

2019 Educator of the Year

Tom Beaudry of Walpole, NH

Each year the Cheshire County Conservation District honors an individual or organization with the “Educator of the Year” award. This is done to celebrate the efforts the recipient has undertaken to steward a conservation ethic and awareness through their personal and professional work, in whatever form of education that takes. This year we are happy to announce Tom Beaudry of Walpole, NH as our 2019 Educator of the Year.

Tom Beaudry is a Certified Crop Consultant who works with farmers to meet their production goals and provide education on best management practices for soil health and water quality. Tom has been doing this work since 1995 on over 20,000 acres of farmland on both sides of the Connecticut River, from the MA border to Woodsville, NH.

Tom grew up right here in the region, in Charlestown, NH, and prior to attending college and later starting his own farm Tom worked on several local farms including Putnam Farms in Charlestown, Ascutey View Farm in West Claremont, and Boggy Meadow Farm in Walpole. After gaining this experience, Tom received two back-to-back degrees – an undergraduate degree



in Animal Science from the University of New Hampshire and a Master’s degree in Dairy Science from Virginia Tech.

All of Tom’s early education and work experience led him to purchase Elm Island Dairy Farm in Walpole in 1995, at which point he also began his career as a Crop Consultant. While Tom only raises approximately 15 heifers on the farm today, at its peak the dairy farm was milking approximately 50-60 cows.

As a Crop Consultant, Tom supports farmers throughout NH and VT in a variety of ways. First and foremost, Tom’s work focuses on meeting each farmer where they’re at to provide

recommendations to meet their desired production goals. His work varies from farm to farm for this reason, but often involves a focus on nutrient management and recommendations for manure/fertilizer/herbicide application rates, seeding rates, farm equipment and machinery conversions and maintenance, as well as education and advice regarding soil health & water quality.

If you were to ask Tom, he might not label himself an educator – but that doesn't change the fact that he certainly is. Through his consulting work Tom aims to help farmers understand best management practices for soil and water health, and how to navigate those practices when and if they make sense for each farm's end goal. This includes

conversations and education regarding pH levels in the soil, cover cropping, crop rotation, manure application, erosion control, seed application, and especially no-till practices – all practices that support the conservation of soil and water resources in the region. This year alone, Tom has worked with farms to transition approximately 2,000 acres on both sides of the Connecticut River to no-till - which is no small feat!

Farmers in and around our region respect Tom and trust his input. As he puts it *"This is their game"* and *"it's about building relationships."* Tom is a farmer, which goes a long way to bridging those tough conversations. He recognizes the financial restrictions farms are plagued with given the current state of the local dairy economy. He recognizes that



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implementing these practices must make sense in more ways than one and thus, does his best to communicate the value of practices such as cover cropping and no-till, while remaining transparent that change is not going to happen overnight though the benefits, both economically and ecologically, will grow over time.



Additionally, as a Technical Service Provider (TSP) for the USDA NRCS in New Hampshire Tom serves as a liaison between NRCS and local farmers to develop nutrient management plans. He has worked closely with NRCS Soil Conservationist Heidi Konesko through the years and Heidi had this to say about the great service Tom provides to the conservation community:

“Tom has a deep understanding of the plant and soil interactions that affect the nutrient cycle on our farms. His practical knowledge of farm operations and local soil and climate conditions allow him to help farmers improve their crop production and bottom line while minimizing the risk of environmental harm from nutrient leaching and runoff. Farmers trust his advice. He knows the landscape and he has personally sampled the soil in just about every crop field in the CT River Valley as well as many outside it!”

In addition to working closely with the USDA NRCS, Tom plays several additional volunteer roles throughout the farming community. He is an Associate Board Member of the CCCD, a member of the NH Soil Health Partnership, he sat on the Walpole Conservation Commission for 12 years and served as Chair of that Commission for 7 years, sits on the newly established Modern Nutrient Management Commission as well as the NH Agricultural Experiment Station External Advisory Commission, and also served as Vice-Chair of the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance.

If this all seems like a lot of work – that’s because it is! Education comes in all shapes and sizes and presents itself in obvious and sometimes not-so-obvious ways. The impact of Tom’s work educating through crop consulting often has a more immediate impact than traditional education. Tom’s advice is respected by



farmers and practices are often quickly implemented as a result of his guidance. Remember those 2,000 acres converted to cover cropping in just this year alone? Those converted acres yield a range of ecological benefits that include increased water retention in the soil, reduced erosion, and increased soil biodiversity and organic matter. These benefits not only have a positive impact on farm productivity but support the overall

health of our watershed and the wildlife they support.

The service Tom provides is invaluable to the region and we thank him for his commitment to conservation and advancing the farming community in NH and beyond. It is with great honor that the CCCD presents Tom Beaudry with the 2019 Educator of the Year Award. Congratulations Tom!

