

2019 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–Tennessee Rivers

Adam A. Wilson, Wilson Farm LLC

Nominated by Holston River Soil and Water Conservation District



Adam A. Wilson is dedicated to protecting the environment while maintaining a productive and profitable beef operation. He has participated in several conservation programs through the years, most notably the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, to improve conditions on the 1,200 acres he farms in various locations in

Washington County. This includes four wells, three stream crossings, 23 watering troughs, 33 acres of tree plantings, more than 23,300 feet of waterline and more than 17,700 feet of fence. Mr. Wilson has protected 4 miles of streambank and created 30 acres of riparian buffers. While cost-share programs provided the incentive to initiate many of the changes on the farm, it is the Wilsons' commitment to conservation that keeps all systems functioning on a farm of this size.

Chowan River

Mark Palmer, West Wind Farm

Nominated by Southside Soil and Water Conservation District



Mark Palmer is a longtime farmer and conservationist. In 1981, he established West Wind Farm in Lunenburg County and today raises cattle and crops on the 313-acre farm. Cattle are excluded from 4,000 feet of stream and rotate among seven pastures. Pastures are dragged for manure distribution, and feed troughs are rotated to prevent disease and erosion.

Seventy-five acres of cropland are planted with cover crops, and sod waterways and buffers carry excess water and trap loose sediment that borders woods, roads and irrigation ponds. Grain crops are planted with a no-till drill. Mr. Palmer also manages 145 acres of planted pines and hardwoods for wildlife and timber use. This year, he celebrates 31 years of service to the Southside SWCD Board of Directors. He practices what he preaches and promotes best management practices within the farming community.

Coastal

David Rew, Rew Farms Inc.

Nominated by the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District



A native of Onley, Virginia, David Rew grew up helping his uncle on a 600-acre farm. In the 1980s, he took ownership of the farm and grew it into a 3,500-acre operation. Mr. Rew manages the entire acreage with conservation-tillage methods. High levels of crop residue are left on fields, including wheat residue, which he does not

bale in order to maintain high biomass and nutrients in the straw. Each year, more than 700 acres of soybean, oats and barley cover are incorporated into his operation to add soil carbon, reduce nitrogen loss and prevent erosion. Mr. Rew participates regularly in state and federal conservation programs, which have helped result in a model clean-water conservation farm. He recently planted 5 acres of pollinator habitat, and a portion of the area is being monitored as part of a Natural Resources Conservation Service study on plant salt resistance and tolerance.

James River

Taylor and Lois Cole, Scott Hollow Farm

Nominated by Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District



Taylor and Lois run a grass-fed beef operation on 515 acres along the Calfpasture River in Augusta County. The Coles have always had a conservation mindset, and this can be seen in the way they manage their farm. Through state and federal conservation programs, they have fenced off 39,636 feet of streambank and installed over 88 acres of

riparian and wildlife buffers, some as wide as 300 feet. They have protected approximately 4 acres of wetlands through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and most of the farm is permanently protected with two conservation easements. Thirty-five cow-calf pairs graze on 14 paddocks situated on 150 acres. The Coles are looking to further subdivide their paddocks to increase forage production and enhance rotational grazing. They are also in the process of planning a winter feeding facility for when cattle are located in the sacrifice lot over the winter months.

New-Yadkin River

Jessie R. Cox

Nominated by Skyline Soil and Water Conservation District



Jessie Cox sees the value of keeping streams and springs clean for those downstream. He has seen the effects of rotational grazing on overall herd health and increased performance in his calf crop. Working with the district, Mr. Cox has implemented conservation plans on three farms he owns and rents. This

involved fencing off 23,492 feet of stream, which created 25.3 acres of forested riparian buffer and 7.3 acres of herbaceous riparian buffer. Fourteen paddocks were created with four stream crossings, 11 frost-free troughs, two heavy equipment tire troughs and one existing concrete trough. Mr. Cox has been instrumental in encouraging others to do the same as he has done. For instance, he has gotten his two landlords and others in the community to sign up for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program.

