COVID-19 and Agricultural Flexibility

Farmers are used to dealing with uncertainty – weather is unpredictable, animal health can change quickly, and market forces are outside of an individual’s control. What we’re collectively experiencing in regards to COVID-19 has created levels of uncertainty that most of us have never experienced before. Spring time is typically one of the busiest times for many of us; it’s definitely the case for the Ag Team at the Conservation District. Plans for surveys and BMP installation had to be quickly abandoned, and our focus had to shift to work that could be accomplished remotely.

In times of uncertainty, it’s important to be flexible and understanding of each other. We know that the current crisis has created a lot of strain for many farmers, and we understand that conservation cannot be a top priority for each of you at the moment. We will strive to be understanding of your situation and to be flexible in order to work towards our shared goals. Agriculture is a vital industry, particularly in Chester County. Our goal is to provide our expertise to local producers to ensure that agriculture sustainably thrives for the collective benefit of the county and its citizens; we will adapt so that we continue to work towards this goal. We will continue to work for you because we know you’re continuing to work for all of us.

COVID-19 and Construction Permitting

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic that is temporarily altering life and work as we know it, CCCD has taken our Chapter102 permitting capabilities into the digital environment. As of March 25, 2020, we are accepting digital permit application submissions; for the prior 27 years we only accepted paper copy permit application submissions. The adjustment has had many challenges, but overall it has been a successful transition and seemingly a soft opening for the ultimate move to ePermitting. For more information on how to submit an NPDES permit application to our office please visit chesco.org/conservation.

If you are an NPDES permittee or operator, please reach out to your Resource Conservationist at CCCD to let them know when you are back and working at your NPDES permitted project site so that we know when we can add your site back into our routine inspection routes. The following information is an excerpt about field work, conditions, and expectations from a statement that PA DEP provided:

In recognition of the Governor’s directive to implement social distancing, permittees may, upon temporary or permanent stabilization, cease performing weekly Routine Inspections as otherwise required by their permit. Permittees must continue to conduct other inspections required by their permit, including Post-Storm Event Inspections and Corrective Action Inspections as set forth in their permit.

Required site inspections of permitted activities by permittees are considered critical operational functions and will not be considered to be out of compliance with the Governor’s Order. Permittees and operators are reminded to limit on-site personnel, and in all cases follow social distancing and COVID-19 mitigation guidance provided by the PA Department of Health and CDC.

The cessation of Routine Inspections as set forth herein is not a limitation of, or defense to, liability for injury to private property or invasion of personal rights. Permittees must continue to comply with all other permit terms and conditions, including, but not limited to, the requirement to take immediate action to restore, repair, or replace the BMP or to provide an alternative method of treatment upon reduction, loss, or failure of any BMP.
NPDES Permitting Updates Presentation

In December 2019, PA DEP unveiled the new PAG-02 General NPDES Permit for Discharges of Stormwater Associated with Construction Activities (“NPDES Construction Stormwater”). This release included a major overhaul of the existing applications, checklists, and related forms for the PAG-02 General Permit and Individual NPDES Permits. In response to these significant changes, Urban Team Leader Gordon Roscovich and District Engineer Molly Deger gave a presentation on February 20, 2020 to a full room of 180 design professionals at a facility outside of Coatesville, PA. The venue and logistics of the presentation were coordinated by Chester County Engineers, a local membership-based organization, who agreed to host an open forum for CCCD to give a 2.5 hour presentation on the updates. Survey responses were positive and the common theme for improvement was for the presentation to be longer and to do a follow-up in six months with lessons learned and/or updates at that time.

A PDF of the power point slides is available on CCCD’s website. All of the most up-to-date resources for the NPDES Construction Stormwater program are available on PA DEP’s E&S Resources website.

Three Pollution Control Projects Funded in Chester County

29 County Conservation Districts Received Funding to Promote Water Pollution Prevention Strategies across Pennsylvania

Chester County Conservation District recently received $4,250.00 for several Manure Management Workshops throughout the county, two Agriculture Field Days for equine and mushroom operations, and a Municipal Stormwater Workshop within the Christina Basin.

