AGRICULTURE: WE’RE HALF WAY THERE
Cliff Miller, Mount Vernon Farm

Sperryville, VA – Mount Vernon Farm has been in Cliff Miller’s family since 1827.

The farm, 840 acres near the Blue Ridge Mountains in Rappahannock County, Va., sells grassfed beef and lamb and pastured pork at its farm store and to buyers clubs, food co-ops, and restaurants within a 100-mile radius of the farm.

Miller was one of the first farmers in Virginia to enroll in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in 2001, a conservation program funded by the federal Farm Bill. Mount Vernon Farm has several CREP contracts, 170 acres in the riparian buffer program, and several Virginia Best Management Practices.

“We used to use the river to water our cattle, but the Farm Bill programs helped us put secure water in every field we graze,” says Miller. “The CREP program actually changed us from a continuous grazing farm to a rotational grazing farm. We move livestock every day to fresh pasture.”

CREP and Virginia’s agricultural best management practice cost-share program helped pay for the fences to exclude Miller’s livestock from the streams on the farm and for the cross-fences as well.

Miller is proud of the holistic approach the family uses to manage the farm and its natural resources.

“My family’s 840-acre farm is an organic whole,” he says. “We make decisions understanding the implications for each part of that whole—the water, soil, domestic animals, people, wildlife, finances, customers, and the community.”

It’s a winning management approach.

In 2012 the farm won the Grand Winner Clean Water Farm Award for the entire Rappahannock River basin.