



PHOTO BY STEPHEN MAHONEY

ENVIRONMENTAL FIRST: Willie, Craig and Roger Giroux received New York's first "AEM Partnering to Protect Our Environment" roadside sign recognizing their exemplary environmental stewardship.

Farm shines with AEM help

By **BARB SILVESTRI**

FARMERS have traditionally been considered the first environmentalists. But today, farmers involved in New York's Agricultural Environmental Management Program have an even stronger claim to that mantle.

Take the Giroux Poultry Farm family of Chazy, N.Y. This third-generation family farm was recognized as Farm of the Year by the Lake Champlain Basin Program, an international overseer group of environmental leaders from New York, Vermont and Quebec.

With more than 1 million eggs being packed a day, it's the state's largest egg producer. All the farm's cropland lies in the Lake Champlain watershed, much of it close to the lake. So this family takes environmentalism seriously.

Feed rations for the laying hens are balanced with phosphorus reduction in mind. Animal density guidelines follow the recommendations of the United Egg Producers Animal Care Program.

Manure from the hens is dried and composted. Certified organic, the fertilizer-grade compost is delivered to buyers in New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

A Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan guides the quantity of composted chicken manure spread on their fields for corn and soybeans. Soils are tested annually, and the manure nu-

Key Points

- AEM involvement enhances farmers' environmentalist role.
- Giroux Poultry Farm was 2007 Lake Champlain Farm of the Year.
- AEM provides key information for long-term business planning.

trient content is analyzed periodically.

Principal owners Willie, Craig and Roger Giroux are very cognizant of their role in protecting the watershed from ag nutrients and pathogens. Steve Mahoney, Soil and Water Conservation District manager for Clinton County, recently quizzed them about their ground-level environmentalism:

Q: Why do you place so much emphasis on environmental issues?

Craig: We try to farm under a good-neighbor policy. We put ourselves in our neighbors' shoes and operate accordingly. After all, it's our back yard, too.

Willie: Lake Champlain is an incredible natural resource; it should remain as beautiful for future generations.

Q: What environmental conservation practices have you incorporated?

Craig: Minimum tillage using a paddle plow or offset disk leaves about a 50% residue of cornstalks on the surface. All fertilization needs are supplied by our farm's dry compost.

Willie: Very little starter fertilizer is

Make a farm dog famous

AMERICAN *Agriculturist's* 18th Annual Northeast Rural Living Photo Contest is loping toward its July 20 finish line. Your favorite "pooch picture" may be worth \$250 — the top prize in "Our favorite farm dog" competition.

Send in your best photo, along with an explanation of why he or she is your favorite dog. The winners will be published in September's issue. The entry rules are:

- You must be an *American Agriculturist* subscriber or family member of a subscriber.
- Photos must have been taken by the entrant within the past 18 months.
- Submit only photos of Northeast rural subjects.
- Submit images on CD, slides or prints in color or in black and white. Prints must be at least 4 by 6 inches. Save the negatives!
- Include a copy of this entry

blank with each photo.

■ Print your name, address and phone number on each entry blank, and attach an address label.

■ Include a short story about why this dog is your favorite.

■ Send no more than five photo entries per person.

■ Mail entries to be received by July 20.



2007 Northeast Rural Living Photo Contest

Photographer _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____
 Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
 Photo description: _____

Mail entries to: Northeast Rural Living Photo Contest, *American Agriculturist*, 5227B Baltimore Pike, Littlestown, PA 17340.

needed. Phosphorus in our feed rations is reduced to protect water quality.

Q: How did the AEM risk assessment and the CNMP boost your awareness?

Willie: It made us look more aggressively at the land base needed for the bird numbers we had.

Craig: Our compost program was started as a result.

Q: Would you recommend that other New York farmers participate in AEM, whether they're the size of a concentrated animal feeding operation or smaller?

Craig: All sizes of farms can benefit from the planning process.

Roger: Through AEM, farmers can get into compliance easier than they think they can.

Willie: It helped us move forward and plan for expansion.

Q: AEM has developed a "Working With the Media" training course. Would that be of use to farmers?

Willie: Yes ... absolutely!
 AEM, the incentive-based umbrella program for ag conservation in the Empire State, has more than 10,000 farms participating in 54 counties.
Silvestri is AEM outreach coordinator.

It's about being a good neighbor

DAN and Sue Nickerson of Nickerson Farms in Allegany County, N.Y., welcomed the AEM assessment process as an opportunity to think about being good neighbors. "If you don't spend time evaluating your farm, problems don't get solved," contends Dan.

With their 120-cow dairy close to residential, school and athletic complexes, it was a priority for the Nickersons. "The AEM program helped our farm find funds to design necessary changes. Farmers do their best, and with AEM, they can do even better," he believes.

The assessment led to an almost immediate benefit. A 6-inch diameter power takeoff pump was installed at their waste transfer station. The larger pump reduced odor-generating agitation from one hour to less than five minutes.

"Odor has been reduced to the point that there are no neighbor complaints," Dan says.

Grow public support for agriculture

THE AEM program will host another round of "Working With the Media" workshops to help farmers raise public awareness of the benefits of farms, such as producing fresh products, protecting the environment, preserving open space and providing wildlife habitat. Media professionals will provide tips and techniques to handle media inquiries, answer environmental questions and communicate farming's importance.

"Today, we hear a great deal of negative publicity about agriculture and the environment when the positives are actually innumerable," says Dale Stein, partner in Stein Farms LLC, LeRoy, N.Y. "Farmers need to step forward and work together to educate the public on the true benefits of agriculture to the environment." Communications is an increasingly important component of a good farm business plan. "It's easier than you may think," adds Stein. "It takes less time than you may think and is a key ingredient for successfully farming today."

For workshop details, e-mail Barbara Silvestri at barb.silvestri@agmkt.state.ny.us or call 518-457-3738.

He said it

"Odor has been reduced to the point that there are no neighbor complaints."

Dan Nickerson
 Scio, N.Y.



PHOTO BY COLLEEN CAVAGNA