



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

Jeff Gentry, Hillview Farm



Jeff Gentry and his mother Margaret own Hillview Farm in North Garden.

North Garden, VA—"I could not believe it, but I heard a covey of quail in the conservation area this year," said Jeff Gentry, operator of Hillview Farm. He was referring to the 10-acre area he and his mother Margaret excluded from their beef cattle herd. The effort not only improved their cattle operation but also helped restore quail and their distinctive "Bobwhite" call to the Albemarle County countryside.

The Gentrys enrolled in Virginia's Stream Exclusion with Grazing Land Management Program administered by the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District. In addition to 100 percent cost

sharing from the district, the family received an additional incentive payment from a private foundation, the Hardware River Project.

"Mom was skeptical at first, but when she heard a couple of the neighbors were fencing their cows out of the streams, she decided it was okay," Gentry said. "We could not have afforded to do it all at one time without these programs, and everyone worked with us so well."

The Gentrys own 175 acres in the Walnut Branch watershed of the Hardware River, which flows into the James River.

They installed five livestock watering stations and over a mile of fencing, which created six grazing units and a wildlife area that boasts a covey of quail.

"We needed better water," Gentry explained. "After my dad passed away in 2008, we had two droughts in three years. The cows would just stand in the drying-up springs and ruin them. Our challenge now is to utilize the grazing units as they were designed by the district. They really set us up nicely."

Fencing the cows out of the streams also ensures fewer calf losses. "Calves would die in those streams during calving," Gentry says. "Calves can roll over in the water and never get up."

"Our farm is upstream from one of Albemarle County's parks that has a lake for recreation and swimming. We felt like it was the right thing to do to get our cows out of the streams because they not only pollute the water, they damage the stream banks, 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
- 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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