the time of application and using precision ag rate control, in addition to applying manure during the growing season. Our smaller farms struggle with this technology for two reasons: cost barriers and equipment scale issues. The threats to water quality were instrumental in the DCSWCD's decision to develop its Livestock Exclusion Policy and to identify Riparian Forest Buffers as a priority Best Management Practice.

Soil Resources

Only about 7% of the soils in the county are considered “prime farmland.” Much of our ag land is on steep slopes, has shallow depth to bedrock and is very stony. Fragipan subsoils are very common, which reduces the effective rooting depth of crops and limits subsurface drainage, which subtracts from an already short growing season. As a result, crop yields are typically lower than in other areas of New York State and is a hindrance on our farmers’ economic competitiveness.

According to current concepts, a healthy soil can be used productively without adversely affecting its future productivity, the ecosystem or the environment. While most Delaware County farmers are well aware of the inherent soil properties (such as soil texture) as presented in soil surveys, the role and importance of dynamic soil properties (such as compaction or biological functioning) are still in their understanding infancy. Considering the soil resource restrictions detailed above, it is important that soil health management becomes a routine strategy on Delaware County farms. CCEDC and the DCSWCD will continue to lead the soil health effort.

Climate Resiliency

Climate resiliency is a resource concern that is becoming more prominent over the years. Delaware County SWCD has modified our mission statement to now address this concern of adaptation to climate change due to the accelerated greenhouse gas emissions to our environment. The frequency of extended drought and heat have affected crops and their livestock. Farmers must continually invest in upgrades to facilities, infrastructure, and management to stay sustainable. Torrential rainstorm events are more common than ever. Storms regularly cause havoc to producer’s streams, fields, and infrastructure. Over the past twenty years, the 24-hour storm events have changed significantly. As an example, for the bulk of Delaware County, a 24-hour, 100-year storm (defined as a 1% change of occurring within any given year) was 5”-6” of rain in 1993. In 2023, this same 24-hour, 100-year storm is now 6”-7” of rain. Over the last 80 years, county data shows an increasing annual precipitation trend of about 9%. It’s important that the Delaware County SWCD and its partnering agencies work together to promote resilience for our county producers.

Planning Unit Strategies

In summary, there are four watersheds in the county: the Susquehanna River, the New York City (Delaware) Watershed, the Upper Delaware River Tailwaters, and the New York City (Mohawk) Watershed.

Within all four watersheds, the strategic goal is to enhance water quality, soil health, stream corridor management, climate resiliency, and farm viability. Performing stream assessments during the AEM planning process, the DCSWCD is able to coordinate available cost share programs to implement controlled limited livestock access to surface waters through animal behavior management, exclusionary fencing, and establishment of riparian buffers. Significant work has already been done with this strategy using CRP/CREP, USC, and ANPSACP grants to install riparian forest buffers, rotational grazing, cover crops, streambank stabilization, and nutrient management planning.

Watershed Assessments

SUSQUEHANNA WATERSHED

In the Susquehanna Watershed, the continuation of the AEM process will include completing Tier 1 and Tier 2 assessments on new farms and Tier 5a updates on farms with assessments over three years old.

Using the information gathered from Tiers 1, 2 and 5a as well as Tiers 3 and 3a already completed, farms will be prioritized. Focus will be on priority conservation practices such as riparian buffers, cover crops, rotational grazing, Precision Feed Management and manure nutrient management. Farms that have been identified in Tier 2 as having special nutrient resource concerns, will be prioritized for CNMP development. As funding opportunities become available through EQIP, CRP/CREP, USC and ANPSACP, Tier 4 implementation will be completed. An additional goal in this watershed is to develop a method to track our progress with planning and conservation practice implementation. The DCSWCD is building a database that will track BMP implementation; planning and their funding sources.

