



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE *Butch Snow and Melody Tennant, Dutch Hollow Cattle Company*

Walkers Creek, VA – Butch Snow and his wife Melody Tennant have a beef cattle operation in Rockbridge County in the headwaters of the James River. It's a cow/calf operation and a grass-finished beef business called the Dutch Hollow Cattle Company. They own one farm and lease four adjoining farms.



Butch Snow and Melody Tennant own one farm and lease four others in Rockbridge County.

The pair rotate their cows and calves through nineteen grazing pastures, allowing each pasture at least 45 days of rest. This allows Snow and his wife to extend their grazing into mid-January, which has cut their need for hay in half.

“Because of our rotational grazing system, we’ve sold all of our hay equipment,” explains Snow. “I’m buying better hay than what I could make.”

Snow contends that by rotating his cattle herds, he gets more grazing days and has healthier livestock.

“Since we started rotating, we have fewer pink-eye outbreaks and fewer parasite problems. We are also weaning heavier calves.”

But “you can’t rotate if you don’t have water,” Snow continues. The couple has used several combinations of CREP, EQIP, and the state’s agricultural cost-share program to get their cows out of the streams and build rotational grazing systems.

“I attribute my better herd health to better water. They would rather drink out of a trough than in the creek. When I found out these programs help pay for wells, I was motivated to enroll. I could not have swallowed the cost of these improvements. It actually works.”

Snow also persuaded the owners of the farms the couple leases to enroll in programs that help pay for cross-fencing, stream exclusion, and alternate watering systems. The owners enrolled in the programs, and Snow coordinated the conservation work.

“It was definitely worth it for me to make these improvements on farms I didn’t own,” he says. “We get healthier, heavier calves, and the owner gets capital improvements on the land and better forage with fewer weeds.”

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
- Buffer strips
- 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.

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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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