



Excessive rainfall has made this Wayne County road's condition match its name, Mud Lane. Gov. Mario Cuomo has sought federal disaster aid for a number of upstate counties.

Flooded counties seek help from government

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

MARION — July was one of the wettest months ever in western New York, and the rain wrought devastation for farmers throughout the Finger Lakes region.

Laverne Blied knows that devastation first hand.

The Marion farmer lost 200 acres of potatoes due to flooding as a result of a July 17 downpour that brought more than six inches of rain to this Wayne County community.

"We had two to three feet of water over most of our fields," said Blied, a parishioner at St. Gregory's Church, 3806 Union St.

In addition to potatoes, Blied lost most of the 80 acres of sweet corn he planted, and at least 15 of the 60 acres of cabbage he is raising. He also expected to lose some of his alfalfa.

The losses will hurt, Blied noted, because he had to take out a \$300,000 loan to pay for this year's planting. Some of that loan will be paid off when he harvests his surviving crops. After that, he said, he will have to find a second job to help pay off the rest.

Blied is not alone, either. The St. Gregory's parishioner reported that one of his neighbors lost 600 acres of potatoes due to the flooding. Other neighbors with potato, alfalfa, cabbage, cherry and onion crops lost part or all of this year's harvest, or were selling their crops at lesser prices because of reduced quality.

Many of those farmers have loans to pay off as well.

"Most people got some money in their pockets yet," Blied said. "When it's going to hurt is six months from now."

That's why farmers such as Blied and his neighbors in Wayne County — where the most extensive damage occurred — and in six other counties in the Rochester diocese are hoping for state and federal aid to help them weather these rough times.

In light of extensive crop damage and flooding of homes, business and roads, Marion Town Supervisor Monica Deyo declared a state of emergency

in the town July 18.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Deyo, also a St. Gregory's parishioner, noted that her office had received reports of \$110,000 in home and business damages in the Marion-area alone. And damage reports are still coming in, she said.

"More than 40 percent of the county had losses," Deyo said. "For the farmers, that's a permanent loss."

In response to the extent of the problem, the American Red Cross set up a service center in Newark July 23-25, dispensing vouchers for food and cleaning supplies. Officials also assisted in replacing washing machines and water heaters, Deyo said.

Meanwhile, the Wayne County Board of Supervisors July 21 asked New York Gov. Mario Cuomo to request that the federal government declare Wayne County a disaster area.

As of July 31, Gov. Cuomo had sought federal-disaster aid for a number of upstate counties, including Wayne, Cayuga, Seneca, Ontario, Yates, Monroe and Livingston counties.

If such assistance is approved, residents in those counties will be able to take advantage of low-interest loans and other disaster assistance.

