

Honoring a Vision

**By Troy Bishopp,
Madison Co. Soil and Water Conservation District**

Canastota, N.Y.—The Oneida Lake Watershed glimmered a little brighter today as the Richard Bargabos Family received the 2010 Madison County Conservation Farm of the Year Award from the Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District. Flanked by family, fellow farmers, friends, county agency partners and legislators at the Rusty Rail restaurant, Rick, Marybeth, Olivia and Emily accepted the prestigious award from district board member, Ron Bono, for their commitment to 20 years of sustained on-farm conservation and water quality work. “It’s my pleasure to recognize a farm family that has created a landscape based on a pro-active, conservation work ethic to protect the topsoil, the water and to feed a community”, said Ron.

Since 1989, the farm has been on a “green” path of success due to the vision, passion and hard work of Richard and his family. The once nutrient depleted, bramble filled property has undergone quite a transformation. The 322 acre farm is now home to a sea of lush pastures, rotationally grazed by 80 cow/calf pairs and watered by an intricate series of gravity-fed concrete tanks flowing out from 7 ponds throughout the property. “Our goal from the start was to create a sustainable farming model that could run on sunshine and gravity”, said Rick.

In addition to the management-intensive grazing system, the family has protected the watershed by implementing conservation measures such as; riparian buffers, cattle exclusion fencing, reinforced laneways and stream crossings, windbreaks and a recently built heavy-use area with adjacent filtration system. The farm has utilized local technical assistance and conservation program funding through the Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District, The NYS Agriculture Environmental Management Program, The Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Farm Service Agency, The Graze-NY Program and other environmental partners to achieve its water quality goals.

Richard capped off the ceremony with an emotional tribute to his family and friends by saying, “After peeling away all the layers of life, your belief in our vision and hard work to leave the farm better than we received it, for future generations to enjoy, is truly inspiring for a man born to be a caretaker of the land”.