

# Danby Land Bank Cooperative Newsletter

Dec. 2011



## Biomass, Rural Land Owners, and Sustainable Production

### Overview 2011

This has been a year of new economic initiatives for New York and the Southern Tier many of which feature bioenergy, thus increasing momentum for development of thermal combustion of biomass and new networking possibilities. I am enthusiastic about this and have attended meetings and workshops for the [Heat the NE conference](#), [Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Council for the Southern Tier](#), [Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative](#), [Tioga REAP SET program](#), and [Building Bridges](#) – the last an attempt to combine social equity and sustainability issues. But, whatever may result, it is not in place yet, and the Danby Land Bank Cooperative has had to deal with the immediate difficulty of two major setbacks this year: the failure of Broome Biomass to get their guaranteed USDA loans and so buy our hay, and the death of steering committee member, Tony Nekut.

The response we took to the situation with Broom Biomass was to enter the arena of New York State biomass lobbying and networking. A meeting was held at TC3 on July 20<sup>th</sup> with all grass biomass groups in New York State. We worked out a list of priorities and decided to become an interest group in the New York State Biomass Alliance – called ABIG, short for Agricultural Biomass Interest Group – and to try to influence NY State policy. To further this direction The DLBC became a member of the New York State Biomass Alliance.

With Tony's death we realized that we would have to change our strategies. Tony was beginning a grass entrepreneurial initiative with technical help from the New York State Biomass Alliance and SUNY at Cobleskill. He was in the process of buying land at the intersection of Routes 13 and 34 near West Danby and had a business plan to begin a delivery system of chopped hay and wood chips in containers for burning in multi-fuel biomass boilers.

### Mobile Pelletizer coming to Ithaca

In lieu of that and to do something on a small scale that is a good fit for our organization we are looking at a mobile pelletizer. I received an enthusiastic response by members to a trip I reported to the Hudson Valley Grass Energy (HVGE) mobile pelletizer, at a July DLBC meeting arranged for Broome Biomass owners, Doreen and Rich, to speak to members. So we decided to bring one here. Please put these dates on your calendar: - **April 21, 2012, Rain date April 28<sup>th</sup>.**



Our interest in the pelletizer is two-fold: 1) It will be used as a major educational and publicity tool with other local groups to make people aware of the possibility of heating their homes with 4 acres of goldenrod. 2) Also we will be doing a feasibility study, possibly with the help of a student group, DesignConnect, to determine whether purchasing and operating one is something the Land Bank wants to take on.

### Chicken Tractor Project



On a entirely different note, the DBLB successfully got the Sustainable Tompkins Community Mini-grant to help interested people in Danby build a portable chicken house to raise broilers. The model, modified by Ben Boyton, a carpenter in Caroline, is on the website. Ben led a group workshop on building it and 5 families participated. We bought broilers which fertilized our fields as they grew. Erica Frenay and her husband, also Caroline residents, lent us their expertise and use of their equipment to butcher them. Now they reside in our freezers.

Chicken Tractor turned into a winter Green House



**The 2012 Hay season – New Strategies**

Annual Meeting for all members will be held Saturday, January 21 at the Danby Town Hall at 10am.

- Consider options for buying our own used mowing and baling equipment and working with an operator who would maintain it and use it but give us first priority. This could to be paired with expanding to nearby communities. Finances.
- Look for donation or rental of some good hay fields to be a fall-back for our \$10K minimum annual gross income. Use large square bales with Warren Van Pelt as contractor similarly to 2009
- Consider a Mobile Pelletizer or other small scale production.
- How to resolve the initial brush-hogging problem.
- Discuss an option proposed by Hilary Mayton of Cornell, now working for [Beneterra](#), to be considered for a project they have of developing marginal lands using their equipment under a land lease agreement of around 7 years and planting crops of owner’s choice on a 50/50 net profit sharing basis.

**Follow-up reports on past initiatives.**

- Cleaned-up Barn now has 8 bales of hay in it waiting for Pelletizer demo in Spring
- Ash vs Lime Testing: Sample taken in 2010 and second sample recently in 2011 to test the effects of ash vs lime applications on soil looking at pH, potassium, and calcium. They will be analyzed this winter.
- Danby Highway Department biomass boiler has been purchased and will be installed this winter. The write up of the initial NYSERDA grant made a woodchip fuel boiler purchase necessary but it can be converted to other fuels after several years.
- We failed to get Northeast Sun Grant Initiative, which was to work with Cooperative Extension reproduce land bank model elsewhere. However, interest has been expressed in both Dryden and Caroline on expanding the concept there.
- Tony’s death has lost us access to both the brush-hog and the tub grinder, which were purchased through his money and loans and which are now being sold by his widow.



**Food, Fiber, and Energy Fair at Mann Library on Nov 17.** First step in bringing local, sustainable energy into a collaboration with local, sustainable food groups.

**Comings and Goings**

Our Steering Committee has gained Matt Detrick, a pellet making farmer from Lansing, and lost Tony Nekut, who will be sorely missed for his energy, enthusiasm, bioenergy vision, and friendship.

