



# INSIDE *this issue*



Van Buren County  
Food & Farm Guide

Page 2



Farm Bill 2008

Page 2



Environmental  
Assurance Program

Page 2

*Get  
Involved!*

Two Rivers Coalition

Page 4

## 2009 Annual Meeting and Election

The 2009 annual meeting of the Van Buren Conservation District is scheduled for Tuesday February 17th at 6:30pm. We will be holding this year's meeting at the Red Brick Coffee Shop in Lawrence.

We will be celebrating the variety of local foods with a meal prepared of foods grown in the Van Buren County area. We hear an update from Representative Tonya Schuitmaker who will share with us information about the Farm-to-School Bill. We will also partake in a cooking demonstration by Sharon

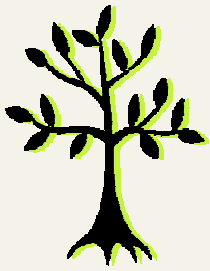
Desimone, owner of the Green Onion Catering Company to show us how easy it is to incorporate local foods into our every day cooking!

### Please join us on February 17th!

- Vote for a Conservation District Board member
- Celebrate a successful 2008 for the Conservation District!
- Sample and learn about eating locally grown foods!
- Learn how the farm-to-school bill can help local farms and schools!



Dinner will be free of charge, donations will be gladly accepted. If you would like to RSVP (not required but very helpful!) please contact Amy at 657-4030 ext. 5 or e-mail at:  
[amy.lockhart@mi.nacdnet.net](mailto:amy.lockhart@mi.nacdnet.net)



2009  
Tree Sale  
is just  
around the  
corner!

The 2009 tree sale will be Friday and Saturday April 17 and 18, 2009. Product catalog and order forms will be available by mid February! If you received this newsletter, you are on the mailing list for the tree sale catalog. If you know anyone who would like to receive a copy of the sale catalog when it is available, please direct them to [www.vanburencd.org](http://www.vanburencd.org) to sign up for our mailing list, or call the office at 657-4030 ext. 5

#### Tree sale needs volunteers!

If you are interested in volunteering for this year's tree sale, we need lots of help! Please email or call Amy at [amy.lockhart@mi.nacdn.net](mailto:amy.lockhart@mi.nacdn.net) or 657-4030 ext. 5



#### Welcome Matt!

The Conservation District is happy to welcome aboard Matt Meersman as the

Conservation Technical Assistance Specialist! Matt will be working along side Natural Resources Conservation Service staff to implement federal farm bill programs in the County. Matt previously worked on the Paw Paw River watershed planning project through the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and is an active community member serving as a board member for Friends of the St. Joe River and the Two Rivers Coalition. We are very happy to have him!

## First annual Van Buren County Food & Farm Guide

#### The deadline has been extended!

#### Help us spread the word!

The Conservation District is developing the first annual Van Buren County Local Food & Farm Guide! This exciting new guide will link residents and visitors with locally grown food and farm products from farms, markets and



other related businesses in Van Buren County and the surrounding area.

The 2009 guide should be available by March and will be available free of cost to area residents and visitors.

We are very excited to be working on this project but we need your help to make it a success!

The deadline for advertisers to be included in the 2009 guide has been extended to **February 10, 2009**.

Information can be found online at [www.vanburencd.org](http://www.vanburencd.org) or by calling the Conservation District office at 657-4030 ext. 5.

*This just in...*

**The federal farm bill programs brought over \$1.1 million of obligated cost share funds to Van Buren County in fiscal year 2008! That's money that directly affects our local economy!**

## 2008 Farm Bill...

by Jeff Douglas

*Van Buren District Conservationist - NRCS*

In late June of 2008, the food, conservation and energy act of 2008 (Better known as the 2008 Farm Bill) was passed by Congress. The 2008 Farm Bill was modeled after the very successful 2002 Farm Bill. Many of the conservation programs were re-authorized with some minor changes to some programs and significant changes to others. The highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland compliance provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill were retained, virtually unchanged. The most popular of the Farm Bill Programs, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP was re-authorized with some changes

related to organic and specialty crop production. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives program (WHIP) was re-authorized as well with minor changes. The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was changed to the Conservation Stewardship Program and remained similar to the old program with one exception: all privately owned crop & grazing land is generally eligible. For detailed information, go to the USDA website at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) and click on the 2008 Farm Bill link.

It is important to remember that the 2008 Farm Bill does have new rules. These rules are currently being evaluated to determine their effect on program implementation.

*continued on page 3.*

Also, program funding for 2009 has not been authorized by Congress and it may be late spring or summer before program funding becomes available. The one item that can really make the program contracting process run smoothly is to make sure your farm records and eligibility are up to date with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Updated records and a clean eligibility status are required for program participation.

