

OCCA e.d. appointed to Northeast SARE post

Erik Miller, executive director of the Otsego County Conservation Association and Fourth Ward Alderman for the City of Oneonta, has been chosen to join the administrative council of the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), a USDA program that provides grants to innovative researchers, farmers, educators and others working on projects that enhance the economic, environmental and social well-being of farming in the Northeast. The overall mission of SARE is to diversify agriculture in the Northeast and make it profitable while providing healthful products to customers.

“I sought this appointment because of my long-standing and ongoing interest in agriculture, combined with my belief in regional planning and sustainability,” Miller said.

“We are pleased to have Erik Miller joining our administrative council, which sets policies and guidelines for our grant programs. His experience with conservation issues in Central New York will add to the council's diverse expertise, which includes University, governmental, non-profit, and producer representatives,” said Vern Grubinger, coordinator for Northeast SARE.

Miller’s qualifications to sit on the SARE administrative council include working as a planner in the Otsego County Planning Department, where he became familiar with the county’s Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan and worked toward its implementation. He also organized the county's agricultural district program so as to increase its efficiency, which resulted in a 15 percent increase in participation in the program’s first year. Miller was also instrumental in reviving Otsego County’s Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.

After three years of involvement with rural planning at the county level, he accepted a position with New York state as a land-use training specialist, working with more than 1600 municipalities throughout the state on planning issues, including conservation subdivision, open space protection, agricultural district participation, and alternative energy options. He joined OCCA in 2005 and became its executive director in 2006.

“I am very interested in supporting sustainable agriculture through my personal endeavors, from collaborating to initiate the Village of Milford's first Farmers’ Market to establishing urban forestry programs,” Miller said.

More information on Northeast SARE and its programs is available at www.nesare.org.

SIDEBAR (?)

What is sustainable agriculture?

As defined by Congress, sustainable agriculture is an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs

- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole

Sustainable agriculture adheres to the tenet that if food production is not profitable, it is not sustainable. Sustainable agriculture is ecologically sound and recognizes that we must preserve the resource base that sustains us all. A premise of sustainability is that the quality of life of farmers, farm families, and their communities is important. This concept is a holistic approach to farming, and is an integral part of pest management, cultural practices, soil health, and long-term farm viability.