



TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON

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East Hampton Town Responds to Concerns About Dust Blowing Off Farm Fields in Amagansett

Works With Landowner, Farmer to Limit Airborne Dust, Test Soils, and Prevent Future Problems

In response to community concerns about recent dust “storms” in Amagansett, when high winds resulted in airborne dust from agricultural land, causing particulates to swirl throughout the hamlet, East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc met last week with Barry Bistran, the owner of the farm field north of the Amagansett municipal parking lot, and Peter Dankowski, who leases and farms the land, along with Mr. Bistran’s son and consultants brought in to help develop both short and long-term strategies to address the situation—Alex Balsam, a farmer who heads the town’s agricultural advisory committee, and Corey Humphrey, the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District district manager.

As mentioned at last week’s meeting of the town board, all involved committed to work to address the concerns over airborne dust, and an action plan was developed that includes:

- Immediate steps to cover the field with straw to hold the soil layer in place.
- Installation of snow fencing on the property to help keep the straw in place.

As of today, the straw is being laid down; fencing has been delivered and is to be installed as soon as practicable.

Mr. Bistran indicated at the meeting that he has no objection to the Town testing the soil in his field in order to provide information to concerned residents. He said he is confident that results would not show elevated levels of arsenic, due to the fact that the field was used for dairy pasturage until the 1960s, which was after local farmers had discontinued use of that chemical. The Town Board unanimously passed a resolution last night to authorize such testing.

Soil testing took place this morning, and results are expected in about a week.

Also in response to community concerns, the Supervisor's office contacted the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Division of Air Resources in regards to concerns about air quality during dust events, and town staff has contacted the state health department. We have been informed by the D.E.C. that the steps being taken by the town are those that the agency itself would follow.

On a longer-range basis, the town board will discuss the possible adoption of policies or regulations that could outline the community's expectation that farmers plant a winter cover crop, and the town's response to airborne dust problems.

As has been discussed, farmers generally plant a winter cover crop after their fall harvest. Mr. Dankowski did so in this case, after harvesting potatoes, but due to heavy rains and cold in the fall the crop failed to take. Because the harvest of potatoes leaves tilled ground with little to hold the soil in place, and because our changing climate means that the establishment of a winter cover crop is too unpredictable, both Mr. Bistran and Mr. Dankowski have stated that in the future potatoes will no longer be planted in the fields adjacent to downtown Amagansett.

Supervisor Van Scoyoc will continue to monitor the progress and efficacy of the actions outlined above, and respond accordingly.