

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Stewardship Matters at Alstede Farms



Kurt Alstede is the owner of Alstede Farms in Chester, NJ, and has been farming for almost 30 years. Alstede grows tree fruit, small fruit, vegetables, and greenhouse ornamentals, and has incorporated agritourism and direct-marketing into his operation. Most recently he transitioned nine of the 500 acres of the farm to certified organic crop production.

As his land and business have transformed over the years, Kurt has continually protected the natural resources on his farmland with technical assistance from the USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Along with NRCS technical assistance, Kurt has been able to implement some of the conservation practices on his farm with NRCS funding and program support.

Apprenticed in farming in the early 1980s, Kurt saw first-hand the benefits of soil and water conservation practices. This awareness was further reinforced while he attended school at Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture in Doylestown, PA.

Through his apprenticeship and farming experiences prior to owning his own farm business, Kurt became acquainted with the resources available from NRCS and other programs that assist with soil and water conservation.

Since he first started utilizing the services of NRCS, Kurt has participated in meaningful conservation activities. For example, he has established contour buffer strips to reduce soil erosion and installed irrigation mains for drip irrigation to reduce water use.

These practices and numerous others help Kurt maintain productive and environmentally healthy farmland. Healthy land is



Kurt Alstede and NRCS District Conservationist Dan Mull confer in the farm office.



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- Kurt Alstede, December 2010

vital for our existence and, he points out, "there is value in investing in soil and water conservation that benefits everybody."

Kurt's philosophy on natural resource conservation is fundamental and based on his strongly-held Christian beliefs. According to Kurt, "We were not given these natural resources without the responsibility to steward them." And while his passion for stewardship of natural resources is genuine, Alstede readily admits that economically it would be difficult to do everything they have done at the farm in resource conservation without the "infusion of the public partnership with private enterprise."

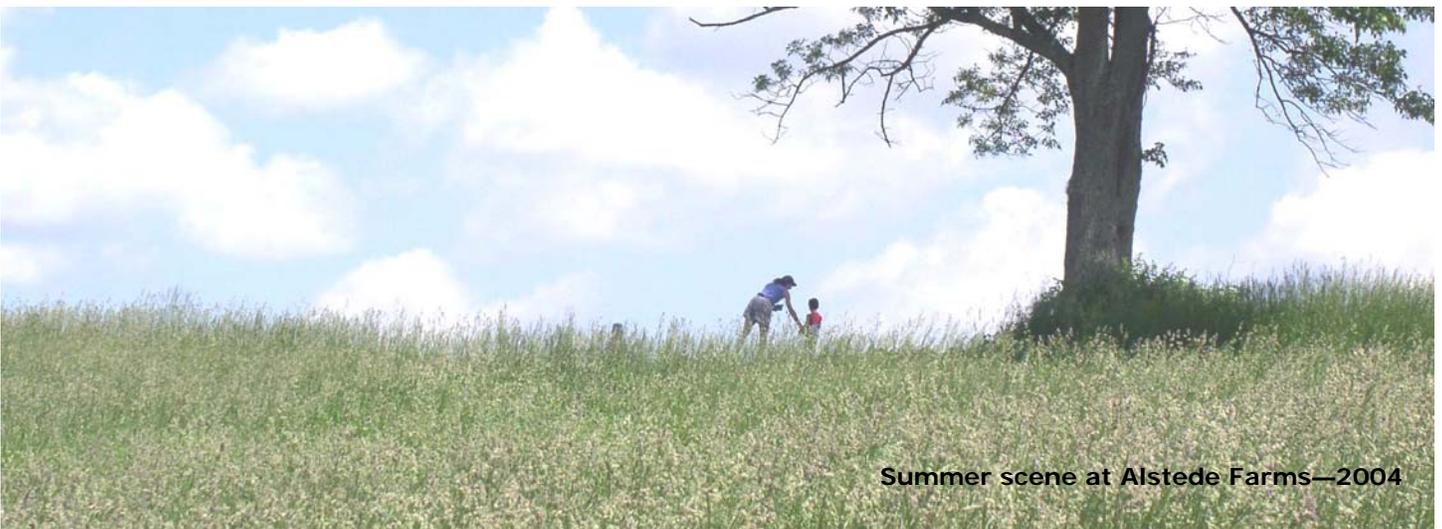
"We couldn't have done the things we've done here on the farm without the cooperation of NRCS

and the public funding in combination with our own private investment," he says.

Kurt asserts that there are "practical and real benefits to the business" that can be achieved by implementing soil and water conservation practices. He has seen improved crop yields and soil organic matter, natural disease suppression, reduced soil erosion, and improved water management on the farm. Practicing environmentally responsive farming and offering healthy locally-grown food has also strengthened the Farm's relationship with the neighboring community.

Through his dealing with NRCS over the years, Kurt has found that "NRCS staff is always available and accessible." This is important to him because, as he says, "There is always something new that happens." For instance, a problem inherited from a previous land use or practice is uncovered, or crop mixtures are adjusted or changed, or conservation concerns arise after incorporating new ideas and technologies into the business practices.

If you intend to continue in the farm business, Kurt says, you need to maintain a "willingness to adapt and change." And he is appreciative of the assistance he has received from NRCS over the years as these adaptations and changes have occurred.



Summer scene at Alstede Farms—2004