Harvest Time

Conservation Planning and Implementation of Conservation Practices

Now is the time to start planning the things you want to make happen tomorrow.

All it took was one week. Within one week the temperatures dropped during the day and nice cool evenings are ushering in the fall weather. Some trees are even starting to change color already in early September! Summer may have seemed very different this year for many of us, but harvest time is here as long as we planted the seeds.

These sunflowers were planted at the same time as the double-crop soybeans after winter wheat. It took some planning and forethought to make it happen, but we are all reaping the benefits! They are bringing joy to the neighbors and passersby on the road; the birds, bees, and insects are just loving it!

It all takes planning. Farming takes an infinite amount of planning. Investing time and money into making improvements to your farmstead, barnyard, property, farmland, crop rotation, farm equipment, streams, pastures, forest land, and any farming operation takes lots and lots of planning. It also takes time. A Conservation Plan is one of the first steps in making short term fixes, and long term improvements to a property, and in getting the financial and technical assistance to make it all happen!

Making the call to the Chester County Conservation District is like planting the seed today for any soil or manure problem you may be having, or for any changes and improvements you would like to see happen in the future through programs or assistance available through working with the Conservation District. The process takes time, and now is the time to plant the seed.

Striving for success without hard work is like trying to harvest where you haven’t planted. –David Bly
If your grass looks like most of the turf grass in Chester County, your lawn is most likely composed of cool season grasses whose roots only extend about three inches below the soil surface. While cool season grasses are nice to walk on in bare feet or have a badminton match on, they score very low in the infiltration and evapotranspiration departments. In other words, rain water just sits on top of the lawn or quickly runs off. If you would like to reduce ponding on your property, decrease runoff coming off of your property, or improve water quality by making changes on your property, you have options!

Warm season grasses are a great place to start. They have deep root systems which provide increased infiltration and soil stabilization, helping to reduce soil erosion, ponding, and runoff. They also have improved evapotranspiration as compared to cool season grasses. They grow in bunches, and can provide texture to the landscape. There are a handful of native and popular warm season grasses which can be ordered from most local nurseries. Big bluestem, little bluestem, indiangrass, and switchgrass are all native to North America and are considered the most prominent species of the tallgrass prairie. They each provide bird habitat and have autumn appeal. Warm season grasses can be planted in fields, lawns, and gardens. They work best on dry and sunny sites.

**Pesky Wet Spots**

Do you have a spot on your property that you cannot mow during the rainy season because it’s too soggy? Your best bet is to plant a tree there to take up that water. If you have overhead wires, underground utilities, or other site restrictions, it might not be appropriate to plant a tree. In those cases, there are other options – either shrubs or herbaceous plants.

Is it a sunny wet spot? Eastern white pine, tuliptree, red maple, white oak, and eastern hemlock are large trees that thrive on sunny and wet sites. A smaller tree that will do well in these conditions is a serviceberry, also known as shadbush. If you are looking for something in the 5-10 foot range, with robust root systems to hold the soil in place and increase infiltration and evapotranspiration, look no further than Pennsylvania native shrubs. Summersweet, red-osier dogwood, winterberry, red chokeberry, and ninebark are a few that would thrive in sunny and wet conditions. Perhaps woody vegetation just isn’t for you. While herbaceous plants don’t have as strong of roots and aren’t quite as good at taking up the water as trees and shrubs, they can still provide major improvements from cool season grasses found in lawns. Consider plants such as bee-balm, wild blue phlox, swamp milkweed, joe-pye-weed, gaura, oxeye sunflower, great blue lobelia, mountain mints, New England aster, New York ironweed, and culver’s root.

Is the wet spot on your lawn in a shady area? Trees suited for these conditions are sugar maple, river birch, flowering dogwood, and pin oak. Appropriate shrubs are smooth alder, pagoda dogwood, wild hydrangea, spicebush, and rosebay (rhododendron). Herbaceous perennial plants suited for shady and wet conditions are jack-in-the-pulpit, wild ginger, dutchman’s breeches, cardinal flower, golden ragwort, Jacob’s ladder, and foamflower. Native ferns which would also be appropriate include maidenhair fern, wood ferns, cinnamon fern, interrupted fern, and Christmas fern.


