



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE *Dr. John Wise, Augusta County, Virginia*

STAUNTON, VA - Dr. John Wise is a large animal veterinarian and one of the founding partners of Westwood Animal Hospital in Staunton, Va. He's also a beef cattle producer in Augusta County, Va, in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.



"Abundant clean water is essential for the health of cattle," he stresses. "Lepto, E. coli, and mastitis are the main health problems with cattle drinking dirty water."

Lepto is short for Leptospirosis. This infectious and contagious disease causes abortions, mortality in young calves, and decreased milk production. Producers commonly vaccinate against several strains of Lepto twice a year. It's a bacterial disease transmitted from the urine of infected animals into open wounds, mucus membranes, and the eyes and mouths of susceptible animals, including humans. The causal organisms survive in surface waters, streams, and moist soil. Infected animals can include cattle, deer, pigs, raccoons, opossums, and rats.

The best treatment for cattle to prevent Lepto is immunization followed by "eliminating access of cattle to surface water or streams used by other livestock," according to leading university and animal science experts. E. coli infections and mastitis can also be reduced by keeping livestock out of infected wet areas and streams.

Knowing this, Dr. Wise keeps his own cattle out of farm ponds and streams.

"We fenced the ponds off years ago and recently fenced the springs and a really steep area," he said. "Streams and the river on our home place were especially dangerous during calving, so we fence them off, too. I recall pulling a calf out of Middle River almost every year, many of them dead."

Dr. Wise participated in Virginia's Agricultural Cost Share Program more than 10 years ago to help pay for excluding the livestock from farm ponds. Today he has a Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP contract that excludes additional streams, provides watering stations for rotational grazing, and funds to over-seed pastures with clover.

"These programs have helped us a great deal, and I think producers should visit their local [Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA] offices to find out what is available for them. They have helped us improve the animal husbandry on our farms, and I hope it's helped the environment, too."

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
- Riparian buffers
- Rotational Grazing

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), 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 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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