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## **Governor Cuomo Congratulates Suffolk County Farm as Recipient of the 2016 Agricultural Environmental Management Award**

### Wickham's Fruit Farm is the First Long Island Farm to Win Top Agricultural Environmental Award

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today congratulated Wickham's Fruit Farm, located in Cutchogue, Suffolk County, as the recipient of New York's top agricultural environmental award – the 2016 Agricultural Environmental Management Award. Each year, the award honors the outstanding efforts of a New York State farm to protect and preserve soil and water quality. Wickham's Fruit Farm is the first fruit farm and the first farm on Long Island to receive this accolade.

"Farms are key partners in our work to preserve our natural resources and build a cleaner, greener New York," **said Governor Cuomo.** "I congratulate Wickham's Fruit Farm on receiving this honor for their outstanding commitment to environmental stewardship. They are a testament to the ongoing efforts of farms across the state to protect our environment and ensure the economic sustainability of New York's agricultural industry."

Wickham's Fruit Farm was recognized, along with the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District, during a ceremony at Empire Farm Days in Seneca Falls. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Empire State Potato Growers, and the American Agriculturist Magazine presented the award to ninth generation farm owner Tom Wickham for the family's long established history of implementing conservation best management practices that benefit the environment and protect the community.

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**Tom Wickham, Owner of Wickham's Fruit Farm, said,** "The conservation practices we've put in place and that are so critically important would not be possible without the active engagement of a number of parties—from the NYS Departments of Agriculture and Markets and Environmental Conservation, Cornell University, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and of course, the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District. They have all provided great help and guidance in implementing projects that protect our land and the health of our community while improving our operation."

Wickham's Fruit Farm is a 200-acre, historic bicentennial farm that is located on some of the oldest, continually cultivated land in the country. One of the largest farms on the North Fork, the Wickhams grow fruit trees on 120 acres and various small fruits and vegetables on the remaining 80 acres.

The Wickham Farm was one of the first 50 farms to receive an Agricultural Environmental Management comprehensive farm plan in 1999. As early adopters of the principles of Agricultural Environmental Management, Wickham's Fruit Farm has implemented several practices that protect ground and surface water, as well as other natural resources, and that have also improved the farm's profitability.

The Wickham family has participated in many cost-share programs and implemented many conservation best management practices for the last two decades, including participation in the District's Fuel Tank Replacement Program, in which they have replaced three on-farm fuel tanks with state-of-the-art environmentally sound tanks to reduce the risk of fuel contamination into the soil. They have also installed a micro-irrigation system to better manage the amount and placement of water to their crops.

The farm has focused on the reduction of fertilizer usage by transitioning to a controlled release nitrogen fertilizer program that considers weather and soils before making

application decisions. This has greatly reduced seepage of nitrogen into the Peconic Bay that surrounds the farm. The farm also uses integrated pest management practices including monitoring crops as a first defense against pests and using pheromone disruption methods decreasing the need for pesticide applications.

The Wickhams have also installed an innovative seasonal high tunnel that is being used to grow cherry trees. The seasonal high tunnel is a greenhouse type structure that does not require any additional heating, instead it focuses the sun's energy to produce ideal growing conditions, maximizing the growth of the plant. This use of a seasonal high tunnel is the first of its kind in the area.

**Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said,** "The Wickhams have made good environmental practices a part of their daily life on the farm, and we congratulate them on their innovation and commitment to protect and conserve the quality of our soil and water. With support from the Suffolk County SWCD and other critical partners, the Wickhams have been able to implement progressive farming practices that will be a model for generations to come."

**Senator Ken LaValle said,** "I am proud of the coordinated efforts put forth to protect our environment by Wickham Farm, Suffolk County Soil and Conservation Water District, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, the NY Departments of Agriculture and Markets and Environmental Conservation, and the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service. Their combined stewardship, advocacy and goals of this nature will protect our lands and waters for future generations."

**County Executive Steve Bellone said,** "The Wickham Fruit Farm is an excellent example of farming operations within the Suffolk County Farmland Protection program, which has permanently preserved ~11,000 acres of agriculture. It is a demonstration that agricultural preservation leads to excellent environmental stewardship and concentrated efforts to protect our soils and waters. I am very proud that Wickham's received this great statewide honor."

The farm has worked closely with the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District, which provides technical assistance to advance agricultural environmental management practices within the county. The District uses the feedback to improve its own efforts for environmental management in agriculture.

**Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, Sharon Frost said,** “The SCSWCD is proud to be the recipient of the 2016 NYS AEM Award. We are also very proud of Tom Wickham and his accomplishments as he has participated in the AEM program since 1999. He has worked diligently towards becoming a superior land steward as we can see from him achieving this recognition.”

**Robert Carpenter, Administrative Director of Long Island Farm Bureau said,** “Long Island Farm Bureau is pleased that Wickham's Fruit Farm and Suffolk County Soil and Water District are being honored for their hard work and dedication to environmental practices. Tom and his family have long been leaders and innovators when it comes practices to protect our soil and water resources for current residents and future generations. This award also shows that Long Island farmers truly care about the environment which we all share by voluntarily engaging in better environmental practices.”

The Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District has a very active agricultural environmental management program that has assisted over 278 farms since its inception. The District focuses on assisting farmers with programs that help protect Long Island's sole source aquifer, which provides drinking water to over 2.7 million people. They have successfully been administering grant funding for programs such as fuel tank replacement, nutrient management planning, pesticide sprayer retrofits, and the installation of agrichemical handling facilities, among others. The Agricultural Environmental Management program has guided the District in assisting farmers in protecting the environment while meeting their economic goals.

Assistance to Wickham's Fruit Farm and other producers was provided through conservation planning, design and cost-share opportunities for conservation practices.

Since 1996, the District has successfully secured over \$1.7 million through the State Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control grant program to assist 98 farms across the county implement sound environmental practices.

The annual Agricultural Environmental Management Award is jointly sponsored by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, American Agriculturalist Magazine and the Empire State Potato Growers. Award winners are chosen from nominees submitted by County Soil and Water Conservation Districts from around the state. The first Agricultural Environmental Management Award was presented in 2002; prior to that, the award was known as the Agricultural Stewardship Award.

New York State's agricultural environmental management framework is a model for the nation as a voluntary, incentive-based approach to protect natural resources and meet the economic needs of the agricultural community.

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