

Part 7c - A Cyclic History: Pollute, Distort, Pacify, Repeat . . . Committees and Cover-ups

By Doug Baird

Politicians, bureaucrats, and agricultural interests hold hands in committees, while putting on an endless dog and pony show of ineffectual voluntary fixes and do-nothing oversight.

10 years of articles in the Auburn Citizen show that efforts to abate agricultural pollution are at a standstill — the only difference is the date of the article.

The following quotes and excerpts taken from the Auburn Citizen are grouped by article and presented in chronological order:

From *The Citizen* May 27, 2007: *Is county's top industry the largest threat to lakes?* By Shane Liebler

“Overall, farmers are very good stewards of the land” Sharon Anderson, lake steward for the Cayuga Lake Watershed network, said. “When I talk to farmers, they're concerned about the water.”

New York leads the nation in terms of regulations on large farms, Mark James, executive director of the Farm Bureau's Finger Lakes office said.

“The plans and practices are working,” Jon Patterson of Patterson Farms in Aurelius said. “I'm sure of it,” he said.

“They've all been forgotten, they haven't been monitored, they all drain into our lakes, which are becoming impaired,” watershed resident Connie Mather said.

From *The Citizen* Jun 19, 2014: *DEC fines Scipio farm for manure runoff events* By Carrie Chantler

The DEC served Gary Allen and Duane Allen, the owners of Allen Farms, of Scipio, with a consent order they signed June 3 agreeing to pay a \$10,000 fine for the runoff events that contributed to the contamination of lake tributaries and of a private drinking water well.

According to the order, a Feb. 20 application of manure to a field along Rice Road caused the contamination of a neighboring private drinking well.

Additionally, a Feb. 21 manure application caused contaminated runoff to discharge into Tributary 44a of the lake.

On March 11 and 28, manure Allen Farms applied to a field along Black Street caused contaminated runoff into Tributary 9a-1 of Yawger Creek.

On April 9, manure spread on a Gilling Road field caused contaminated runoff to discharge into Tributary 16 of Crane Brook.

On March 19, the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council sent a letter to the DEC with an accompanying photo that showed a 75-by-25 foot plume of manure along the shore line near Fire Lane 26 in the Town of Scipio.

“Ten thousand dollars, we feel, is totally out of place,” said Michael Didio, chair of the OLWMC. “It should have been more like \$100,000.”

Didio's disfavor comes from his thinking that the fine becomes “the price of doing business” for the farm.

From *The Citizen* Oct 29, 2014: *Public discusses manure runoff into Owasco Lake* By Carrie Chantler

“We drink the same water as everyone else does. Our children swim in the lakes, same as everyone else does. We, as a family farm, have as much invested in making sure that our natural resources are protected as everyone else does, maybe more so,” said Jason Burroughs.

“We believe that more emphasis is needed to be placed on the inspection and enforcement of the current CAFO plan before we look to add new regulations,” Jon Patterson of Patterson Farms said.

Residents with homes around the lake discussed how grandchildren and pets were kept from enjoying the lake this summer due to the algal blooms.

“If we don't correct the situation now we will have future problems in a much higher level. Anyone who is a lake owner, you will not have waterfront property you will have lake view property because you can't use the lake,” Steve Fland said.

From *The Citizen* Dec 8, 2014: *County water quality officials continue discussion about winter manure spreading* By Carrie Chantler

In response to a request from a Cayuga County Water Quality Management Association member to look at the science behind the issue, the EPA viewed existing research on winter manure spreading and water quality and reported that in New York, the practice should be considered as “a last resort.”

The discussion turned then to best management practices and the distinction between the word “avoid” and “prohibit.”

“To say prohibit is a whole different ballgame than avoid, I think it's prudent to avoid,” the county’s buildings and grounds superintendent Gary Duckett said. “I'm completely comfortable with saying avoid, but I don't recommend prohibit.”

And Stefan Lutter, from Cornell Cooperative Extension, questioned the cumulative repercussions of what would happen if area farmers were prohibited from winter spreading and had to wait to spring to deal with stored manure.

What we do know from this review (winter spreading) is not doing any good from an agronomics point of view. Avoid it if you can, but it's OK if you can't,” Bob Brower of the Owasco Watershed Lake Association questioned. “I don't understand.”