Potomac River

Paul House, Kyle House and Stephanie Cornnell, Kettle Wind Farm LLC

Nominated by the Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District



Kettle Wind Farm is a diverse operation founded in 1968 by Paul and Flora House. The current operation consists of row crops and small grains, sod, hay, pasture, and bred heifer dairy cattle on 4,203 acres in Prince William and Fauquier counties. A variety of conservation practices are employed, including no-till

planting, cover crops and precision application of nitrogen and phosphorus. Grassed waterways, field borders and permanent

vegetated strips are maintained. The family has implemented several resource management plans on parts of the farm and is working to implement more. A stream-exclusion with rotational grazing system protects all surface waters on the farm. This created 3.7 acres of buffer and protects 2,400 feet of streambank. The family has also taken an additional 7.3 acres out of production and converted it to buffer, protecting more than 15,000 feet of streambank. Kettle Wind Farm avidly supports environmental and agricultural education through field trips, field days, an annual farm-to-table dinner and other activities too numerous to list.

Rappahannock River

Frank Gillan, Farm Manager, Retreat Farm Produce Co.

Nominated by the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District



Retreat Farm Produce Co. in Orange County consists of 570 acres, which is mostly pasture. It has a history of good stewardship of the land and sound agricultural practices that protect the Rapidan River, a tributary of the Rappahannock. Six pastures are used in a rotational grazing system for 100 head of mainly Angus cattle. In times of abundant forage growth, the pastures are subdivided and strip grazed. This

has led to minimal supplemental winter feeding on the farm. Stream fencing protects 20,000 feet of streambank and three ponds. Buffers total just under 15 acres, and invasive species are actively controlled in the buffer areas. There are also 200 head of sheep that are rotated in pastures, 1,500 chickens and 25 hogs that are rotated behind the sheep to provide parasite and insect control. Mr. Gillan has noticed improved health and weight gain for livestock since implementing conservation practices.

Roanoke River

Henry and Linda Maxey & Hank and Debbie Maxey, Maxey Farms Inc.

Nominated by Pittsylvania Soil and Water Conservation District



Maxey Farms cattle operation consists of 650 cow-calf pairs, 150 replacement heifers and 25 bulls on about 1,900 acres in Pittsylvania County. The farm operates modified rotational grazing on as many as 20 paddocks, as well as alternative watering facilities to make best use of grazing land. The farm

has hardened stream crossings, and the owners ensure that these are properly maintained after heavy rains. A total of 7,250 feet of fencing excludes livestock from streams and creates 150 acres of buffer. Maxey Farms is proactive about addressing natural resource concerns and has always been receptive to the advice of conservation professionals regarding the best way to conserve resources on the farm. The family is also involved in local educational programs, such as the district's Agriculture Awareness Day.

Shenandoah River

Luke and Roberta Heatwole

Nominated by Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District



The Heatwoles maintain a 110-cow dairy along with 25-30 dry cows and 130 heifers in Rockingham County. They also operate two poultry houses. They are conscientious stewards of the land and have made significant efforts over time to manage the entire operation in a way that improves overall environmental quality.

Approximately 40 acres of pasture are divided into 12 permanent loafing lots of varying sizes. Cattle are rotated through as needed to

protect vegetative cover. Animals have access to water troughs in all loafing lots and use concrete and gravel walkways. Manure deposited on the concrete walkways and in feeding areas is scraped into a manure dry stack area. Manure is cleaned out twice a year and applied to crop and pasture land in accordance with a nutrient management plan. Cattle are excluded from both sides of an 1,800-foot section of stream that runs through the property. The poultry operation includes a litter shed where manure is properly stored, and an Eco Drum is used to compost and manage poultry mortality. Cropland is managed using vertical tillage and no-till methods, as well as cover crops.

York River

B. Allen and Brenda Tignor Jr.

Nominated by Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District



The Tignors have operated their family farm in the small community of Tignor, Virginia, since 1970. They have 1,350 acres of cropland, 20 acres of hayland and 60 acres of pasture. They installed their first rotational grazing system through the state cost-share program in 1999 and completed their latest one in 2018. Cattle have been excluded from 7,115 feet of stream, creating more than

67 acres of buffer. Buffers are generally more than 100 feet wide along waterways. Mr. Tignor is a proponent of no-till techniques and cover crops. He manages and split-applies nutrients to cropland so that no more is applied than what the crop can utilize. Beyond being a proponent of state and federal agricultural cost-share programs, Mr. Tignor works closely with district staff to keep nutrient management plans and Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act conservation plans up to date. The Tignors are active members of the community and welcome visitor groups onto the farm for educational programs.

