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CONSERVATION DISTRICT HONORS TWO AT ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY

WAYNESBURG, PA – The Greene County Conservation District honored two recipients during its annual awards ceremony Wednesday, Dec. 15, at Valley View Farm.

Each year, the Conservation District honors those within the county who have shown an outstanding commitment to soil and water conservation. Honorees for 2021 included Gene Saurborn and Bobbi Bailey of Buckshot Cattle Company, recipients of the Outstanding Cooperator of the Year Award and Zachary Frye, recipient of the Outstanding Conservation FFA Speaking Award.

Gene Saurborn and Bobbie Bailey, owners of the Buckshot Cattle Company located on Big Shannon Run Road, were honored as the 2021 Outstanding Cooperator of the Year. This award is given to local farms that have shown substantial improvements to their operations by committing to the use of conservation practices that are intended to improve soil and water quality.

Mr. Saurborn and Ms. Bailey's farm is located in Perry and Whiteley Townships and is nestled within both the Dunkard and Whiteley Creek Watersheds. The 202-acre farm along with



James A. Cowell, Jr. presented Buckshot Cattle Co. owners Gene Saurborn and Bobbi Bailey with the 2021 Outstanding Cooperator of the Year Award at the Greene County Conservation District's annual award ceremony on Wednesday, Dec. 15.



James A. Cowell, Jr. presented Chris and Danielle Frye, parents of Zachary Frye of Holbrook, the 2021 Outstanding Conservation FFA Speaking Award on behalf of Zachary at the Greene County Conservation District's annual award ceremony on Wednesday, Dec. 15.

additional leased acreage supports a cow-calf operation that consists of mainly Simmental and Angus breeds and a few horses. The farming operation has implemented numerous federal, state and local programs and practices intended to improve soil and water quality. Their years of implementing farming practices that protect our natural resources were leading factors in being selected for this award.

Zachary Frye, a 2021 graduate of West Greene High School and November 2021 graduate of USMC Parris Island boot camp, was recognized for his outstanding speaking skills at the county speaking contest with his speech entitled "Energy: Preserve, not Replace". During the 2021 speaking contest year, he advanced through the county and area rounds and placed first in the regional Conservation Speaking contest. This qualified Zachary for the

State Prepared Speaking Contest making him the highest placing Conservation Speaker in the Greene County FFA programs. Frye is the son of Chris and Danielle Frye of Holbrook, and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

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CONSERVATION DISTRICT HOLDS FARMER'S FIELD DAY

The Conservation District held a Farmer's Field Day on Saturday, October 9th at the Frosty Springs Farm operated by Jim and Billie Cowell. The field day was an opportunity for Greene County farmers to connect with experts and other farmers. A dozen farmers attended the event despite some scattered showers. Thankfully most activities were held in the Cowell's barn which had been cleared to accommodate tables and chairs. The Conservation District provided refreshments and lunches for everyone in attendance.



J.B. Harrold and Phil Evans from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) discussed rotational grazing and how it can improve pasture condition and reduce the need for costly inputs. They discussed pasture management and how to use the information in soil test reports.

Clint Iams, of Log Cabin Fence Company, shared information on agricultural fence construction that will hold up to livestock and minimize time spent making repairs. He also fielded lots of questions about maintenance and troubleshooting of electric fences and chargers.

Veterinarian Dr. Glodenna Halstead spoke about maintaining herd health and the role that pasture management and rotational grazing plays in keeping livestock healthy. She also answered questions about specific conditions and keeping herds healthy in general.



Finally, Jim and Billie Cowell, the event hosts, took participants on a hay ride throughout the farm where they pointed out specific practices they have implemented, such as winter-feeding areas. They spoke candidly about the things that were working well and some things they wished they had done differently. They discussed the process of working with groups like the Conservation District and the NRCS for technical and financial assistance. The tour included questions and answers which was the whole idea of the field day; to get farmers together with agency representatives and each other to share ideas and information.

We at the Conservation District are very thankful to our speakers and to the Cowells for being amazing hosts. We would also like to thank R&D Watters for donating portable restroom facilities for the event.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

- Greene County Department of Economic Development
Jeremy Kelly, Planning and Business Development Manager
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
Phil Evans, District Conservationist
- PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry
Russell Gibbs, Service Forester
- PA Fish and Boat Commission
Brian Guenin, SW Region Waterways Conservation Officer
- Penn State Cooperative Extension
Tom Beresnyak, Area 6 Client Relations Manager
- Washington/Greene County Farm Service Agency
Michal Roup, CED

DISTRICT LOCATION

Our office is located on the 2nd Floor of the Ben Franklin Building at
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Waynesburg, PA 15370
Phone: 724-852-5278
gccd@co.greene.pa.us
Hours: 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday-Friday

The GCCD Board meets the third Tuesday of each month at 10:00 am in the Conservation District Conference Room located on the 2nd Floor of the Ben Franklin Building.