“The projects funded through this mini-grant program will reach many of our county’s citizens. Our District staff will educate a variety of audiences on actions they can take every day to improve water quality,” said Chris Strohmaier, Managing Director.

Advertisement for the projects will tentatively begin in July. The District expects to start the workshops and field days later this summer, as permissible.

Statewide, forty-one projects will be funded in twenty-nine counties. Projects include agricultural field days, streamside landowner workshops, forestry workshops, homeowner workshops, and more. For a complete listing of awarded projects, visit https://tinyurl.com/2020-21NPS.

For more information about the Chester County Conservation District or its planned projects, visit www.chesco.org/conservation or call (610) 925-4920 x115. Chester County Conservation District promotes the sustainable use of natural resources through educational and technical assistance.

Financial and other support for this project is provided by the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. (PACD) through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For more information about PACD, visit www.pacd.org.
Paperwork, Paperwork, Paperwork!

Being housebound has had a lot of us getting a head start on spring cleaning and organizing. There is no better time to look through your farm documents, and make sure you are up to date and in compliance!

Plans differ from farm to farm depending on what kind of operation you have. Some farms require more complex, professionally written plans. While others have simpler plans, written by the farmers themselves. All plans are for the benefit of the farmer, and can be tailored to meet the needs of their operation specifically.

So, what are these plans?

- **A Manure Management Plan** (MMP) – documents the proper storage and land application of animal manure and agricultural process wastewater.
- **A Nutrient Management Plan** (NMP) – balances soil nutrient inputs with crop requirements. Describes how major plant nutrients will be managed.
- **An Agricultural Erosion and Sediment Control Plan** (Ag E&S Plan) – documents current and planned best management practices to reduce the erosion and runoff from plowing/tilling activities and animal barnyard/high traffic areas.
- **A Conservation Plan** – a tool designed to help better manage the natural resources on your farm.

How do I get these plans?

- **MMPs** can be written by the landowner or operator. Chester County Conservation District (CCCD) regularly hosts Manure Management Workshops, where county employees assist landowners in writing their own plan. CCCD also has workbooks, provided by Penn State Extension, which can be handed out as requested. The online version of the MMP workbook can be found on the Penn State Extension Website. MMPs can also be written by plan consultants.
- **NMPs** are written by professional, certified plan writers. Many of these plan writers work for agronomic consulting firms. CCCD has a list of plan consultants, which can be provided upon request.
- **Ag E&S Plans** are another type of plan that can be written by the operator. Unfortunately, at this time, there is no paper version of this plan. This plan can only be written online, via paonestop.psu.edu. Ag E&S Plans can also be written by plan consultants.
- **Conservation Plans** can be written by plan consultants, by an NRCS conservationist, or in house at CCCD.

How do I know what plans are required of me?

- In order to determine whether or not you are in compliance, it is best to contact the CCCD. We can provide you with the necessary tools and information you would need in order to better understand what is required of you. We are always willing to offer assistance in any form.

Paperwork can be a tricky thing, but the conservation district is here to help! If you have any questions about plans, or would like assistance, please contact us at 610-925-4920.
NOTIFICATION:
EMERGENCY LAND APPLICATION OF MILK

The following is taken directly from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection memo, titled "Emergency Land Application of Milk Under COVID-19 Temporary Suspension, April 17, 2020." For more information, please visit https://extension.psu.edu/programs/nutrient-management/news/2020/on-farm-disposal-of-bulk-waste-milk.

Pursuant to the Temporary Suspension of certain manure and waste land application regulations authorized by Governor Wolf on April 17, 2020, the following guidelines and notices should be followed by dairy operations needing to address the need to manage excess milk as a result of market and supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 emergency. These limited guidelines implementing the Temporary Suspension expire on June 1, 2020 at which time, the Temporary Suspension will terminate and any land application of milk cannot be done unless in compliance with an existing Manure Management Plan (MMP) or Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) which complies with applicable regulatory requirements. If the COVID-19 emergency’s impact on the milk supply chain ends before June 1, 2020, any land application must be conducted pursuant to an existing and compliant MMP or NMP. Before June 1, 2020, DEP will post a notice on its website reflecting either termination or extension of the Temporary Suspension.

