



Spring/Summer 2016

SUMMER WORKSHOP SERIES: STREAM BUFFERS

Join the Chester County Conservation District on June 29th, July 19th, or July 28th from **9:00 AM to 12:00 PM** for a workshop focused on CREP stream buffer installation and management. All Chester county farmers and landowners interested in improving their stream property are welcome. **Lunch** will be available at the conclusion of the meetings. Presentations will be made by the CCCD, Stroud Water Research Center, and NRCS. Learn about the science of stream buffers, installation program requirements, maintenance solutions, and local farmer success stories. *Find out how to benefit from a buffer on your property!*

- ▶ June 29th: at the Stroud Water Research Center. A tour of an onsite stream buffer will be included. This workshop will emphasize buffer maintenance & CREP project renewal.
- ▶ July 19th: at the Honey Brook Township Building. This workshop will emphasize new buffer installation.
- ▶ July 28th: at the Lower Oxford Township Building. This workshop will emphasize new buffer installation.

To register please contact: Paige LaDuca, Agricultural Resource Conservationist
610-925-4920 x118 or email pladuca@chesco.org.



Equine Update...

WASH STALL WATER



Maybe you never thought of it or maybe you have no idea where your wash stall water goes - down a drain and off into the hidden underground? Maybe you just drag the hose outside and use the great outdoors as your horse's shower, just like washing your car. Depending on how close your barn is to ground water and streams and frequency of use, though, farm owners should be aware of how this wash water is handled after it goes down the drain. Large equine operations can potentially create large amounts of soapy, dirty water every day.

Grass has tremendous filtering capabilities as water infiltrates into the soil and through the root zone before it gets to ground water. The larger the operation and greater the amount of water, the more this water should be distributed over a larger grassed area. Faulty below ground tanks and stone beds can sometimes act as direct conduits to streams and ground water.

This topic is not addressed often in most of the farming operations we deal with on a regular basis, but it is becoming a topic of conversation as more and more large horse farms are getting involved in updating conservation plans, manure management plans, and applying for financial assistance for conservation practices. We are working to raise awareness of this issue and to help farm owners to start considering ways to improve how to handle wash stall water runoff for new and old barns, indoors and out.



ROB ROY FARM

EXCAVATING: Loader Service, Martin's Limestone Service
CONSERVATION: Waterways, Terraces, Building Site Work,
Building and Repairing of Ponds

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Chester County Farmland Preservation



Chester County's Farmland Preservation Program is well-known and respected at the County, State, and National level. Pennsylvania leads the nation in the number of farms and acres permanently preserved. Chester County has preserved 430 farms of 36,138 acres through the Chester County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (ALPB) and surpassed the 50,000 acre threshold when it's funding for natural areas and parks are included.

In addition to wanting to preserve farming and farmland for future generations, farmland owners are motivated to participate in the program for a number of different reasons. Selling the development rights but keeping the farm can provide critical funds to purchase new equipment, expand their operation, implement best management practices, transition to new or different products, and invest in more farmland. It can also provide flexibility for estate planning and make it easier to allocate assets to future generations. While the number of farms and prices paid changes from year to year; last year Chester

County's Department of Open Space Preservation preserved 20 farms and close to 1,500 acres with an average payment of more than \$5,000 per acre.

Many landowners are currently enrolled in an Agricultural Security Area (ASA), and/or Act 515 or 319 (Clean and Green). While these programs provide many benefits to the farmland, they do not provide permanent protection. It is a common misconception that once enrolled in either the ASA or 319/515 then your property is preserved. The Chester County ALPB partners with landowners, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to permanently preserve farmland in Chester County.

The County's Department of Open Space Preservation (DOSP) is now accepting applications to sell agricultural conservation easements with an August 1, 2016 deadline. Additional information and applications are available online at www.chesco.org/openspace and clicking on "Farmland Preservation". To receive a blank application in the mail or receive personal assistance, contact Geoff Shellington, DOSP's Agricultural Programs Coordinator, at (610) 344-6504 or gshellington@chesco.org.