WHY EVERY FARM NEEDS A MANURE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Pennsylvanians depends on farms. The Department of Community and Economic Development lists Agribusiness as one of the Commonwealth's three key industries. Farms provide livelihoods for many of us and quality nutrition for all of us. But keeping livestock can be a messy affair. Concentrating animals in a small area like a barnyard or feeding area tends to break up the grass and results in areas of bare soil and not to mention all of the animal waste. Agricultural runoff occurs when rain comes into contact with bare soil and animal wastes and carries it into local streams and in some cases, into groundwater aquifers.

Pennsylvanians also depend on abundant clean water. We rely on it for nourishment, hygiene, and to sustain our farms. Any farmer will tell you that a field is useless if it doesn't have access to water and healthy grass. Farms and water are both incredibly important and we can't sacrifice either for the other. While there are many industries and land-uses that affect water quality in Pennsylvania, none are so widespread as agriculture. Working with farmers to reduce ag runoff has the greatest potential to protect and improve water quality where we live.

Ag runoff may not seem like a big problem when you view just one farm. But when you realize that it's not just one farm but dozens and dozens of farms in just a single watershed, it can quickly add up to a lot of polluted runoff. That's why state law requires every farm that produces manure or applies manure to the land to have and implement a written manure management plan. Manure management plans are relatively easy to write and don't cost a farmer anything.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has developed a workbook to make the process easier and both the Conservation District and Penn State Extension offer assistance in completing the plan. Jefferson County Conservation District has even produced a step-by-step video to assist farmers in completing their plans (https://www.jeffersonconservation.com/jccd2019_075.htm).

Developing a plan starts with mapping the farm and considering farm operations. Next, the farmer will identify environmentally sensitive areas, such as drinking water wells and streams, where the potential for problematic ag runoff is highest. These areas

will be protected by setbacks. In other words, the farmer should not spread or concentrate manure too close to these areas. The farmer will complete worksheets related to each aspect of the farm. Finally, the workbook includes a place to keep records.

Writing a manure management plan generally doesn't change farm operations because the farmer was likely already using good manure application practices. Although sometimes, going through the process can help the farmer improve their operation. The nutrients in manure, after all, are a resource and keeping them on the farm where they can be used for crop/forage production is more efficient than letting them be washed downstream.

Additionally writing and implementing a manure management plan ensures that the farmer is in compliance with state law. This becomes more and more important as time goes on. Landowner complaints are more common now than in years past. Having an up-to-date manure management plan on the farm shows that the farmer is not only complying with state law but is doing their utmost to ensure their farm is not causing water pollution. This can be an important protection from liability.

Having a written manure management plan doesn't cost a farmer anything, ensures compliance with state law, and can help make their farm more efficient all while keeping our soil healthy and water clean. Anyone who has animals or imports manure for their farm is welcome to contact the Conservation District for assistance with manure management plans or for a copy of the manure management plan workbook. This includes farmers who previously completed a manure management plan and do not remember where it is or know that it hasn't been updated in years. Now might be the time to take a fresh look at updating their plan. Either way, the Conservation District is here to help. A PDF version of the workbook and some helpful links are also available on the Conservation District website.



LOOKING TO ACCEPT FILL ON YOUR LAND?

The Conservation office receives many calls from construction companies looking for areas to dump fill such as excess soil and stone. There are quite a few regulations on accepting and discarding fill material. In this article, our office will give a few suggestions and questions to ask yourself and the contractor if you plan to accept fill in the future.

1.) Location - Where on my property will the fill be placed?

“Location, Location, Location.” Location is very important when it comes to fill placement. It is unlawful to place fill within a floodplain or a wetland without a permit. A general rule of thumb, keep fill at least 50 feet away from any streams (no matter how small) and do not fill in areas that could be a wetland. You also need to think about access to these areas where fill is wanted. Will accessing these areas damage your property? Is it going to track mud over public roads or your driveway? Is it going to be close to any culverts where sediment runoff can get into a nearby stream? Will any streams or wetlands need to be crossed to get to the location? Another thing to think about when determining location, is the fill going to be dumped over an embankment or hill, these areas should be compacted to protect against slides and to reduce erosion or future damage to your property. Fill should not be placed on saturated or frozen surfaces.

2.) Size - Is the overall site less than one acre? Is there any existing disturbance?