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**Crossword Puzzle**

- **ACROSS:**
  1. A group is called a flock, a group of females is called a brood, a group of young is called a clutch. Used for meat and eggs.
  5. A group is called a rafter. Both farm raised and wild locally. Used for their meat, which is popular on a certain fall holiday.
  6. A group is called a tribe or a trip. Used for milk and meat. Young are called kids.
  7. A group is called a flock. Widely used for their fleece, but also used for their meat and milk.
  9. A group can be called a paddling, maybe because they are excellent swimmers.Used for their meat and eggs.

- **DOWN:**
  2. A group is called a team. Used for recreation and sport. Essential to the mushroom industry.
  3. A group is called a heard. Used for milk and meat.
  4. A group is called a herd. Used for their meat and milk.
  8. A group is called a passal or a team. It is used for meat and is eaten on New Year’s for good luck.
Backyard Composting

♦ As Summer transitions into fall, it is the perfect time to consider starting or jumpstarting your backyard compost pile.

♦ Compost is a vital tool in the farmer or gardener’s toolbox. Compost is made from organic wastes like coffee grounds, garden trimmings, paper, grass clippings, fallen leaves, straw, kitchen scraps and more. It is a very effective way to recycle while naturally creating a valuable byproduct that can help to grow healthy plants.

To start composting you will need four basic components:

1) Water  2) Oxygen  3) Nitrogen  4) Carbon

Water is needed for maintaining microbial life in the compost pile, while oxygen, i.e. aeration, helps to maintains aerobic conditions. Nitrogen rich materials include grass clipping, coffee grinds, as well as other kitchen scraps. Carbon rich materials are referred to as the “browns”, for example leaves, newspaper, and wood chips. The ideal ratio for a well-balanced compost pile is 2:1 green to brown and keeping the pile wet similar to the consistency of a rung-out sponge will ensure active decomposition.

Finished compost can be used as a soil amendment, mulch, lawn topdressing, potting mix, and worked back into the garden.

For more information or tips on composting visit the Chester County Solid Waste Authority website at www.chestercountyswa.org or contact the Chester County Conservation District.

Why should pregnant cattle walk stairs? It gives them stronger calves!

The farmer was late in getting the cows out in field one night. He told them “It’s pasture bedtime.”

NOTICE - New Grant Opportunity:

CCCD is proud to announce its newest grant for agricultural best management practices in the Delaware Watershed!

CCCD recently received a Cornerstone Grant award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This grant will provide operation and maintenance education, technical assistance, and financial assistance for previously installed agricultural best management practices (BMPs) within the focus areas of the Delaware River Watershed Initiative Clusters. Our goal is to implement or repair BMPs such as grassed waterways and roof runoff structures on an estimated 12 farms. If you are interested in improving your existing practices or require assistance with stormwater or manure management, please give us a call at (610) 925-4920 x115 for a consultation!
Conservation at its Roots

The art and science of conservation has seen some drastic changes over the years. From the use of high tech survey equipment and computer modeling to design state of the art manure handling facilities and stormwater control practices; to using drones to monitor field health; to highly discriminatory soil tests quantifying the properties of what lies beneath our feet; advances in technology and critical thinking have empowered conservationists and landowners to better understand and address resource concerns around the globe. Yet, among all these advancements there are some aspects of conservation that have remained just as critical today as they were even before conservation's conception. One of these timeless elements of conservation that serves as an interface between plants, soil, and water is root zones.

Plant roots and the subsurface ecosystem that they foster serve interdisciplinary roles in soil conservation and health, water quality, and plant growth. Of course, the primary function of plant roots is to provide a sort of underground scaffolding to hold the plant in place while providing uptake of water, oxygen, and nutrients from the surrounding soil. What is often overlooked, however, is how this function impacts the ecosystem both above and below the Earth’s surface. A healthy root zone supports other beneficial soil organisms such as worms, beetles, isopods, bacteria, and mycorrhizae fungi that all work in synergy with the roots to promote healthy soil systems. Soil organisms help break down and decompose organic matter to provide nutrients for more plant life to grow. Channels called biopores formed by roots and invertebrates allows water to infiltrate the soil and be held for uptake and air to be transported through the soil to facilitate plant growth. From an agricultural perspective this reduces runoff and erosion. This means the productive topsoil and often expensive nutrients stay in place for the next growing season. From a water quality standpoint, healthy root systems prevent excess nutrients and sediments from making their way into waterways carried by runoff. Roots also help to hold stream banks in place and facilitate infiltration and uptake during rain events to mitigate flooding and help further keep the streams clean.

