



COVER CROPPING THE ROCK AND THE BAY

Friends of Northern Lake Champlain has just received two state grants totaling \$95,000 that will help to improve water quality in the Northern Lake through the introduction/demonstration of new agricultural field practices in the Rock River watershed and St. Albans Bay watershed.

Rock River is a small river flowing through Franklin, Highgate and two towns in Quebec; it is the most phosphorus-polluted waterway of any river in the Champlain basin. Phosphorus contributes to accelerated plant and algae growth and can lead to the explosive growth of blue-green algae blooms, which foul the water, and can even be poisonous. St. Albans Bay also is plagued with high levels of phosphorus in the four major streams that empty into the Bay. Both areas are intensively farmed with a high percentage of corn crops.

Corn land has been shown to be a major contributor to sediment and phosphorus pollution because the land is un-vegetated for 8 months of the year, and is thus vulnerable to erosion caused by rain and by snowmelt. In the Rock River watershed, much of this corn is grown on sloping land, which further contributes to erosion of soil and nutrients into the waterways.

For reducing sediment/phosphorus pollution from corn fields, covercrop is the practice that we believe delivers the best results for the dollar expended. When winter rye is planted immediately after corn harvest (late September/early October), the green growth protects the soil from erosion until spring corn planting (early May). In addition, there are benefits for soil nutrition, primarily the addition of nitrogen, which is a cost benefit to the farmer.

In the past two years we have done covercrop work in the Rock River watershed with grants from Agency of Natural Resources, and have successfully worked with 57% of the farmers in the watershed. Through these grants we pay ¾ of the cost of planting covercrop, with the farmer paying the remainder.

This fall, with grants from the Agency of Natural Resources and the AgAgency, we plan to support the planting of almost 1,700 acres of covercrop in corn land in Rock River and St. Albans Bay watersheds. In addition, in the spring we will work on reducing the impact of "Critical Source Areas" by supporting the seeding of hay crop in the gullies and heavy water-flow areas of corn fields. Critical Source Areas typically cover 20% of the land in a watershed but produce 80% of the pollution. So we are going to tackle those areas, and get the biggest bang for the buck.

Farmers in Rock River and St. Albans Bay watersheds interested in participating in this program should please call Brian Jerosé, the contractor for Friends of Northern Lake Champlain. His phone number is

933-8336. This is a first come-first served program, so call soon.

Paul Madden
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Friends of Northern Lake Champlain
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