NEW YORK CITY (DELAWARE) WATERSHED

In the New York City Watershed, the Watershed Agricultural Program (WAP) is funded by the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and administered by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC). The WAP utilizes the AEM process on smaller farms grossing under $10,000 in annual income. Large Farms are planned utilizing the Whole Farm Planning Process. The WAP is working with the DCSWCD to integrate the AEM process on Large Farms participating in AEM related programs. Through the leadership of CCEDC and the WAP, the Precision Feed Management, and manure nutrient management program will continue to be implemented on farms.

The WAC has developed a database that will track farm planning and implementation

UPPER DELAWARE RIVER TAILWATERS

The ultimate goals in this strategic plan are to increase awareness and participation of the AEM program. Farms that have been identified in Tier II as having special nutrient resource concerns will be prioritized for CNMP development. As more farmers successfully complete Tier 4 implementation, awareness will increase. Using Tier 1 and 2 assessments, farmers interested and willing to participate will receive Tier 3 plans and begin Tier 4 implementation as funding opportunities become available through EQIP, CRP/CREP, and ANPSPACP. Focus will be on priority conservation practices such as riparian buffers, cover crops, manure nutrient management, and streambank corridor and shoreline management systems.

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NEW YORK CITY (MOHAWK) WATERSHED

The portion of the Mohawk River Watershed within Delaware County is encompassed in New York City's water supply system. In the New York City Watershed, the Watershed Agricultural Program (WAP) is funded by the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and administered by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC). The WAP utilizes the AEM process on smaller farms grossing under $10,000 in annual income. Large Farms are planned utilizing the Whole Farm Planning Process. The WAP is working with the DCSWCD to integrate the AEM process on Large Farms participating in AEM related programs. Through the leadership of CCEDC and the WAP, the Precision Feed Management, and manure nutrient management program will continue to be implemented on farms.

The WAC has developed a database that will track farm planning and implementation

Priority Agricultural Best Management Practice Systems

Using the New York State Agriculture & Markets Soil and Water Conservation Committee's Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) System Catalog we have prioritized our conservation projects into specific BMP Systems. Our prioritized systems are as follows:

Access Control System – provides for the permanent exclusion of livestock from a waterbody or hydrologically sensitive area to protect water quality.

Livestock Heavy Use Area Runoff Management System – a system for the interception, collection, and safe treatment of runoff water from a barnyard or concentrated livestock area.

Nutrient Management – managing the amount (rate), source, placement (method of application), and timing of plant nutrient and soil amendment applications for efficient use by crops and reduced losses to the environment.

<u>Riparian Buffer System</u> – an area of grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, legumes, forbs, shrubs, or trees tolerant of intermittent flooding or saturated soils located adjacent to and up-gradient from waterbodies.

<u>Soil Health System</u> – employ cultural or management-based measures including crop rotation, tillage, mulching, cover cropping, or other practices according to a soil conservation plan to control soil, erosion, reduce run-off, and enhance soil health.

<u>Stream Corridor and Shoreline Management System</u> – a system of vegetation, structures, biotechnology, or management techniques to stabilize or protect stream channels, streambank and shorelines while also enhancing natural hydrologic processes and improving fish and wildlife habitat.

<u>Waste Storage and Transfer System</u> – system designed for the collection, transfer, or storage of agricultural livestock and recognizable process waste.

Communications Strategy

One of the most crucial components for success in achieving the goals of this strategy is effective communication with the farmers. To that end, there are several efforts already underway to reach and educate farmers and landowners about AEM. The DCSWCD has developed a website and publishes an annual newsletter covering program developments and progress being made throughout the county. A second goal is to continue outreach and education on the importance of healthy stream and floodplain systems; riparian buffers; rotational grazing; nutrient, precision feed and forage management; and soil health. The benefits of these programs can directly affect economic sustainability, while nutrient and sediment reductions contribute to improved water quality.