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Are you reaping all of the benefits of your soil's health?

Having good soil health improves the drought tolerance of the soil, improves the permeability of the soil, increases plant health, and ultimately increases the land's yield.

What does healthy soil look like? Healthy soil has a wealth of organic material. It has good structure - a network of different sized pores for air and water to travel through providing for better infiltration. It supports the survival of worms and other organisms. Tilling destroys the structure of the soil. This exposes subsurface organisms to lethal amounts of heat and negatively affects infiltration. Organic material is often carried away by water or wind after tilling.

What can you do to improve the health of your soil?

Many farmers prefer the appearance of a "clean" field in the spring and abide by a tradition of turning the earth. Using **no-till** practices reduces erosion, increases soil structure, and benefits health of organisms in the soil. Allowing the complex ecosystem beneath the surface to thrive undisturbed, along with growing plants that provide nutrients to the subsurface organisms as often as is practical creates a much healthier soil.

The use of **cover crops** increases organic material, puts down roots which improves structure, protects the soil from erosion during winter months, and provides shelter for organisms above and below the surface. Wesley Neal, Soil Conservationist Coatesville Field Office agrees, "An important step in improving soil health is keeping the soil covered."

Managing nutrients will keep your soil fertility at an appropriate level. Excessive nutrients or deficiencies in nutrients can adversely impact the health of your plants and your crop yield. Using cover crops and diversifying cover species can help to make these nutrients available, rather than having to purchase plant nutrients.



Leaving **crop residue** on fields reduces soil erosion and increases the soil's organic material. It also keeps the soil cooler which helps survival of subsurface organisms.

Diversifying cover crops makes better use of resources. Plants from the same species compete more with themselves than plants of another species. This is because they require different nutrients from the soil, different spectra of sunlight, and different amounts of water. This also improves the diversity of nutrients made available to beneficial organisms.

Judicious use of pesticides makes nutrients from decaying plant matter available to organisms and reduces risk of harm to the environment and to the farmer. Always follow label instructions.

Maximizing living root structures will assure that your soil's microbes are getting the nutrition they need. The activity of living root systems directly correlates with aggregate stability. Aggregate stability refers to soil's resistance to disruption by water and other outside forces. It provides the soil structure. A low aggregate stability can cause crusts to form that close pores and other pathways for water and air to enter into a soil. This crust restricts the emergence of seedlings from the soil. Living root structures also make nutrients more available for absorption by future crops.

The practices named above just scratch the surface of the many soil quality improvement practices that exist. Here at NRCS, we provide cost share for many of these conservation practices using funds allocated by the Farm Bill and through partnerships. This is done through programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. If you have natural resource concerns you would like to address through conservation practices and you would like to find out more about our programs, call us today! USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Attention Oxford, PA Residents

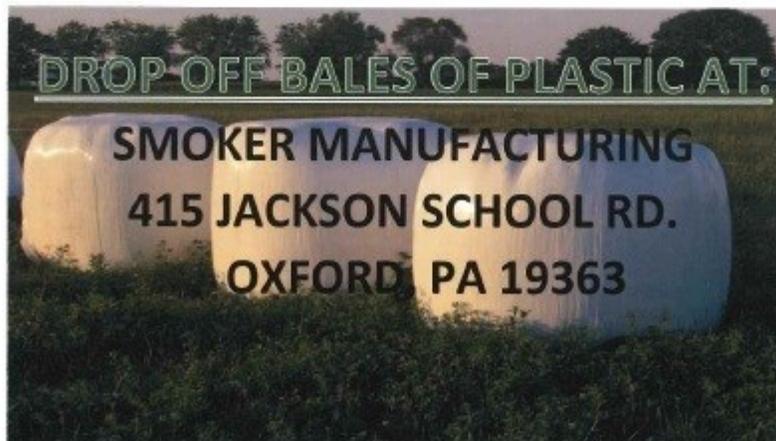


RECYCLE



THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY BE RECYCLED:

