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Suffolk County Soil & Water Conservation District Staff Help Farmers Go Green

Originally Posted: March 21, 2012

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From Left to right: Linda Hack, USDA Farm Service Agency; Polly Weigand, SWCD; Liz Condon, SWCD; Paul TeNyenhuis, SWCD; Nicole Spinelli, SWCD; Liz Camps, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service; and Sharon Frost, SWCD. (Courtesy Photo: SWCD)

Riverhead - The Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is assisting farmers in recycling their agricultural plastics with the purchase and operation of a Bigfoot Baler. Many farms use plastic to cover greenhouses during the winter. In the spring the plastic is removed and sent to the landfill. By assisting farmers in baling and recycling, this program could potentially eliminate hundreds of tons of plastic otherwise headed for Suffolk County's waste stream.

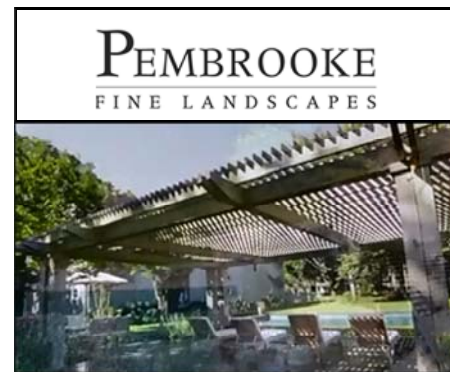
"The Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District staff does a remarkable job in assisting farmers in protecting our natural resources on Long Island", said **Joe Gergela**, Long Island Farmer Bureau's Executive Director.

North Fork Nursery, owned and operated by **Joe Lebkeucher**, located in Jamesport generously donated the use of his nursery as a training site for District staff on Monday, March 19. North Fork Nursery covers 300 greenhouses each winter with plastic. According to **Matthew Pendleton**, Nursery Manager, it would normally take 20 to 30 employees three days to remove the plastic from all their houses. It is then carted to the landfill in dumpsters. With the Bigfoot Baler, five employees can uncover and bale the plastic on approximately 50 greenhouses per day.



The Bigfoot Baler pulling plastic from greenhouses at North Fork Nursery in Jamesport. (Courtesy Photo: SWCD)

Dennis Sutton, inventor of the Bigfoot Baler, flew in from Florida to demonstrate the machine and train District staff. After making cuts in the plastic, a corner is fed into the machine where rollers then pull the plastic into a chamber while compressing it. Each compressed 4'x4' bale weighs approximately 1,000 lbs. The bales are then picked up by a recycler who pays top dollar to get the plastic.






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"By recycling plastic we are reducing the need to manufacture new plastic therefore reducing our reliance on fossil fuel," said **George Proios**, Chairman of the District Board.

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