Size is also a very important fact that can lead to troublesome situations unless proper permits are in hand. Another rule of thumb is to keep disturbance, including fill, under one acre. Once a project is over an acre, an engineered permit is required. Size is determined over the life of the project. For example if you started accepting fill back in 2010, and you continue accepting fill into the future, once the disturbance is over one acre, the engineered permit is needed.

3.) Permit or Plan Needed? - Is the fill coming from a permitted site? Is it over one acre?

No matter how much fill is accepted or the size of the area, erosion and sediment controls such as silt fence, compost filter sock, seed and hay/straw etc. These practices should be placed in such a manner to protect streams, wetlands, and neighboring properties from receiving sediment runoff. These subjects should be covered in what is called an “Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan” (E&S Plan). An E&S plan is a site specific plan consisting of both drawings and a narrative that identifies what controls will be used to minimize erosion before, during and after an earth disturbance activity. If a contractor would like to place fill on your property, you should ask for an E&S plan. The E&S plan is a tool that the landowner can use to ensure that their property is utilized and left in a manner that was equal to or better than the original conditions. If the contractor has fill from an already permitted site (bridge replacement, industrial building, pipeline, etc.) an approved

E&S plan is required, from our office or PADEP, regardless of size or location.

4.) Consistency of Fill - Is it certified clean fill, free of root wads, garbage, and rebar?

The consistency of the fill is a crucial factor when determining if fill should be accepted. Fill should be free of any frozen particles, trees, sod, roots, and other foreign objects. Once these objects thaw out or decompose, it can cause slides, sinkholes and additional dangerous problems in these areas. Some site preparation may be needed before fill placement. Clearing an area of stumps, trees, tree limbs, shrubs, and other decomposable foreign objects is suggested so they are not incorporated into the fill.

5.) Access - Will any streams or wetlands need to be crossed to place the fill?

It is vital to plan for access to the area where the fill will be placed. A permit is required if any streams or wetlands need to be crossed. If crossings can be avoided, it would be beneficial to the environment and your pocket, as crossings have required fees by the state. If access will be in an area where a road does not already exist, a rock entrance should be installed to minimize the sediment being tracked onto the public roads. Also, keep in mind that access roads are counted as disturbance, unless it already exists. To sum it up, if an access road needs to be excavated to get to where the fill will be placed, the access road plus the size fill placement will be counted towards the one acre threshold (one acre or more = permit).

6.) Restoration - What should be done when the fill is already placed?

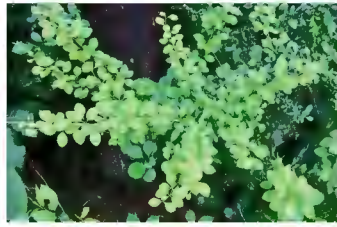
Once fill is placed in the appropriate areas, it should be brought to final grade. The very next step is to get a vegetation to grow as fast as possible (using permanent seed & hay/straw). Vegetation protects against erosion and sediment runoff that can enter streams and wetlands. Most fill that a landowner will receive will be sub-grade soils, and may not have the needed nutrients to establish vegetative growth, some topsoil may need placed over the fill area to establish vegetation. Don't bury your topsoil stockpile before you get a chance to spread it for final grade.

Lastly the site should be monitored for signs of erosion and monitor the silt fence (or other controls) weekly and after runoff events. If signs of erosion are observed (rills, channels, gully's etc.) these areas should be smoothed out/re-graded and re-seeded.

It is always a good idea to give the Conservation Office a call before starting any earth disturbance activities to see if an E&S plan or permit may be required. Ultimately, the landowner is responsible for the work being done on their property. We are always willing to provide needed information and/or come out and look at the project.

PENNSYLVANIA MOVES TO CONTROL MORE NOXIOUS WEEDS

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has recently added Japanese Barberry, Japanese Stiltgrass and Garlic Mustard to the State's list of Noxious Weeds. The Department of Agriculture identifies Noxious weeds as, "a plant that is determined to be injurious to public health, crops, livestock, agricultural land or other property and cannot be sold, transported, planted, or otherwise propagated in Pennsylvania."



The biggest effect of this move will be related to Japanese Barberry which is widely used in landscaping and sold through nurseries and home improvement stores. Barberry has long been included in plantings because of its beautiful fall colors and bright red berries. Unfortunately, it is very invasive and readily escapes cultivated areas and competes with native plants.

The new rule took effect in early December and means that for the time being nurseries, landscapers and homeowners will not be able to use the plant in Pennsylvania. It is possible that sterilized varieties of the plant may become available for use in landscape plantings. For now, it's much better to plant a native alternative such as Winterberry holly.

