

Shenandoah River
The Shifflett Family, Purple Cow Road Farms

Nominated by the Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District



Roger and Sharon Shifflett purchased their first farm in 1971. There, they raised pigs and dairy goats on just 5 acres. Today, they run 100 cow-calf pairs along with a turkey brooder operation on many more acres. The Shiffletts have excluded cattle from all the streams on their farms using a combination of 10- and 35-foot

buffers where feasible. A total of 7,330 feet of streambank along the South River and its tributaries is protected because of their projects. They work hard to rotate their cattle year-round in a way that benefits the animals and the land. They have worked with the district on best management practices, including the installation of a litter storage facility for the brooder operation, and are currently working toward a winter feeding and manure storage facility for the beef operation on the home farm.

York River
Higginbotham and Gibson Family Farms

Nominated by the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District



The Higginbotham and Gibson families have worked together on this 925-acre farm to protect the water quality of Tomahawk Creek and Poorhouse Run. The Orange County farm is mainly a cow-calf operation that also backgrounds weaned calves on grass. It has evolved from a continuous grazing system to an intensive, rotational grazing system. All cattle are grass-fed. Cattle are

moved weekly during growing seasons on 24 permanent pastures, with poly-wire used to subdivide pastures during spring and fall. All streams are fenced off from cattle, and bridges have been installed over Tomahawk Creek to allow animals to cross from pasture to pasture. Hardened stream crossings and 15 permanent watering troughs have also been installed. The families have noticed positive results of their best management practices, including improved herd health, decreased pinkeye and increased weight gain.



2018 Virginia Clean Water Farm Awards
Grand Basin Winners



The annual Virginia Clean Water Farm Awards recognize farmers who implement conservation practices and do their part to preserve water quality. The program is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in partnership with Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Grand Basin winners represent the most exceptional of these awardees. One winner is selected from each of Virginia's 10 river drainage basins. The winners' conservation practices and dedication to protecting natural resources make them role models for producers across the state.

We hope you enjoy reading about these exemplary farms and the people who own and manage them. Many thanks to district staff members who made this another outstanding year for the Clean Water Farm Awards.

Big Sandy and Tennessee Rivers
Seth and Courtney Umbarger, Laurel Springs Farm

Nominated by the Evergreen Soil and Water Conservation District



The Umbargers transitioned their dairy farm to an all-natural beef operation in 2004. As their farming goals have changed over time, so have their conservation goals. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Umbargers installed a covered heavy-use area with attached solid-waste storage facility and nearly 4,000 feet of animal trails and walkways. They have put

275 acres into nutrient management and replanted 2.2 acres of eroded hillsides. They've fenced cattle out of 42 acres of riparian areas and woods, which has curbed erosion and improved woodland habitat. By installing 14,000 feet of cross-fencing and 18 watering troughs, they were able to exclude cattle from all surface waters that run through the property. The Umbargers are vocal proponents of "farm-to-table" agriculture through their farm store and many educational endeavors in the community.

Chowan River
Richard T. Hite Jr., Hite Farming LLC

Nominated by the Southside Soil and Water Conservation District



A lifelong farmer, Richard Hite partners with many agencies on practices to improve his 1,000-acre operation. He was one of the first farmers in Lunenburg County to adopt a resource management plan. His 400 acres of soybeans are no-till planted with a no-till rye cover crop that follows the harvest. The farm also produces 125 acres

of tobacco as well as 25 acres of organic tobacco. The tobacco crop has a no-till wheat cover crop that follows the tobacco harvest. Crop fields have sod waterways to reduce soil erosion and grass field borders to catch any excess nutrients and detached soil. Crop fields are under a nutrient management plan, and Hite uses precision spraying to rid the fields of pests that would potentially damage his crops.

Coastal

David L. Long, Long Grain and Livestock

Nominated by the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District



David Long’s 2,000-acre operation is diverse and includes cotton, corn, wheat, soybeans and potatoes. Reducing runoff into local waterways is essential to his production. He is a regular participant in annual cover crop programs, and all of his cropland is under a nutrient management plan. He is working toward

certification of a resource management plan on 670 acres. Through a grant obtained by the district, 2,300 feet of buffers on Long’s farmland were found to be in compliance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. He maintains nine irrigation ponds to water crops in times of drought, and a minimum 15-foot buffer around pond edges enables native plants to thrive and filters additional runoff. In 2014, he established a 2.3-acre pollinator habitat and plans to plant an additional 9 acres.

