



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

George and Ruth Coyner



Waynesboro, VA: Ever since George and Ruth Coyner fenced their cows out of the streams on their farm in 2005, they've seen great benefits for their herd. What's more, there has been a marked improvement in the stream's water quality.

"I'll bet I could drink the water leaving our farm," Mr. Coyner exclaimed.

The Coyners own and operate a commercial cow/calf operation in the headwaters of Porterfield Run, a tributary of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. They also raise soybeans, corn, barley, and hay.

"Years ago, I remember a vet telling us there were herd health advantages for our cows if we fenced them out of the streams," Coyner said. "The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was available and we decided to enroll. The program reimbursed us over 100 percent of the costs and they pay us rent every year for the land we fenced away from the cows."

"Since we fenced the cows out of the stream, we no longer have calves falling down in the stream at birth and dying. We no longer have old cows mired up to their bellies in the muck. They now drink clean water and there is no more mortality because of the stream," Coyner continued.

They fenced a half of a mile of stream, developed alternative watering stations, and built a stream crossing for the cows. The program required them to set a fence thirty-five feet from the top of the bank on each side of the stream.

"One of my neighbors told me I was giving up good pasture by fencing the cows out," Coyner said. "But I told him I can get the cows into the barn so much easier now, they drink clean water, and I don't have any deaths because of the steep banks or muck."

The Coyners are proud stewards of their land, implementing not only streamside buffers but also rotational grazing, grassed waterways, cover crops, and strip cropping.

"We are happy with the program and plan to re-enroll when our contract comes up for renewal in a couple of years," he added.

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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