Right now, the Van Buren County Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS) has about a 40 person waiting list for program participation. We provide service on a first come, first serve basis. Right now we are trying to complete conservation plans for customers that started the program participation process back in the spring of 2007.

If you would like more information or to schedule an office visit to discuss conservation planning for your farm, please contact Jeff or Steve at (269)657-4030 ext. 3

Take the Conservation District Survey!

The Conservation District is working on an updated strategic plan, and we need your input! Please take a moment to complete the survey insert from this newsletter or go online and complete the survey at [www.vanburencd.org](http://www.vanburencd.org). Please reply by Feb. 13 **Your input is greatly appreciated!**

## Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program

Submitted by Kyle Mead  
Van Buren Conservation District

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is a voluntary program that recognizes a farmer's legacy as an environmental steward. This innovative and proactive program helps farms of all sizes and all commodities voluntarily identify, minimize and prevent agricultural pollution risks. Farmers who successfully complete the three phases of a MAEAP system are rewarded by becoming verified in that system and can obtain a sign for their farm that states that the farm is environmentally verified.

MAEAP was developed by a coalition of agricultural producers, commodity groups, state and federal agencies, and conservation and environmental groups. While the Michigan Department of Agriculture is the verifying agency, MAEAP is not a governmental or regulatory program but rather a partnership effort.

The first phase is to attend an educational meeting. Ag Action Day, held January 30, 2009 at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, will count as a MAEAP Phase 1 credit. There, farmers from all over Southwest Michigan will be able to meet local Groundwater Technicians who will assist them with Phase 2 of the program, the on-farm risk assessment. The third phase is a third party verification, which in Southwest Michigan is done by Josh Appleby, MAEAP Verifier for the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Farmers can become verified in various system areas of production: Livestock, Cropping and Vegetable, Farmstead, Greenhouse, Orchard, and Nursery. Operations as diverse as livestock farms in Allegan, blueberry farms in Van Buren, vineyards in Berrien and greenhouses in Kalamazoo are participating and getting verified under the MAEAP program.

Farmers who successfully complete the three phases are recognized as outstanding environmental stewards and are eligible for rebates from Agricultural Associations, low-cost lending and reduced liability insurance premiums from participating companies. Farmers interested in this unique program who would like more information about where to attend a MAEAP Phase 1 meeting should contact their local Groundwater Stewardship Program Technician or visit the MAEAP website at [www.maeap.org](http://www.maeap.org).

To contact Kyle Mead, Groundwater Technician for Van Buren Conservation District:  
E-mail: [kyle.mead@mi.nacdnet.net](mailto:kyle.mead@mi.nacdnet.net)  
Phone: (269)657-4030 ext. 5



*Congratulations to the following farms for becoming MAEAP verified in 2008!*

*Alaga Farm  
Steve & Anita Friend  
Leduc Blueberries, LLC  
Rob Vanderswag*



**Van Buren Conservation District**  
**1035 E. Michigan Ave.**  
**Paw Paw, MI 49079**

## **Two Rivers Coalition: An Alliance of the Black and Paw Paw River Watersheds**

The Two Rivers Coalition is a citizen-based group working to protect the health of the Black River and Paw Paw River watersheds through conservation, education and advocacy. In May and June of 2008, two forums were held titled "Finding a Voice for the Black and Paw Paw River Watersheds". The intent of these forums was to gain community input and involvement in the creation of a sustainable watershed organization to carry out further implementation of the Black and Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plans. Attendees were invited to attend follow-up "Transition Team" meetings to further the efforts of the forum and move toward the creation of the watershed group. The

transition team first met on July 9, 2008 and began discussing ways to build the organization. The TRC is now making quick steps toward establishing itself as a non-profit organization. The first annual meeting was held on December 10, 2008 and saw the election of the first TRC Board of Directors which consists of Al Baerren, Bob Becker, Nancy Edwards, Sam Ewbank, Dave Foerster, Kevin Haight, Thomas Howe, Amy Lockhart, Matt Meersman, Joe Parman and Chris Shaw. TRC meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm at the Geneva Township Hall - anyone is welcome! For more information about TRC, please visit [www.vanburencd.org/trc](http://www.vanburencd.org/trc).

### **2008 plat book and lake photo atlas are available!**

The Van Buren County Department of Land Services has agreed to donate \$5 of the purchase price to the Two Rivers Coalition! For more information about the books, contact the Van Buren County Land Services Department at 219 Paw Paw Street, suite 302 in Paw Paw or online at <http://www.vbco.org/government0119.asp> Make sure to mention TRC when you make your purchase!

**Save A Tree!**



If you wish to be removed from our mailing list or to receive Conservation District Newsletters, Tree Sale and Plant Sale catalogs electronically, please email Amy at the address listed below.

[amy.lockhart@mi.nacdnet.net](mailto:amy.lockhart@mi.nacdnet.net)