From *The Citizen* Jun 26, 2015: *Cayuga County agricultural working group receives positive input during forum on manure* By Carrie Chantler

The 10-member advisory committee, comprised of city leaders, farmers and environmentalists, developed the report's 15 recommendations, flagging five of them as high priority.

“Agriculture in Cayuga County is as important as the lake is, so we need to find a way to live and work together.” Auburn City Councilor Debbie McCormick, a member of the advisory committee.

From *The Citizen* Feb 3, 2017: *DEC issues new permits for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations* By Gwendolyn Craig

“The permits are an important measure to safeguard public health and the environment. I thank everyone involved for their thoughtful input throughout this process,” said DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos, in a news release.

“New York Farm Bureau was a major collaborator in a workgroup with our agricultural and environmental partners from the very beginning of the new CAFO permit process,” said David Fisher, president of the New York Farm Bureau, in a news release.

Bob Brower, president of the Owasco Watershed Lake Association, said there was “great disappointment” over the new conditions.

From *The Citizen* Feb 22, 2017: *DEC works with two Cayuga County farms on manure runoff* By Gwendolyn Craig

The state Department of Environmental Conservation was busy in Cayuga County this weekend, working with two farms that had manure runoff issues in two watersheds.

The DEC recommended the public to stay away from Salmon Creek and the Cayuga Lake shore near the creek's inlet. The DEC also said the Tompkins County Health Department advises anyone on a beach well or using lake water in the area to avoid consumption.

RE: Sunnyside Farms manure spill

“It's not a violation necessarily because it's a good practice,” Doug Kierst executive director of the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District told members of the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council Tuesday. “It was on higher ground. It wasn't seemingly saturated.”

RE: Broadway Pork farm chicken manure runoff

“There's no need for fines or tickets,” Kierst said. “It's a good way to handle it, through education and outreach.”

Jim Beckwith, former president of the Owasco Watershed Lake Association, seemed incredulous that part of an emergency plan would be to spread [manure] on snow.

From *The Citizen* Mar 3, 2017: *Manure management guidelines adopted by Cayuga County water agency* By Gwendolyn Craig

Besides the Water Quality Management Agency's nutrient working group, a group of 10 farmers, four who actively participated in the process, helped draft the document

All of the 19 practices outlined are voluntary measures - “guidelines intended to encourage progress through expanded voluntary use of proven, cost effective methods, technologies, and techniques rather than force changes through legislation or rule-making.”

“It's a lot easier and softer to know that they're just guidelines, and they're not rules and regulations at this time,” Doug Kierst, executive director of the Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District said.

Members voted on the guidelines, passing them with Rick Nelson, representing the Owasco Watershed Lake Association, voting against. Nelson said that OWLA believes the guidelines “are inadequate and ineffective for phosphorous reduction.”

From *The Citizen* Jun 20, 2017: *Owasco Lake watershed rules and regulations get their first public critique in decades* By Gwendolyn Craig

Steve Lynch, director of the Cayuga County Department of Planning and Economic Development said that now is the opportunity to examine what's there and what's not, use the best science available and input from various stakeholder groups, and create a document locally that works for the watershed, which touches Cayuga, Onondaga and Tompkins counties.

From the *Cayuga County Government* website:

“WELCOME!

The Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations Update Project is an important water quality initiative being undertaken by the Owasco Lake Watershed Management Council. The project goal is to update and revise the 1984 Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations, through a thoughtful and engaged public participation process resulting in effective and equitable watershed regulations that will help to improve, protect and preserve water quality within Owasco Lake and it's 205-square mile watershed for the benefit of current and future generations.”

From *Stracuse.com* Sept 25, 2017: *'Astronomically high' levels of new algae toxin found in Owasco Lake* By Glenn Coin

Syracuse, N.Y. -- Scientists have discovered a new algae toxin in Owasco Lake, and at levels high enough to kill dogs who swim in it, said the head of a state testing lab. The sample taken from Owasco Lake had “astronomically high” levels of the new toxin.

Cayuga County health Commissioner Kathleen Cuddy declined to answer questions about the new toxin earlier today, saying she needed to get more information.

New pony, same show.

Next: *Part 8 – Disclosure, Ethics and Image: Honesty in Government & Agriculture*