For more information on Noxious Weeds, visit the PA Department of Agriculture's website (https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Plants_Land_Water/PlantIndustry/NIPPP/Pages/default.aspx).

Photos credited PennState Extension (<https://extension.psu.edu/japanese-barberry>)



2021 GRACE Program Update

LIME	\$ 44,647.46
FERTILIZER	\$ 33,118.40
WATERING SYSTEMS	\$ 93,550.00
FENCING	\$ 36,000.00
FORESTRY	\$ 15,800.00
TOTAL	\$ 223,115.86

65 APPLICANTS

The GRACE program is now in its fifth year and has contracted over \$846,000 to farmers across Greene County. The Greene County Conservation District Board of Directors awarded over \$223,000 to 65 GRACE applicants at their September 21, 2021 meeting. These awards funded the following agricultural projects:

- 2,014 tons of lime to condition 1,182 acres of pasture
- 799 acres of fertilizer of farm land
- 10 interior fencing projects for pasture division or streambank fencing
- 29 full water development projects
- 12 water development pipeline projects
- 10 trough replacement/repairs
- 2 spring development repair/replacements
- 4 forest management planning projects
- 4 forest management practice projects

Practices like these improve pasture condition and livestock health. They make farms more efficient and profitable. They also maintain healthy soils and clean streams by reducing erosion and agricultural runoff.

Funding for the GRACE Program comes from ACT 13 Oil and Gas Impact fees the Conservation District receives from the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC). The District Board feels that money derived from these fees is best used to fund on-the-ground projects that help farmers improve their farms and safeguard soil and water resources. Contact the Conservation District for more information on the GRACE Program and other opportunities.

FAMILY FOREST CARBON PROGRAM EXPANDS: NOW OPEN FOR ENROLLMENT

The Family Forest Carbon Program, a new program created by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, is now available for enrollment to landowners in Pennsylvania with as little as 30 acres up to 2,400 acres.

For landowners who are interested in improving the health of their forest or finding new revenue streams to be able to keep their forest as a forest long-term, a carbon program may be able to help. A carbon program is an opportunity for landowners to get paid to care for their trees in ways that sequester and store more carbon. The carbon that is captured is sold to companies who are looking to neutralize emissions they cannot eliminate.

Traditionally, carbon programs have been developed on 5,000-plus acre tracts of forestland. But most forestland in the U.S. comes in smaller tracts of 20 to 2,000 acres owned by families and individuals. In Pennsylvania, more than 50% of the forestland is owned by families.

The Family Forest Carbon Program is breaking with tradition – the program is specifically for small woodland owners. It is also different in that it is designed to be an all-around resource for landowners. The program provides payments to family and individual landowners to implement scientifically proven forest practices that increase the carbon sequestered and stored on the land. In addition, the program provides expert consultation from foresters and will create a forest management plan customized for the landowner's property. Landowners can log on to familyforestcarbon.org to learn more and see if their property is eligible.

Enrollment is being offered for one of two improved management practices:

- *Growing Mature Forests, a 20-year contract to delay harvesting and engage in sustainable management practices*

- *Enhancing Future Forests, a 10-year contract to manage invasive species and undergrowth to encourage the next generation of trees.*

Some limited and salvage harvesting are allowed within sustainable harvesting requirements of the contract, including for personal use. Payments to the landowner are determined by property size and forest conditions and guaranteed throughout the contract period regardless of carbon credit sales.

The Family Forest Carbon Program first launched in a few select counties of Pennsylvania before expanding across the state. The program received positive feedback from landowners as well as local news outlets, including the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Landowners are excited to have found an alternative revenue source that is helping them pay taxes or take on new habitat projects. Other landowners, newer to forest management are finding value in the assistance with a management plan.

The program will measure and verify the carbon captured by enrolled landowners using a new forest carbon accounting methodology. This new methodology increases the credibility of the carbon benefit calculation and is on track to be approved by Verra's Verified Carbon Standard at the beginning of 2022.

As two mission-driven organizations, AFF and TNC have placed integrity at the forefront of its program. The Family Forest Carbon Program is only selling its verified carbon credits to companies who are taking a comprehensive approach to their climate goals—first reducing emissions before working to neutralize those they cannot eliminate. The program just announced REI, the outdoor specialty retailer, has signed on as a carbon credit buyer.



PENNSYLVANIA TREE NUTS

A drive along a country road, a walk through a cemetery or a closer look at farm property in southwestern Pennsylvania will reveal a number of nut trees, some of them native to our area and others introduced. Pennsylvania does not have a state tree nut. Our Pennsylvania state tree is the eastern hemlock which produces inch long egg shaped cones rather than nuts.

