

## Press Release

**Local Leadership Group Forming to Address Critical Water and Agricultural Issues in Potter County and Tioga County**

Coudersport, Wellsboro, PA – Penn State Extension, in partnership with area farmers, several Potter and Tioga County agencies, service providers and agricultural organizations has announced the formation of a new initiative and leadership group dedicated to identifying long-term solutions and implementing projects that address the Region's most pressing water and agricultural issues.

Potter and Tioga County, the Cowanesque Watershed, now joins four other communities across the country as part of the Water for Agricultural project - a USDA supported initiative designed to provide communities with the resources and assistance they need to explore the water and agricultural issues that matter most to them. "In addition to assisting these communities meet their needs, our goal is also to learn more about the best ways to bring together a diverse set of interests to discuss these types of challenges so that we can share these lessons with other communities across the country" said Nicole Santangelo, Penn State Extension Educator and Local Leadership Engagement Team Lead.



The other communities in the project include Mifflin County in central PA, two communities in Nebraska, and the Verde Valley in Arizona. "We wanted to work with each of these communities because they each have different types of agriculture and water issues and all have had a history of developing effective programs and partnerships to address agriculture and water issues" noted Nicole.

The leadership committee, comprised of 11 representatives of from the farming community, interest groups, agencies, and technical service and education providers, will work together over the next year or so to assess current conditions and programs, identify and prioritize needs and implement projects that address the issues most important to Potter and Tioga Counties. Prior to the recent formation of the leadership committee, the project was focused primarily on planning and conducting more than 30 interviews with local decision makers, farmers, technical service providers and organizations. "Our goal" explains Sean Rukgaber, Local Leadership Team member, "was to gather as much information as possible about everyone's ideas and perspectives and how a collaborative approach to addressing water and agricultural issues would be useful". Local Leadership Team member Rob Thompson added that "Farmers are currently facing increasing pressure from state and federal agencies to be compliant with water quality regulations and at the same time are enduring one of the worst farm economies in recent memory – our goal is to ensure that programs and resources are developed in ways that are responsive to these concerns".

The Team members have been meeting for more than a year to prioritize the water issues important to the community and region, and welcome new suggestions and ideas. The project recently conducted a random sample survey to both farmers and non-farm residents to gather their ideas and perspectives related to water and agricultural issues. These surveys are now being summarized and will be shared as they will begin to prioritize the effort's plans and resources.

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