



County's plastics baler will help farmers

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CANTON — St. Lawrence County officials await the arrival of an agricultural plastics baler to help farmers recycle silage bags, bale wrappers, mulch films and other plastics.

The baler is the second to be housed in the north country. Jefferson County officials got word in December that they also would receive one.

Both balers, part of a Cornell University agricultural plastics recycling initiative and paid for by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, will be shared with neighboring counties. DEC officials have agreed to purchase six in the state.

"We decided the region was large enough and active enough for a second one," said Lois C. Levitan, Recycling Agricultural Plastics program leader at Cornell.

She said past ag plastics recycling events have been held with a baler borrowed from Clinton County.

Having one in the county will help step up recycling efforts because collection can be easily scheduled, said Dawn C. Howard, St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District manager. She said central collection points could be developed for farmers to dispose of small amounts of plastic, and the baler could be brought to larger-scale farms for on-site collection.

"Our machinery has been manufactured, and it's in Florida waiting for the Department of Environmental Conservation to release the money," Mrs. Howard said. "It's quite a feather in our cap to have two of them in the north country. We have a lot of active dairy programs up here who have participated so far."

Stephen W. Litwhiler, DEC spokesman, said the funds could be released as soon as contracts with the Soil and Water Conservation District and Cornell are finalized.

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Mrs. Howard said officials want to unveil the baler next month at the Gouverneur & St. Lawrence County Fair. She said the Gouverneur FFA club is building a picnic table made from plastic lumber fabricated from recycled ag plastics.

The lumber is just one product that could be made from the material, Ms. Levitan said. The lumber is manufactured by Think Plastics, New Hamburg, Ontario, but she said the company is at capacity and cannot accept more plastics. She said she's still working to find a market for the material.

"We're working with products that are harder to recycle, like thin mulch film that has a lot of surface area. Just putting it on the ground for a couple of days makes it too dirty for any manufacturers to want to pick it up," Ms. Levitan said. "It's a matter of cultivating a different group of markets than those of curbside recyclers."

She said also uncertain is how quickly the idea will catch on with farmers, who will have to clean the plastics before they can be baled. The alternative to recycling is to bury plastics, burn them or send them to a landfill, she said.

"We want to make it easy and inexpensive for farmers so that they wouldn't have to put out any money or spend a lot of their time resources," Ms. Levitan said. "It will be easier once we have some established guidelines so that farmers know what to do and can get their next-door neighbors into it."

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