

# Press Release



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## **Partnering to preserve Schuyler County agriculture, open space, and rural character**

Alpine, NY – A new twist to an old technique is becoming the way of the future for some of our existing livestock operations in Schuyler County. The Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District partnered with an area farm to preserve the way of life that has existed on this land for generations. Tom Wood and his family have owned and operated a dairy farm in the Alpine area of Schuyler County for decades. Tom’s dedication and passion for farming still burns even though he has “retired” from operating as a dairy. Although Tom has sold his dairy herd, he still would like to maintain the farmland that has been so precious to him and his family over the years.

Tom inquired with acquaintance, and former dairy farmer himself, John Wickham, Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District and Upper Susquehanna Coalition Grazing Specialist, about the potential for installation and assistance with grazing infrastructure in order to establish a heifer operation. This would help to maintain the open space and rural character we all have come to enjoy and cherish in Schuyler County. John Wickham is known statewide for his grazing expertise. “His hands-on knowledge from his own farm go along with over a decade of dedication to learning the newest techniques of intensive rotational grazing that makes him a true asset for our region,” said Jerry Verrigni, District Manager Schuyler County Soil and Water.

Together Tom and John worked tirelessly to install high tensile fencing to USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service specifications. Utilizing the Soil and Water District’s post pounder, over 4,600 feet of fencing was installed in a short time to be ready for the early grazing season. The Soil and Water District obtained the post pounder through funding from the Upper Susquehanna Coalition. This post pounder has been utilized to install over 50,000 feet of fencing throughout the region. “Intensive rotational grazing, accompanied with alternative watering systems, buffer fencing, and improved animal trails and walkways tends to be some of the most cost-effective conservation practices implemented in New York State. It is all about the biggest bang for your buck, and a true

win, win for the farming community, the residents of Schuyler County, and the environment,” said Wickham.

“I was very impressed with the immediate response I received from Soil and Water. I was looking for technical assistance and received that and more. To have a low-cost alternative to create the infrastructure I needed to maintain my farming operation was greatly appreciated. I know that John at the Soil and Water District works with hundreds of farms throughout the region but he, as always, made me feel like I was the only farm he was working with,” said Wood. “With ever increasing taxes, fuel bills, and other costs that large landowners assume, we needed to do something to help bring in income to contend with those expenses,” Wood added. Each year the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District and John Wickham implement over two dozen projects, and over 800 acres of grazing implementation. This program is truly the epitome of protecting water quality, preserving agriculture and open spaces, and maintaining the rural character of Schuyler County.

**Caption for attached photo:** John Wickham, Chemung/Schuyler Grazing Specialist, foreground, using the Wheatheart fence post pounder that is available for rent from the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District.