Land application of milk not currently authorized in an NMP or MMP is a temporary solution to a critical constant supply and market demand disconnect situation caused by the COVID-19 emergency. If land application outside of an approved NMP or developed MMP can be avoided, it should be avoided.

Farms with excess milk should follow the guidelines in this Memorandum and consider the following:

- Create and maintain records, which is a requirement for conducting the activities described herein;
- Move milk to other on-site or nearby storage facilities, if possible;
- Utilize milk as animal feed, under permit or by waiver from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at (717) 772-5215;
- Consider other means of disposal, including seeking authorization to discharge all or some produced milk to a wastewater treatment facility until demand can be connected to supply in the supply chain.

If land application is determined to be the necessary option for a dairy producer:

- Move excess milk to a manure storage facility, if feasible, maximizing available storage to allow for better land application planning and timing;
- Obtain the necessary equipment to pump the excess milk into a liquid manure spreader;
- Give preference and priority to land application of a mixture of manure and excess milk, wherever possible;
- Identify fields best suited for the land application, considering the nutrient content and other properties of the liquid milk;
- Review and adhere to the specific guidelines . . . including the maximum application charts and setback requirements.
A Farm as an Ecosystem

The idea of viewing a farm as an ecosystem is not a novel thought. This concept has been written about in numerous books, articles, and other literary sources over the years. The idea is fairly straightforward. An ecosystem, much like a farm, is made up of a multitude of biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) resources that are all deeply interconnected in the way they influence one another. No one factor can be changed without considering the effect that it will have on the others. Perhaps one of the most powerful of these resources to consider is the human resource. In present time, it is hard to deny that humans have an impact on every ecosystem on the planet, whether directly or indirectly. We have the ability to either positively or negatively affect an ecosystem in a way that is unprecedented by any of the other contributing factors. But, with great power, comes great responsibility; possibly one of the most important similarities between an ecosystem and a farm is the responsibility we have to manage them properly.

The parallelism between human management of an ecosystem and a farm is quite simple to see. We can make changes to the biotic or abiotic factors in order for that system to be more suitable for its inhabitants, better represent a natural system, better serve our own agenda, or any combination of purposes. In a freshwater stream ecosystem this could be managing the habitat for and stocking trout. We manipulate the ecosystem to provide a suitable home for the fish which can provide recreational fishing opportunities or food to the community. In the same way a farmer might manage his field with a cover crop in the fall and winter. This not only provides the potential of harvesting a crop, such as wheat, in the spring, but also serves to hold the soil and nutrients in place for the next planting. Not only does this promote a healthier, more productive farm ecosystem, but it could also benefit the nearby freshwater stream ecosystem by keeping sediment and nutrients from running down slope into the water, which degrades the trout habitat that we worked so hard to improve. It’s clear that not only do all factors in an ecosystem affect one another, but they can spill over into their neighboring systems and influence them in ways that are not always recognized if only thought of as an isolated system.

This sense of interconnection and interdependence within and between systems is so important when considering how to manage an ecosystem or, in our case, a farm. The Agricultural Team at the CCCD works with and around farm ecosystems with this kinship in mind. Nothing in nature is isolated, therefore, it cannot be managed with an isolated mindset. If we can manage a farm in a way that benefits the biotic, abiotic, and, of course, human resources in and around the farm, then we can make a notable impact on our community, our environment, and our own wellbeing. Managing a farm or ecosystem with an interconnected mindset is essential if we intend preserve our natural resources, lifestyles, and cultures for generations to come.
Conservation Tips for…

Your Small Pasture

CONSERVATION GOAL: Manage animals in a healthy environment by keeping mud (soil erosion) and manure (nutrients and bacteria) out of ground water and surface water, ultimately keeping from entering the stream!

