



Agriculture: We're Half Way There

Dale Powers

Keeping livestock out of streams has proven herd health benefits. It is also a clear sign to downstream neighbors and other community members of your ethics and environmental stewardship.

Try these options to keep cattle healthy by keeping them out of streams:

- Off-stream watering systems
- Stream fencing
- Stream crossings
- Buffer strips
- Rotational Grazing

Both the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the state agricultural best management cost-share programs can help cover expenses for certain livestock stream exclusion projects that are built to specification.

This is one in a series of articles about farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed who have implemented conservation practices to improve farm operations and water quality in nearby streams, demonstrating how agriculture has achieved half of the nutrient reductions necessary to clean up local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

The author, Robert Whitescarver, lives in Swoope, Virginia, and can be contacted at bobby.whitescarver@gettingmoreontheground.com.

SWOOPE, VA – Dale Powers was one of the first landowners in Virginia to place a permanent riparian easement on his farm. The easement, recorded in 1989, is a legal document that protects the environmental values of the land adjacent to the river that goes through his farm. Powers has a half-mile of river frontage along Middle River—a tributary of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.

The easement restricts livestock from having access to the river and requires natural areas along the bank.

“I am trying to do my part to clean up this river. When it rains this river runs like chocolate milk from all the cows upriver, and it stinks,” said Powers, a retired Marine who has been farming in Swoope since 1968. Powers voluntarily fenced his cattle out of the river and its flood plain years ago because his cows were trampling the banks and he couldn’t keep a fence along the river because of flooding.

“I cannot understand why more farmers don’t take advantage of all the programs available to them to get their cows out of the streams,” he says. “The programs will pay for the fence, watering troughs, and even pay rent on what you fence out.”

When asked why more farmers don’t fence their cattle out, he replied, “They don’t think they are the problem, but in this watershed they are.”

In fact, according to a 2004 report, 94 percent of the bacteria pollution in Middle River was from domestic livestock.*

“We humans can bring back this river just like we humans brought back the bluebird. When humans are causing the problem like this polluted river, we humans should be willing to fix it.”

“I think it’s worse now than it was in 1968. All the frogs have disappeared, the bass are gone, even the yellow suckers have disappeared. I think its cattle. There are a lot more cows now than there were in ’68.”



Retired Marine and Swoope farmer Dale Powers standing in his riparian easement beside Middle River.

**[Fecal Bacteria and General Standard Total Maximum Daily Load Development for Impaired Streams in the Middle River and Upper South River Watersheds, Augusta County, VA., MapTech Inc., Blacksburg, VA, April 28th, 2004, Appendix C, pg. C-9.](http://www.deq.virginia.gov/portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/apptmdls/shenvr/middle.pdf)*