James River

Mike and Ashley McMahon, Magnolia Farm

Nominated by the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District



When the McMahons purchased their farm in 2014, it had serious erosion problems. Cattle had been allowed free range of gullies, areas of bare soil, springs and spring-fed streams. The McMahons have spent the last four years implementing best management practices in an effort to transform highly degraded, mismanaged land

into a working farm that prioritizes conservation and productivity. Today, livestock are completely excluded from all waterways. A combination of hardwoods and pines have been planted to stabilize eroded slopes. The McMahons run 25 cows and 70 sheep through a rotational grazing system, allowing each paddock to rest for three to four weeks. They use spent sawdust from their oyster mushroom operation to fill in ruts and gullies, which enhances and secures the soil over time. Current projects include the planting of 3 acres of apples and 200 native paw-paw trees.

New-Yadkin River

Sharitz Family, Sharitz Dairy Farm

Nominated by the Big Walker Soil and Water Conservation District



The Sharitz Family farm dates back to the mid-1800s. Different generations have noted how erosion affected the land. No-till farming was implemented in the 1960s, and the farm hasn’t been plowed since. In 2016, the Sharitzes inquired about programs for fencing and alternative water sources, with a desire to protect herd health

and Reed Creek, the local source of drinking water. They installed 8,300 feet of fence to exclude livestock from the creek and created 31 acres of riparian forest buffer. An additional 20,000 feet of cross-fencing was installed, along with 7,100 feet of water pipe and seven new watering facilities. The Sharitzes’ 250 acres of grazeable land has been converted into seven paddocks, while the remaining cropland was converted to permanent pasture and hayland. As a result, pastures are lush with valuable grasses, weeds have diminished and streambanks are healing from erosion.

Potomac River

Jay and Sonja Yankey, Yankey Farms

Nominated by the Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District



The conservation of soil and water resources has been a cornerstone of the management of Yankey Farms since its beginning in the early 2000s. The Yankeys maintain approximately 15 beef stocker steers and farm 111 acres of traditional row crops and 9 acres of mixed fresh market vegetables. They have been on the forefront of no-till planting

and use cover intercropping and organic mulch for soil conservation. The entire farm is managed following a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plan. In 2017, the Yankeys completed a stream exclusion and rotational grazing project that excludes livestock from all surface waters. The project created 4 acres of buffer and protects 4,650 feet of Kettle Run streambank. In addition, the Yankeys contribute to environmental and agricultural education through farm tours and other events in the community.

Rappahannock River

William M. and Mary S.T. Alphin Family Limited Partnership, Rillhurst Farm

Nominated by the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District



Rillhurst Farm in Culpeper County dates back to 1749 and has been in the Alphin family for 11 generations. They have worked to protect several tributaries of Mountain Run, which is the water supply for the town of Culpeper. The 550-acre farm is mainly a cow-calf operation. Hardened stream crossings have been installed to help facilitate a 29-pasture rotational grazing system. More than 35,200 feet of streambank

and a large lake have been protected with stream-exclusion fencing. Cattle drink from 22 permanent pressurized watering troughs in the pastures. Buffers are a minimum 50 feet on both sides of the streams and total just under 80 acres. Since implementing best management practices, the family has noticed improved herd health and better clarity in two ponds on the property. The Alphin family is an example to other farmers in the county and the broader agricultural community.

Roanoke River

The Thurman and Furrow Families, Lazy Acres Angus

Nominated by the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District



Lazy Acres Angus is owned and operated by two families who are working to pass their knowledge, work ethic and love for the land on to the next generation. Their focus is to promote quality genetics in the herd in order to have cattle that are healthier and better producers. Working with the district, they installed 15,000 feet of stream-exclusion fencing

and created 12 acres of riparian buffer. They also installed alternative watering systems and cross-fencing to allow for rotational grazing. On rented land, they use poly-wire for the same effect because they have seen the beneficial results from rotating. The families have devoted themselves to being involved in the local agricultural community, encouraging their neighbors to participate in conservation programs and opening their property to groups such as the Future Farmers of America and Ferrum College classes.