Oak trees are plentiful in our area and include white oak, northern red oak, pin oak and black oak. Oak trees produce acorns which are the most abundant nut crop in North America. Even in an off-year oaks produce more nuts than all other nut trees both wild and cultivated and were an important food source for Eastern Woodlands natives and European colonists.

Evidence of acorn consumption has been traced back to the Paleolithic era.

Black walnut trees are also easy to identify. Native and abundant in our area, these trees stand tall and can reach 80 feet. The bark is deeply furrowed and there is an absence of lower branches. Clusters of green nut husks form in the summer and are easy to see as this tree loses its leaves early in the fall. Black walnut trees can also be tapped for making syrup as you would a sugar maple. Nuts are harvested in late September and early October while the husks are still green. Another native member of the walnut family is the butternut, also known as the oil nut or white walnut. These two nuts are stored and consumed by squirrels and also gathered by humans for their distinctive taste for eating out of hand or in baked goods.



However, black walnuts and butternuts may not be good companions in the yard or near a vegetable garden. They produce a substance called juglone. This chemical, which is released through the roots into the soil, acts to eliminate surrounding plants which might compete for light, water and nutrients. Juglone can be toxic to a number of plants including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and potatoes as well the ornamental shrubs peony, lilac, rhododendron and azalea. Juglone is most toxic under the drip line of the tree but can extend 50 to 80 feet from the trunk.

Two other well-known trees in Western Pennsylvania are the shellbark and shagbark hickories. The shagbark is distinctive by the appearance of its bark which appears to be peeling up and down the length of the trunk. It often grows in drier upland soils. The shellbark has smoother bark and produces larger husks and nuts. It prefers moist fertile bottomland. Hickory nuts have a milder taste than black walnuts and are prized for cakes and cookies.

I was in a doctor's office some forty years ago and listened to a man tell an amazing story about his father, a lumberman, and the

disappearance of trees up and down the east coast that were as big as the California redwoods. He was talking about the American chestnut. Numbering around four billion, these giants grew to be 100 feet tall and nine feet in diameter and were the most common tree in Pennsylvania until about 1904. A blight introduced in Japanese nursery stock was first detected at the Bronx Zoo. By 1940 most American Chestnuts had been wiped

out. The tree is considered technically extinct. The fungus that killed them still exists in the wild with trees only reaching the size of shrubs. The large chestnuts that we see today in their spiky husks are Chinese chestnuts. Research is currently being done at The American Chestnut Foundation in Louisville, KY and Penn State University among others to restore this species.

Did you know you can grow pecans in Pennsylvania? Or that English walnuts actually came from Persia? Nut species that were once thought impossible for our area have been

achieved by creating cultivars through grafting. Grafting is accomplished by taking rootstock from one species and grafting a section (called a scion) of another species onto it. This is called a cultivar and produces a tree with the best characteristics of each tree. Cultivars are more hardy but more expensive to purchase. One example is the hican. Hicans are grown in Pennsylvania and are created by grafting a pecan to a hickory root stock. Nuts produced by native trees tend to be smaller

and harder to crack than those produced by grafting. Ease of shelling, size, taste and blight resistance are goals when creating cultivars.

Nut trees are planted with an eye for the "long view." Most nut trees take about ten years to produce. In our state, filberts, or hazelnuts are the exception and produce a crop in about five years. As with every living plant, hardiness zone, soil composition and plant location are basic considerations. Trees need full sun and a deep, acidic, well-drained soil. Water is crucial especially in the first two years and weeds should be kept back at least four feet from the trunk, to hinder disease.

Trees are wind pollinated so that two trees of each variety should be planted. Chestnuts and walnuts require a genetically different chestnut or walnut to pollinate. The Northern Nut Growers Association [<https://nutgrowing.org/>] representing North America, and the Pennsylvania Nut Growers Association [<http://pnga.net/>] are good resources; the Pennsylvania Nut Growers offer grafting classes.

Soil testing kits and help from Penn State Master Gardeners can be obtained by contacting your local Penn State Extension office.

Photo Credit: The Pennsylvania Nut Growers Association (http://pnga.net/?page_id=390)



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OUR MISSION

It is the mission of the District to commit to protection, stewardship, and conservation of the County's natural resources to ensure a wise balance between the protection of the environment and the benefit of the landowners of the County.

It is the District's belief that conservation works best when people living and working in the local area work together to manage their natural resources collectively. Valuable partnerships are formed when diversity is brought into the conversation and decision-making process. Our office is a conservation-oriented organization that offers a wide variety of expertise and knowledge. The District staff can assist with questions related to permitting, offer guidance on planning for farming, and assist landowners with various natural resource related topics.