



# Agriculture: We're Half Way There

## Mt. Airy Farm

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.*

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“We fenced our cattle out of Smith Creek and the Shenandoah River because we didn’t want them drinking dirty water,” explains Joe Beckenstrater Jr. “We don’t have any cows, not one cow, in the creeks.”

Joe, his wife Anita, and their sons James, Joseph III, and William own and operate Mt. Airy Farm in Mount Jackson, Va. The farm has 3.5 miles of stream banks along Smith Creek and the Shenandoah River. As a grade A dairy, the Beckenstraters milk 140 dairy cows. They also have 100 beef brood cows and maintain all the cropland and pasture to support their livestock.



Anita and Joe Beckenstrater at Mt. Airy Farm in Mount Jackson.

The most important best management practice (BMP) for the Beckenstraters is the stream fencing that excludes their livestock from Smith Creek and the Shenandoah River. Other important BMPs include “high residue” cover crops, no till, nutrient management, soil nitrate testing, and a loose housing facility for the dairy cows.

Alan Hawkins, soil conservation technician with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, said, “We’ve been working with the Beckenstraters for over 10 years. They started out with the cover crop practice from the Soil and Water District and have done something new every year.”

In fact, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District presented Mt. Airy Farm with a “Clean Water Farm Award” in 2009.

When asked what keeps more farmers from participating in conservation programs, Beckenstrater said, “Maybe some of them are fearful of government intrusion, or they think the government will control them somehow. In all the years I have been participating in these programs, I have never felt that way.

“These programs bring us the expertise and the incentive money we need to be better stewards of our land and water.”