

Long Island's last duck farm celebrates investment in its future with completion of waste handling improvements

By Denise Civiletti - Aug 4, 2017, 9:21 am



County Executive Steve Bellone extends a hand to Crescent Duck Farm's Doug Corwin yesterday during a press conference at the Aquebogue farm, Long Island's last remaining duck farm. County Legislator Al Krupski, center, Deputy County Executive Peter Scully, right. L.I. Farm Bureau director Rob Carpenter, left, and members of the Corwin family look on. Photo: Peter Blasl

Long Island's last remaining duck farm celebrated a major investment in its future yesterday.

The Corwin family, which has operated Crescent Duck Farm in Aquebogue since 1908, recently completed an \$800,000 concrete and steel waste storage facility that will prevent pollution from duck manure stored on-site from impacting Meetinghouse Creek.

In the past decade, the Corwins built a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment facility to handle waste from the 150,000 ducks being raised on the 145-acre farm at any given time. That facility, which can handle 100,000 gallons per day, cost nearly \$4 million.

Doug Corwin, 58, said when he graduated from Cornell University in 1980 there were “30 or so” duck farms left on Long Island – where once as many as 100 existed. The Long Island Pekin duck became a much sought-after delicacy for chefs around the world.

“Now we’re it,” Corwin said yesterday.

Suffolk’s first county executive, H. Lee Dennison, who served from 1960 to 1972, said he wanted “a duckless county,” Corwin recalled.

“We used to be public enemy number one in this town,” Corwin said.

Historically, duck farms once discharged high-nitrogen waste by-products into the estuaries, which impaired the estuaries’ health. Modern environmental regulations prohibit those historical practices, requiring expensive wastewater treatment and storage of waste by-products on-site.

“Dealing with duck waste is the biggest challenge,” Corwin said. “So much of our time and effort is spent learning how to deal with duck waste.”



Crescent Duck Farm in Aquebogue in May 2016. File photo: Joseph Oliver

The treated effluent from the wastewater treatment facility at Crescent Duck Farm is discharged to artificial wetlands located on-site. Sludge and other solids, which are composted on site, had been stored uncovered on the ground, allowing nutrients can percolate to the groundwater table and flow into the nearby creek.

The new waste storage facility, a 65-foot-by-400-foot covered building with 6 1/2 to 7-foot tall concrete side walls and an impervious concrete floor, prevents that pollution – estimated to be as much as 21,900

pounds of nitrogen from reaching ground and surface waters annually. Suffolk County contributed a \$250,000 grant toward to cost of the storage facility's construction.

"It's a huge commitment we had to have," Corwin said of all the upgrades the family made to stay in operation. "To see the agencies of government helping us instead of trying to push us out of business is so gratifying."

The nutrient-rich compost is provided to local farmers free of charge, Corwin said.

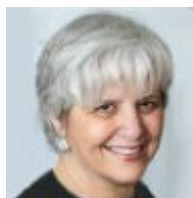
"Agriculture is not just putting a seed in the ground and watching it grow," said Long Island Farm Bureau administrative director Rob Carpenter, who also serves as chairman of the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District. "Agriculture is very technical."

"No industry has faced greater challenges than the duck-growing industry," Suffolk's water quality "czar" Peter Scully added.

County Executive Steve Bellone said the Corwins "truly are leaders here in the agricultural community and the environmental community, too." Their longevity is "an amazing thing for Suffolk County and something to celebrate and honor," he said. "It's inspirational."

"We have to make sure as a government we're doing everything we can to support them in every way we can," Bellone said.

Peter Blasl contributed reporting.



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Denise is a veteran local reporter and editor, an attorney and former Riverhead Town councilwoman. Her work has been recognized with numerous awards, including a "writer of the year" award from the N.Y. Press Association in 2015.

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