- Create a heavy use area around the shelter, near the gate, or in a high and dry location to use when weather and pasture conditions are not ideal for grazing
  - Use geotextile fabric, 6 inch stone base and stone dust top coat
  - Consider using plastic grid or rubber mats as an alternative
  - Stabilize gate areas too!
  - Use heavy use area and hay feeder to allow turnout from stall even in wet conditions
- Redirect upslope water flowing through the pasture or heavy use area
  - Eliminate any extra water coming from above the pasture or heavy use area to allow quickest drying and reduce mud
- Heavy use area can contain a stabilized feeding area with hay rack or some other form of hay feeder, preferably covered to not waste hay, or install hay rack in shed
  - Use stone or rubber mats for easy clean up
- Remove manure as often as possible from shed, heavy use area, and pasture
  - Create a composting manure stacking pad with solid bottom on high ground away from water ways and streams to keep pastures clean
- Confine animals when the ground is wet to avoid creating more mud and easily uprooting grass
  - Use stalls, heavy use areas, or temporary round pen that can be moved regularly to good grass areas for grazing to allow pasture time to dry
- Limit number of animals on small acres
  - Too many animals on too small a space creates manure and erosion issue if not managed very intensively
- If stream is in pasture: fence out streams to stop streambank degradation and erosion, plant a buffer, and install a stabilized stream crossing
  - Keep animals, manure, and soil out of the stream except for stabilized crossings
- If stream is near pasture: improve stream side buffer with vegetation, trees and shrubs
  - These all work to filter and clean runoff before it reaches the stream
- Split the pasture into sections and rotate!
- Consider off site pasture during certain seasons to allow pasture to regenerate
- Do soil tests and follow recommendations to maximize grass growing potential
- Do what you can to keep grass at least 3 inches in height to protect ground water and surface water quality
  - Grass uses nutrients from manure AND slows water velocity to allow soil particles to drop out and not reach the stream
- Write your Manure Management Plan! Ask the CCCD for a copy of DEP’s Manure Management Manual and Plan Workbook!
- Learn more about Conservation Plans/Ag E&S Plans, and if you need one!
- Call the Chester County Conservation District for a site visit and recommendations!
Springtime Pastures

“The pastures always look their worst when coming out of winter.” We’ve all heard it. Some of us have even said it. And we’ve definitely seen it.

Every year, during the wet, non-germinating late fall and winter months, land that is used for confinement of a population of animals is “sacrificed.” Because it is wet and grasses and other vegetation aren’t growing, populations of animals essentially till the land with their traffic, all while depositing nutrients that aren’t able to be readily utilized for uptake by plants. These deposited nutrients and disturbed land are ripe and available for transport.

While it is understandable that some types of farms and operations need outdoor access during winter months for their animals, that access should not be free, unrestricted access. According to Chapter 91 of PA’s Manure Management Regulations, a key point in the definition of pastures is to “maintain 3 inches of dense vegetation”. It is allowable for portions of your pastures to not meet this criteria, but if none of your pastures meet this criteria, or if areas that do not meet are close to sensitive resources (wells, streams, lakes, sinkholes), it is an issue.

The issue revolves around connection. The whole idea of manure management regulations is to consider sources of pollutants, consider sensitive resources to be protected, and ensure a disconnection between the two.

Sources of sediment and manure will exist, and through management and physical best management practices, the potential for them to affect clean water resources should be minimized, if not eliminated.

If you’ve got a pasture that “looks it’s worst coming out of winter”, depending on its size and/or location, it may not even be a pasture, but an animal concentration area (ACA) and a source of nutrient and sediment pollution adversely affecting our local water quality.

Not sure? Consider contacting your local Conservation District or NRCS office for assistance in evaluating such circumstances, developing solutions, and finding resources to get them implemented.

Blast from the Past!

Have you had conservation work done in the past? Did you have a waterway put in several years ago? How about a diversion or even a manure tank? Did you have the Conservation District help you with any funding? If not, did we help with the technical aspects of it, a survey and design? If you’ve answered yes to any of these questions, then I would like to have a conversation with you.