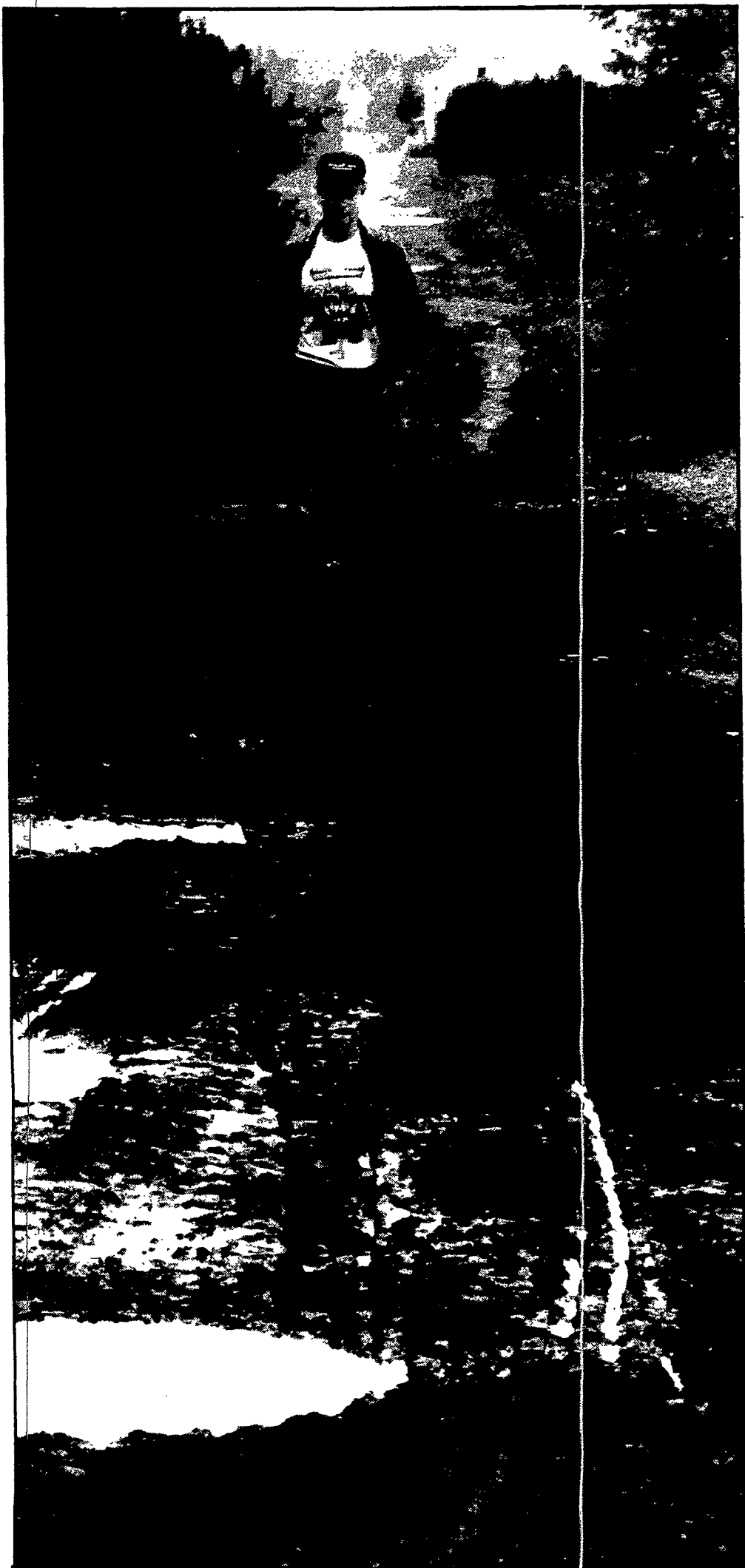
Richard Cobb, operations officer of Wayne County's Emergency Management Office, told the *Catholic Courier* that county officials are still trying to put a price tag on the devastation.

"The damages to homes and business total \$200,000 that we are sure of at this point," Cobb said. He added that some home and business owners had contacted their insurance companies — not the county — so the damage may be even more extensive.

As for area farmers, they won't know the full extent of their losses until after the harvest, noted David Sergeant, a Sodus fruit grower. Sodus received five inches of rain during a two-hour period July 17.

Cherry growers, for example, are now harvesting their crop, observed Sergeant, the cousin of Deacon Edward R. Sergeant, chaplain at the Newark Developmental Center.

The crop is graded and either ac-



Aris Economopoulos/Photo Intern

After another day of hard work July 24, Tim Eastley walks through the flooded fields of his cousin's Sodus farm. Torrential rains have devastated farmland throughout the Finger Lakes.

cepted or rejected at the canning plants, Sergeant explained. He estimated that as much as 100 tons a day are being turned down this year. In previous years, "It was pretty rare that anything got turned down," he said.

Thus far, Sergeant said, all of his cherries had been accepted, but at a lower-grade level than in previous years. That will mean lower profits, he said.

Some cherry farmers have not been as fortunate, Sergeant added.

"There have been a few who haven't gotten their cherries through yet, and they've just given up," Sergeant said. "There are some growers who are having quite an economic loss."

Such heavy rains cause a variety of problems for cherries, according to Sergeant. In addition to leaving the

skins tender, the rain fills the cherries so full of moisture that they can burst during the harvest. The water also makes it easier for the sun to burn the skins and can prompt brown rot — a fungus infection in the cherries.

Sergeant noted that some of the other fruit crops such as apples and pears have not been as affected by the heavy rains, and he hoped to successfully harvest those crops.

Blied, too, explained that he hoped to be able to salvage some of his crops — particularly the cabbage and field corn.

Despite the losses he sustained and the large loan he must repay, Blied remains optimistic.

"We'll make it through OK," he said.