- WHITE ON WHITE BALE WRAP
 - CLEAR PLASTIC FROM GREENHOUSE
 - WHITE ON BLACK SILAGE WRAP
 - PLASTIC BALER TWINE
 - DRY IRRIGATION TUBING
 - CLEAN PLASTIC POTS AND TRAYS
1. ALL PLASTIC MUST BE CLEAN
 2. BALED USING A TOBACCO BALER
 3. NO PLASTIC MULCH FIELD COVER



WARNING: IT IS ILLEGAL TO BURN PLASTIC

Please Note: This Recycling is Limited to Oxford Area Residents Only.

FOCUS ON YOUR FARM

We all want clean, healthy water for our own families and loved ones to drink. No matter whether we are farmers or non-farmers, our water quality needs are the same for ourselves and our families.

All of the attention to the Chesapeake Bay cleanup and the PA DEP reboot plan for the Pennsylvania portion of the Chesapeake Bay has a lot of people very concerned about what is going to happen in the near future. It's a huge, complicated task to clean up this 41,000,000 acre multi-state watershed.

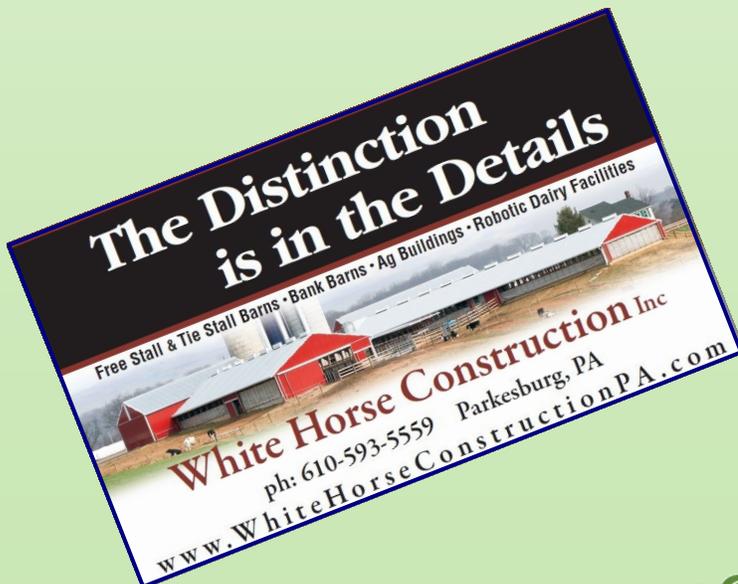
Who is responsible for the pollution that has occurred and is occurring is the subject of many meetings and discussions. Certainly our ancestors caused pollution when anything that wasn't of value to them went into streams. Trash, industrial byproducts, and anything else you can think of was deposited in or next to streams and wetlands. Today, most of us think about where to dispose of unwanted materials in an environmentally friendly manner. The farming community in Chester County is blessed by having some of the best non-irrigated land in the country. Given this great gift makes it our responsibility to see to it that the land stays productive for generations to come.

How do we handle the onslaught of farmers being blamed for part of the pollution to the Bay? Common sense may help to answer this question. You can only control what's happening on your farm and in the stream that receives the water from your property. Make no mistake - even if you do not have a stream on your personal property, the surface water from your farm goes to a stream close by. Individual farmers don't need to clean the whole Bay - rather, the focus should be on cleaning your own neighborhood stream that your farm contributes to. That's all you can do, and if we all do that, the Chesapeake Bay problem will go away. You are responsible for what happens on your own property. You can control erosion, manure applications and spray applications on your farm.

Contour farming makes a huge difference in the amount of soil runoff on a farm and it costs virtually nothing to farm on the contour! It actually increases your profits because the precious top soil on your farm remains on your farm growing high yield crops rather than going into streams. Contour farming has been used for over 60 years to preserve soil, yet farmers continue to remove contours only to shortly find out why the contours were there in the first place. Yes, it's a headache to deal with point rows, but the benefits are clear.

