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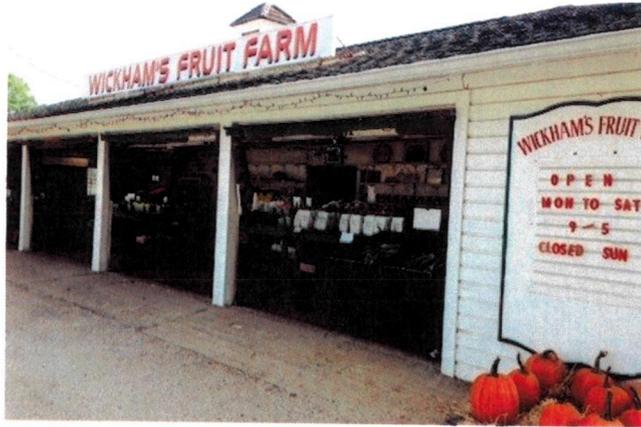
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File photo.

Wickham's Fruit Farm given top award for conservation efforts by New York State

by Courtney Blasl | Aug 12, 2016, 12:03 pm

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A Cutchogue fruit farm has won the state's top agricultural environmental award of 2016.

Wickham's Fruit Farm in Cutchogue was given the 2016 Agricultural Environmental Management Award, which each year honors "the outstanding efforts of a New York State farm to protect and preserve soil and water quality."

According to a press release issued by Governor Andrew Cuomo's office, 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."

"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," said Tom Wickham, Owner of Wickham's Fruit Farm.

"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 said.

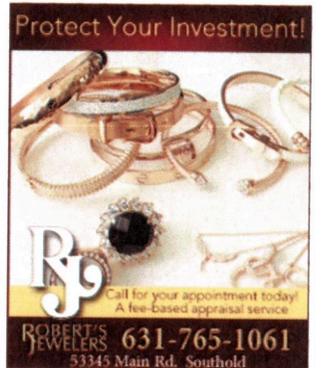
Wickham's Fruit Farm was recognized, along with the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District, during a ceremony at Empire Farm Days in Seneca Falls. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Empire State Potato Growers, and the American Agriculturist Magazine presented 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.



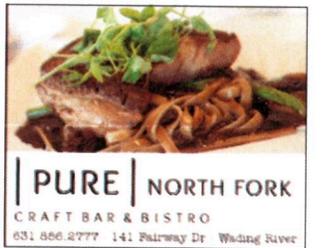
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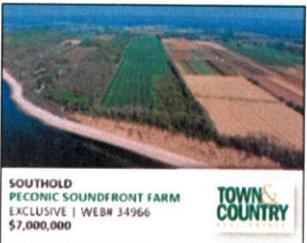
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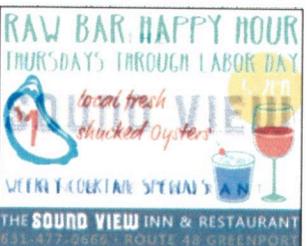
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Wickham's Fruit Farm is a 200-acre, historic bicentennial farm that is located on some of the oldest, continually cultivated land in the country. One of the largest farms on the North Fork, the Wickhams grow fruit trees on 120 acres and various small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

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 agricultural 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.

Source: Press release issued by Governor Cuomo's office.

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