



Agriculture: We're Half Way There

Scott Buchanan and Triple B Farms

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 the first 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.

Scott Buchanan, operator of "Triple B Farms" in Verona, Va., says he got involved in stream fencing programs because of today's value of cattle.

"Ten years ago if you lost a calf, it was worth \$400," he said. "If you lose one today, it's \$1,000."

Buchanan is referring to the health risks involved with calving near streams and ponds. Water can carry disease organisms from all kinds of critters, such as geese and other cattle.

"The main reason we do this is because of bio-security," he said. "And I don't like my cows standing in water. Keeping them out of the water helps prevent foot problems."

The fencing he has installed to exclude his livestock from streams also helps keep the animals out of risky calving areas, Buchanan said. During calving season, it's not uncommon for cows in labor to head for a stream to calve. If the nearby terrain is rough, the newborn calf may be unable to make it up the stream bank to rejoin its mother to nurse, and it will die.

The fencing and alternative watering also provide other benefits.

"In the summertime, I ran out of water, and these programs helped me provide water to my cattle when and where I needed it," Buchanan said. "It also gave me the ability to rotate into more pastures."

Finally, the stream fencing improves water quality in the streams because the cows cannot defecate in the water or erode the banks. That reduces nutrient, bacteria, and sediment pollution going into the stream.

Buchanan participates in the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) cost-share program and the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). These programs provide technical assistance, engineering design, and grazing management tips in addition to financial assistance.

"Triple B Farms" operates mostly on rented ground, but that doesn't stop Buchanan from implementing soil and water conservation practices. He has convinced the landowner to participate in these programs, thus helping his farm operation, the owner, those downstream, and the Chesapeake Bay.

"These practices don't just help us keep our streams cleaner; they help me be a more efficient farmer."



Scott Buchanan of "Triple B Farms" raises beef cattle, poultry, and pigs. The farm includes more than 1,400 acres in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, which drains to the Chesapeake Bay.