



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

Robin Rinaca, Eastern Shore Nursery of Virginia



Melfa, VA. – Eastern Shore Nursery of Virginia grows and ships (wholesale) more than 100,000 container-grown trees a year to retail outlets all over the eastern United States. The Melfa, Va.,-based nursery also prides itself on being a good Chesapeake Bay steward.

"Our conservation practices started by saving as much water as we could, and it grew from there," says Robin Rinaca, owner and general manager. "We could have a more vibrant seafood industry and a healthier Bay if everyone did their part to protect water quality," she added. "We try our best here at the nursery."

Those efforts include planting vegetative buffers along all nursery watercourses. The buffers filter the water entering catchment basins, which dump water into the irrigation ponds where the nursery's pumps are located.

"We don't have big problems with high nitrates or herbicide buildup in our irrigation ponds because of the buffers," Rinaca notes.

The nursery also uses resin-coated, slow release fertilizer, drip irrigation, and even has its own bailer on site to recycle plastic materials.

"All these practices help reduce our costs and help do our part to restore the Chesapeake Bay," Rinaca says.

The nursery's conservation stewardship hasn't gone unnoticed. Eastern Shore Nursery is the recipient of many conservation awards, including "Outstanding Conservation Farmer" from the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and the "Environmental Steward of the Year" from the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association.

And Rinaca's stewardship ethic extends beyond the nursery.

"One of our most important conservation practices my late husband and I realized was placing a conservation easement on our home farm," she says, referring to Bowman's Folly, a historic Accomack County farm that was part of a land grant dating from 1664.

Planting trees, shrubs, and other vegetation between field margins and streams and ditches creates habitat for beneficial insects that can help pollinate plants and destroy harmful insects. Riparian buffers also filter nutrient runoff, prevent erosion, and can limit losses from flooding.

Other best management practices that help reduce pollution flowing to local rivers and streams include:

- Cover crops
- Continuous no-till
- Nutrient management planning
- Crop rotation

Both the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the state agricultural best management cost-share programs can help cover expenses for certain best management practices.

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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