



Agriculture: We're Half Way There

George Watters

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.

MIDDLEBROOK, VA – George Watters is a sheep farmer at the beginning of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. Born in England and raised in New Zealand on a sheep farm, he knows a few things about rotational grazing and animal health.

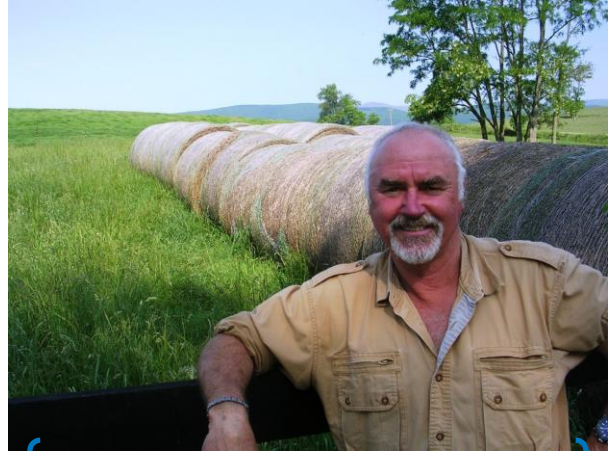
“How can the New Zealand farmer raise and ship lamb to the Northern Hemisphere cheaper than we can do it here? It’s because they’re very efficient; they can’t afford to lose a single animal due to water-borne pathogens. You don’t see livestock in the streams in New Zealand,” said Watters.

“These stream fencing programs you have here helped me set up a rotational grazing system that is very important in the sheep industry. I’ve got a waterer in every field, so they’re drinking clean water, and they rotate to fresh pastures on a regular basis.”

Fencing livestock out of farm streams is a major focus of Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts. This best management practice not only helps reduce bacteria, nutrient, and sediment pollution in Bay headwater streams but also fosters healthier animals and more efficient use of pastures. That can boost a farmer’s bottom line, which is why many Shenandoah Valley farmers employ this and other conservation measures to improve water quality and their farm operations. Some Virginia farmers, however, have not yet jumped on the clean water bandwagon.

After being raised on a farm in New Zealand, Watters served in the Special Forces for Great Britain in Libya and Oman. Then he moved to California to farm before settling in the Shenandoah Valley.

Watters added, “I’ve been all over the world and seen a lot, and you know, fencing livestock out of a stream is not that difficult. I don’t understand what the big deal is. Your animals will be healthier, and you can better utilize your pastures.”



George Watters was raised on a farm in New Zealand and farmed in California before coming to the Shenandoah Valley.