



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

April 2014

AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE *Charlie Drumheller, Augusta County, Virginia*



Charlie Drumheller (left) and his son Bobby own and operate Bellevue Farm in Augusta County, Virginia.

Swoope, VA – Charlie Drumheller and his wife Vicki own and, together with their son Bobby, operate Bellevue Farm, a grazing operation in Swoope located in Virginia's beautiful Shenandoah Valley.

“Any successful business has to have a goal to continually improve,” Charlie says, “and we’ve been doing that on this farm my whole life.”

Their commercial cow/calf operation began with Charlie's father in 1944. “We knew long ago that the most effective use of the

land was for grazing, and in order to have an efficient grazing farm, you have to have abundant water,” Charlie said.

Supplying abundant clean water wasn't easy during several drought years. “I tried to partially fence out the creeks with ‘T’ posts and temporary wire, but we didn't have the alternative water to really make it work,” Charlie recalls.

The farm's rotational grazing system is now fully operational, thanks to several Farm Bill programs and Virginia's Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program. “We started by getting the cows out of the stream in the barnyard. It was a mess,” Charlie said. “Then when the CREP program opened up in Virginia, we used USDA technical support and funding to set up the watering system for the whole farm.”

They now have twenty grazing units and eleven livestock watering stations, with plans to add four more, using a combination of programs including CREP, EQIP, and VACS.

“Prior to fencing the stream, you would have to go to church twice on Sunday to ask forgiveness about what you called the cattle trying to get them into the barnyard,” Charlie remembers. “It's a whole lot easier to get the cows in now. When we open a gate, they come.”

Charlie and Bobby offer a host of advantages for rotational grazing over their former continuous grazing system on the farm: ease of herd movement, better forage utilization, healthier cattle, no more muck and mud, better manure distribution, and reduced hay needs.

This 365-acre farm has also dedicated about 25 percent of the land to riparian buffer and wildlife areas. “Before we got into CREP, we never saw a turkey on this farm,” Bobby says. “Now we see them regularly. And it's nice to see the water leaving our farm clear even after a rain.”

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.

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

visit cbf.org