I’m Gaye Lynn Criswell, and I’m the Outreach Coordinator for Chester County Conservation District. My purpose is to reach back to your past practices and discuss with you what has been a success and what needs to be tweaked. Since January, I’ve visited several of you, and I’m planning on who I’d like to speak with soon. Yes, I set up appointments and bring as much information along as I can, including maps showing the practices that you have in place. What do you need now? What works for you? Are there changes to your management style? These are some of the topics we discuss together. If you want, we walk out to the field or the barnyard so that you can show me your vision or your challenges. I listen to your needs.

Once I get back to the office, I make sure that you are contacted by someone that can give you technical or program funding assistance. So, if you receive a letter or phone call from me, let me assure you, I am just seeing how you and your operation are doing and hoping that you will have me over for a visit to reconnect with your past practices to make them even better for your farm.
Dirt & Gravel Low Volume Roads Program

The purpose of the Dirt and Gravel Low Volume Road Program is to provide funding to municipalities for the improvement and maintenance of unpaved roads, and now paved roads that have traffic volume of 500 cars or less, with the goal of protecting water quality.

Below you will find a snapshot of four of our most recently contracted projects that will be improving water quality across the county. Please visit our website at [http://www.chesco.org/1992/Dirt-Gravel-Low-Volume-Road](http://www.chesco.org/1992/Dirt-Gravel-Low-Volume-Road) for more detailed information on our ever growing program.

- **West Marlborough Township - Tapeworm Road**: A dirt and gravel road near a tributary to the West Branch of the Brandywine that includes road bank improvements, stormwater improvements; the road base will be improved and stabilized, and two improved pipe crossings will be installed. Water quality to the lower West Branch of the Brandywine will be greatly improved. Grant allowance $185,792.00

- **Newlin Township – Kelsall Road**: A dirt and gravel road along a tributary to the West Branch of the Brandywine that includes ditch improvements to the ditches, road bank, road base, stormwater handling, and stream crossings that will greatly benefit water quality and prevent future stream scour and bank erosion. Grant allowance $202,803.10

- **West Brandywine Township – Germany Hollow Road**: A low volume road near a tributary to Indian Run Creek that includes stormwater improvements and a stream crossing improvement in the form of a new arch culvert pipe and concrete walls to replace the failing, undersized culvert that had caved in and temporarily closed Germany Hollow Road. Grant allowance $51,047.25

- **West Chester Borough – Greenview Alley**: A low volume road close to a tributary to Goose Creek that includes new inlets, bio swales, infiltration trenches, and an in kind alley re-pave. These improvements will restore water quality to a large section of Goose Creek, as well as improve the condition of Greenview Alley. Grant allowance $120,270.00

In addition to the above approved projects, there are 2 projects from 2018 that have started, and there are several projects being prepared for submission for approval in 2020. In 2019 we have seen several new municipalities jump on board the program in an effort to improve water quality to their streams.
Reducing Water Usage in Your Home

While water conservation reminders may make some people roll their eyes at the dullness or the need for expensive purchases, conserving water can also be in the form of a fun and creative family activity. We need, now more than ever, creative solutions to save our most valuable natural resource. For example, a reward system could be set up with family and friends as a motivator to practice conservation techniques. Creating strategies to improve water management in your home is a great way for you to make a difference. The frequency of (and need for) handwashing has increased substantially due to the current crisis. According to the CDC, simply turning the tap off while lathering your hands with soap can save water from being wasted and can improve your water bill. The table below presents tips to use in each aspect of your home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips and Ideas to Conserve Water in your House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitchen</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider investing in a high-efficiency dishwasher when replacing your appliances.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compost instead of running the garbage disposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save as much usable water as possible. Collect the water from rinsing fruits/vegetables to water your plants instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run the dishwasher only when it is full.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bathroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If your faucets do not already have one, buy an aerator (an attachment that reduces the volume of water flowing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If your toilet can support one, consider getting a tank bank which reduces the amount of water your toilet tank is using.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check for leaks. One easy way to test if your toilet has water leaks is to add a drop of food coloring to the toilet tank, wait 20 minutes, and if there is color in the bowl, there is a leak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider buying a high-efficiency toilet when it is time to replace your older model.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the number of manufactured and processed goods you buy. For example, to manufacture a new pair of jeans, the process takes thousands of gallons of water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run only full loads of laundry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider investing in a high-efficiency washing machine.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outdoors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid doing any irrigation or watering of your lawn when it is windy, as it leads to increased evaporation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For farmers, inspect your irrigation systems for leaks or signs of runoff to make sure no agricultural water is being lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweep driveway instead of hosing it down.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* It is important that the appliance have a WaterSense label which means the product meets EPA specifications and saves on energy usage.

