



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

Scott Miller, Windy Hill Farm



Swoope, VA: “It’s February and I’ve still got grass!” Scott Miller exclaimed. He’s the owner of Windy Hill Farm and excited about his recently installed rotational grazing system for his commercial cow-calf operation.

He took over farm from his father in 2011.

“I took a measuring wheel and measured how far my cows had to walk for water—2,830 feet, that’s half a mile,” Miller said.

“If I was going to make this work, there had to be more waterers for the cows and better grazing distribution,” Miller explained.

Miller enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2016. His contract included two “frost-free” watering troughs, internal cross fencing to create a total of seven grazing pastures, and exclusion fence to keep cows out of a thirty-two-acre forest.

“We used to feed cattle in a section of the woods next to the pasture. All those trees died,” Miller said. “We put a fence around the woods so the cows couldn’t get in there. That made our EQIP application rank higher. And besides, I was tired of chasing cows and calves in there and I was tired of worrying about acorn poisoning.”

Moving cattle from the far reaches of the farm to the barn used to be difficult. Dividing the pastures into smaller units with access to water in each one allowed Miller to rotate his pastures and afforded much greater ease of herd movement.

“It used to take us two days and four or five people to get the cows into the barn to work them. Now I can get them into the barnyard by myself in an hour,” Miller said.

Windy Hill Farm is in the Middle River watershed, in the headwaters of the Shenandoah River. It clearly produces more forage, faster growing timber, and saves this farmer time, thanks to the funding and technical assistance of EQIP. “The EQIP program made this happen,” Miller said.

Rotational grazing increases forage production and makes moving livestock easier. Livestock watering stations strategically located throughout the farm are key for establishing a rotational grazing system. Abundant, clean water improves herd health. Keeping livestock out of streams can prevent certain livestock diseases and reduces mortality.

Best management practices that create rotational grazing options and keep livestock out of streams include:

- Off-stream watering systems
- Stream-side fencing
- Hardened stream crossings
- Internal fencing
- Riparian buffers

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) can help cover expenses for certain livestock stream exclusion projects.

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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