



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

July 2013

AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

Steve Sturgis, TRI-S Farms, Inc.



Steve Sturgis standing in one of his vegetative buffers. Wheat is in the background.

Tech's Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Painter, Va.

Sturgis is also a partner in a business that supplies Cherrystone Aquafarms with several million clams a year. "Water quality is important to me," he stresses. "I don't leave ground bare, and I leave my own buffers."

One of the things he stresses to farmers is to leave wider buffers around their crop fields.

"That's one thing that really bothers me—when I see farmers tilling right up to the edge of the ditch. We need to leave more buffer along our crop fields to capture and filter runoff."

Such farm conservation practices are nothing new to Sturgis.

"My dad started no-till farming back in the '70s, and we continue this conservation practice today because it saves time and money," he says.

He also practices nutrient management and has installed water control structures to capture runoff water to reuse for irrigating his crops. Recently he installed special nozzles on his spray rigs to reduce chemical drift and over-application of product.

A federal Farm Bill program helped Sturgis construct a "hoop house," which allows TRI-S to supply local restaurants with greens, carrots, and other fresh produce. The Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) shared in the cost of the structure.

"We participate in the programs offered by both USDA and the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District," Sturgis says. "These programs are voluntary and help farmers with the stewardship of their land. It's good for the land and for the Chesapeake Bay."

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

Other best management practices for cropland 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 crop 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.

The author, Robert Whitescarver, lives in Swoope, Virginia, and can be contacted at bobby.whitescarver@gettingmoreontheground.com.

visit cbf.org