An average individual can save up to 25 gallons per day by using water-saving techniques indoors. Remember that every drop saved is a penny in the bank. Simply creating awareness of our water usage can make a significant impact on our environment.
Invasive Species: Why You Should Care and How to Help

It is a common misconception that all non-native organisms are considered invasive species. In fact, some non-native species have valuable agricultural and medicinal uses. They are only considered invasive when they cause ecological or economic harm to their environment. The reason that this can become such a big issue is because humans are moving plant species to different regions at a much faster rate than the plants would spread through natural expansion. Most invasive species outcompete native organisms for limited resources and are capable of altering entire habitats. Not only do invasive plants degrade the quality of water and soil, but the further they spread, the more expensive it is to control them. Invasive plants have the ability to displace and kill off native species in pastures and cropland. Invasive pests can also cause major damage to a crop yield, resulting in economic loss.

Lists of invasive plant species in Chester County can be found through resources like the Brandywine Conservancy, municipality ordinances, or PA DCNR. A few commonly-seen invasive species present in Chester County include garlic mustard (shown in the photo), tree-of-heaven (correlated with the spotted lanternfly), Norway maple, Canada thistle, and mile-a-minute weed.

There are several ways homeowners can take action to help control invasive species in Chester County. The easiest thing to do is to take precautions such as cleaning your boots before hiking in a new area. This prevents accidental transporting of non-native organisms into a different habitat. It is also important to eliminate the introduction of non-native species like exotic houseplants or aquarium pets into the outside environment. Buying native species, especially for landscaping purposes, is an effective way to reduce the spread of invasive species. It is important to be educated on native alternatives and have a conversation with your landscaper about the types of species you want on your property.

Lastly, early detection and rapid response is key to limiting Chester County’s invasive species and reducing the cost of controls. It is crucial to first familiarize yourself with plant species, what to look for, and how to dispose of invasive species properly if you choose to remove plants from your property on your own. A great way to have an impact is to volunteer with organizations and conservancies that hold invasive plant management projects. There are volunteer days dedicated to manually removing invasive plants, and even pests like the spotted lanternfly, in local parks and wildlife areas. You can report sightings to the Chester County Penn State Extension Office and find more information through DCNR and PA Department of Agriculture.
Spotted lanternflies are an invasive species threatening several industries in Chester County, including agriculture and horticulture. Penn State Extension has an abundance of information about what you can do to stop the spread of Spotted Lanternfly on their website. Go to https://extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly for more information.

Spotted Lanternflies lay their eggs on the bark of trees and other smooth surfaces in the fall. Around the beginning of May, the first instar nymphs emerge from the egg masses and begin drawing nutrients from nearby plants. Each egg mass contains 20 to 50 individual eggs, so scraping one egg mass is much easier than chasing down 20 to 50 little nymphs.

While many of us are stuck at home due to COVID-19, it is an opportunity to check our trees, firewood, lawn furniture, and other outdoor items for egg masses. Normally we recommend that if you see them, scrape them off and put the scraped mass into a plastic bag with rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer. However, since rubbing alcohol and hand sanitizer are scarce and vital resources right now, use a scraper card or putty knife to squish the egg masses. This method is not officially approved by any agency, but by obliterating the egg mass and the eggs within, you will be able to tell that they have no chance of survival.

The image below, from Penn State, shows the life cycle of the spotted lanternfly life cycle.
The Back 40
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