Communication Strategies in Watershed

SUSQUEHANNA WATERSHED

Monthly meetings of the AEM Working Group serve to review all progress, problems and opportunities in an inter-agency setting. Targeted mailings, articles, and educational meetings inform farmers of the watershed's status and any regulatory changes from EPA concerning the Chesapeake Bay TMDL issue. A review of Delaware County's AEM Strategic Plan, Action Plan, the AEM Tier process, and presentations from partnering agencies concerning available funding opportunities typically are covered.

NEW YORK CITY (DELAWARE) WATERSHED

The WAC Communications Director coordinates the efforts of the program to educate and reach farmers in this watershed through a website, brochures, as well as a newsletter. In addition, farm tours demonstrate new technologies and techniques of farming, cropping, herd health, etc. that may increase profitability and protect water quality.

UPPER DELAWARE RIVER TAILWATERS

The communication strategy will continue to develop as partnerships evolve.

The DCSWCD is a technical advisor to the Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Coalition (UDRTC). This coalition of eight Towns, two Villages, Broome County and five Not-for-Profit Groups including the Friends of the Upper Delaware River is dedicated to improving the local cold-water fishery, recreational opportunities, flood mitigation and resource protection utilizing science-based initiatives. The UDRTC has recently completed a Watershed Management Plan which will guide implementation of projects on agricultural and non-agricultural lands.

NEW YORK CITY (MOHAWK) WATERSHED

As similar to the New York City Watershed within the Delaware River Watershed, the Watershed Agricultural Council continues to facilitate the agricultural/environmental education through the Watershed Agricultural Program through websites, brochures, and newsletters. Farm tours and conferences are also a common tool used to promote knowledge across the watershed.

Evaluation OF AEM STRATEGIC PLAN

This AEM Strategic Plan will be evaluated and updated every five years by the AEM Working Group. The individual goals and programs available within each planning unit may be reviewed periodically as resource priorities and funding opportunities evolve.

** Program Eligibility in Select Watersheds Only

Since many grants have specific environmental priorities, the DCSWCD will use a supplemental document to prioritize and rank projects as needed. This ranking/prioritization document may continually be modified, if needed, based on the target goals and objectives of each unique grant. Being flexible to adjust rankings will lead to more competitive projects coming from Delaware County. Each year more districts apply for these limited funding opportunities. Modifications of this supplemental document will be the responsibility of the AEM Partners Working Group with approval through the DCSWCD Board of Directors.

AEM ACTION PLAN

Delaware County's three-year AEM Action Plan determines how the DCSWCD uses its funding appropriation to plan, implement, and evaluate farm progress and to conduct AEM education and outreach programs for farmers and the local community. AEM Funding has been and will continue to be used to leverage funding from numerous state, local, federal and private funding sources.

Strategy Approvals

- This strategy was reviewed and revised by the AEM Working Group before being submitted to the SWCD Board of Directors
- The SWCD Board of Directors approved this on 12/17/2025

TIER 4 COST SHARE TRACK

A Tier 4 Cost Share Track allows SWCDs to budget and receive up to $300,000 over a three-year period in State Cost Share funding to implement priority Best Management Practices (BMPs) as identified in Delaware County's Strategic Plan. The DCSWCD Board of Directors has prioritized this funding for the Susquehanna and Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Watersheds in consideration of the robust funding opportunities in the New York City (Delaware and Mohawk) Watershed

Opportunities – Funding Sources

Several cost-share opportunities are currently available for AEM participant producers with the county. Funding is never guaranteed to eligible producers; however, the District and their partners have been successful in securing and leveraging funding for many BMP projects over the years. Producers are encouraged to work with their district office to identify possible funding sources that address their unique resource concerns on their property.

The following cost-share programs have been available during the past five-year period or longer:

AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
AEM

Climate Resilient Agriculture

NEW YORK STATE | Agriculture and Markets

NEW YORK STATE GROWN & CERTIFIED

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

USDA

NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

UPPER SUSQUEHANNA COALITION

ACEP
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Regional Conservation Partnership Program
RCPP

EQIP
Environmental Quality Incentives Program

EBM:
Ecosystem Based Management

USDA CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM