

Wednesday, February 4, 2004

The sweet smell of cooperation

By BETTY ADAMS
Staff Writer

[Copyright](#) © 2003 Blethen Maine Newspapers Inc.



Celebrating the new addition to the Beal Farm are (l-r) Richard Beal, Ron Desrosiers, NRCS, contractor Andy Douglas, Mary MacMaster, Four Towns W/A, carpenter Steve Lund, Guy Piper of the KCFSA and Bob Moore, Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed.

LITCHFIELD -- The new manure pit roof on Richard Beal's farm should start paying off this spring in the form of fewer contaminants flowing into a stream that feeds Pleasant Pond.

Beal and those who helped with the \$37,800 project met at the Pond Road farm Tuesday morning to admire the new structure and to talk about the project's anticipated long-term effects.

"We're really excited," said Mary MacMaster, co-president of the Four Towns Watershed Association, which works to improve Pleasant Pond's water quality. "We have all worked on this for a number of years to try to pull it together." Litchfield, Richmond, Gardiner and West Gardiner border the pond, which also hosts a state beach and public boat landing.

Beal, who runs a dairy and beef farm, was approved eight years ago for a federal agriculture grant to reduce phosphate pollution in the pond. But the project was put on hold. A few months ago, after Beal renegotiated the deal so it could run for a 10-year period, work started on the stick-built structure that covers a concrete manure pit.

The cover will keep snow and rain from flooding the pit and then running several hundred yards across the fields and down into Pleasant Pond. Twice a year, in spring and fall, Beal will haul manure from the covered pit to spread on fields where the ground and plants soak up the nutrients. And a year or so from now, the cows may even notice the difference as they munch the hay fertilized by the manure. "These nutrients will be recycled through the plants," said Ron Desrosiers of the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

So far, the roof has yet to be tested. "It hasn't snowed or rained since we built it," Beal said. Beal hauls some four or five yards of manure a day into the pit from the barn next door.

Guy Piper of the Kennebec County Farm Service Agency said the completed project is the result of a team effort: The agency committee joined the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Four Towns group and the Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed.

Andy Douglas was the contractor and Steve Lund did the carpentry. Steven McGee and Jack Downs also contributed. At the meeting Tuesday, Kate Beal offered to bring out milk to christen the new building. The Beals have about 100 Holsteins and milking shorthorns.