Do you have gullies that you can't farm over? Do you need to fill them in each year so that you can farm? If you do, maybe you need to install some waterways, diversions or terraces to keep the topsoil on your farm. Common sense says that, if there is a gully in the same place year after year, you are losing valuable top soil and maybe some things need to be changed.

No-till farming has been successfully used for many years by some farmers. Soil becomes a giant sponge after years of no-tilling and erosion becomes a minor problem on no-till fields. There is no doubt that converting to no-till is a major undertaking, and some people run into problems in the conversion process. However, the Conservation District can help to find no-till experts who can help to overcome about any problem that a farmer may encounter with the transition. Again, it makes sense because there are many fewer trips over the field, saving time and money. Erosion largely becomes a thing of the past when no-till is properly used. Remember that no-tilling some fields every few years is not true no-tilling and is not effective.



The important thing is to recognize the problems on your farm and set out to do something about them. The Conservation District exists to help you recognize and fix the problems. Please call us at 610-925-4920 to request our assistance on your farm.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Since the inception, in the summer of 2015, of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in Chester County, the Chester County Conservation District, with assistance from and in coordination with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has obligated funds to 7 projects, completed three, and generated high levels of interest amongst the agricultural community for future projects throughout the County. In addition, the second application round has resulted in over twenty new applications that will be considered for funding. The projects contracted to date are true to the diversity found in Chester County agriculture, comprising of best management practices (BMPs) implemented on dairy, crop, and mushroom operations. These BMP's will span across multiple watersheds and are designed to have significant environmental benefits.

The primary objective of the RCPP program is to provide technical assistance and support for BMP implementation. To date, such activities have resulted in \$344,111 of grant allocations to seven agricultural operations that incorporate various BMPs designed to conserve soil and protect water quality. The BMPs designed for round one projects include: four waste storages, 2,020 feet of underground outlet, 17,471 sq ft of heavy use area protection, six waste transfer areas, and two pumping plants. These BMPs will work in conjunction with one another to function as an integrated waste management system, operated in accordance with the farmer's nutrient management plan. Additionally, over 4,860 feet of stream bank fencing, three stream crossings, 215 feet of stormwater diversions, one acre of vegetative treatment area, 2.5 acres of grassed waterway, and 1.4 acres of mulching will also be constructed.

Five of the seven projects contracted are located in the northwest portion of the Brandywine Creek Watershed. The other two projects are located in the White Clay Creek Watershed, which was listed under the National Wild and Scenic River System in 2000 under the Clinton Administration. On a funding allocation by watershed basis, \$232,259 was obligated in the Brandywine Creek Watershed and \$111,852 was obligated to the White Clay Creek Watershed, both of which are located in the greater Delaware River Watershed.

The two projects located in the White Clay Creek Watershed have both been completed. Of the five located in the Brandywine Creek Watershed, one is complete, and the remaining four are on track to break ground in the spring 2016. As round one gets wrapped up, round two of applications are showing a great deal promise, with eleven more applicants located in the Brandywine Creek Watershed, seven in the White Clay Creek Watershed, one in the Red Clay Creek Watershed, and one in Pigeon Creek Watershed, which is located in the northern portion of the County.



Update on the Chesapeake Bay Reboot



As most farmers are aware, Pennsylvania DEP is in the process of implementing a new strategy to promote compliance with existing provisions of the Clean Streams Law within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Chesapeake Bay watershed makes up a small percentage of Chester County, but there are a considerable number of farmers that will be affected by the Reboot.

As it stands in late April, DEP's plan is for either a Conservation District or DEP employee to visit each farm in the watershed to assess the status of the farm's conservation and/or manure management plan. Farmers who are required by PA law to have these plans but do not have them in place will be given timelines in which to obtain a plan.

The Conservation District is committed to working with farmers on a voluntary basis to ensure that the proper plans and practices are in place to be in compliance with State law. We encourage any farmer who has questions or who is interested in having a plan written to contact the Conservation District.