Roots play a major role in conservation and in our interaction with the environment here on planet Earth. With a better understanding of the functions that roots serve in the environment, it becomes clear why conservation practices such as cover crops, vegetated buffers, and stormwater management practices in disturbed areas are crucial to the environment, and sustainable agriculture and urbanization. For more information on the importance of roots, soils health, water quality, and all things conservation please feel free to reach out to the CCCD. Conservation is grounded by roots!

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Greetings! Now that summer is in the rearview mirror, it’s time to reflect on any practices you would like to change for your farming operation. Now is a good time to look back on what worked and what did not and to think about how a practice could be improved.

The Chester County Conservation District Outreach Coordinator, Gaye Lynn Criswell, wants to reach back to your past practices and discuss with you what has been a success and what needs to be tweaked. Due to Covid-19, Conservation District employees have had to adjust to a different style of working. Luckily, since we work with you primarily out of doors, she is still able to meet with you and visit with you in person, with a mask, from across the hood of the truck. She is there to talk to you about your conservation concerns and to help improve your farming practices.

So, if you receive a letter from Gaye Lynn, she would like to meet with you at your convenience. Even though social distancing practices will be employed, she will strive to bring you the help that you need for your farming operation. And remember, there is a smile under her mask!
DEP Provides $3.7 Million and Technical Assistance to Help Farmers Plan and Carry Out Projects to Improve Operations, Water Quality in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Harrisburg, PA – Ramping up its agricultural compliance outreach, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) launched two programs in July that provide $3.7 million and technical assistance to help farmers develop and carry out plans of best management practices (BMPs) that can benefit their operations while improving the health of streams and rivers in Pennsylvania’s share of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The Chesapeake Bay Agricultural Inspections Program (CBAIP) Phase 2 provides Conservation Districts in Adams, Chester, and Lancaster Counties with $2.5 million in 2019 Environmental Stewardship Funds and $300,000 in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funding to help farmers, when needed, install the BMP projects specified in their plans to improve water quality. The Agricultural Plan Reimbursement Program has $900,000 available to reimburse farmers across the watershed (which includes all or part of 43 counties) for some of the cost of developing BMP plans.

“Our goal is healthy waters, healthy farms,” said DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell. “We’ve developed programs that provide quick, accessible funding and customized technical assistance to help farmers put BMPs in place that not only meet requirements to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment runoff in local waters, but also can protect their long term survival, by helping them retain cropland, keep soil productive, and profitably manage their nutrients.”

“Pennsylvania farmers have kept food on our tables through good times and bad,” Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding said. “The long-term survival of their farms depends on healthy soil and clean water. These programs are a tangible way for us as a state to support the farmers who feed us and help ensure that they are able to continue feeding us in the future.”

Chesapeake Bay Agricultural Inspections Program Phase 2

Agricultural compliance is one of the top priority initiatives in Pennsylvania’s Chesapeake Bay Phase 3 Watershed Implementation Plan. CBAIP first launched in 2016 and there are two phases of inspections. Phase 1 inspections ensure that farmers have their required manure management and/or erosion and sediment control plans. Phase 2 focuses on progress farmers are making in installing the BMPs specified in the plans. More than 8,150 farms in the watershed have been inspected since CBAIP Phase 1 launched, with 96 percent achieving compliance with planning requirements without need for enforcement action. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires inspection of at least 10 percent of farm acreage in the watershed.

In Phase 2, staff from Lancaster, Chester, and Adams County Conservation District offices will visit some of these farms in their counties to verify that agricultural plans remain consistent with the current conditions of the farm and BMPs specified in the plans are being implemented on schedule. Barnyard runoff controls, fencing, and grassed waterways, terraces, and diversions are examples of typical BMPs.

When needed, the program offers funding to offset the cost of BMPs and helps farmers get them underway quickly. DEP encourages farms in these three counties that were inspected during Phase 1 to reach out to their County Conservation District for more information about this funding program. Lancaster, Chester, and Adams counties were selected for the CBAIP Phase 2 funding program on the basis of their Conservation Districts’ engagement in Phase 1, the availability of technical staff to prioritize and assist with BMP implementation, and the extent of nutrient and sediment runoff on farms in these counties. DEP regional staff will also conduct Phase 2 inspections in other southcentral counties and will refer farmers to their County Conservation Districts and private consultants, as needed, for assistance with installing BMPs.

Farmers may combine DEP funding with Conservation Excellence Grants and Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) tax credits available through the Department of Agriculture, as well as other public grants and private funding.

Agricultural Plan Reimbursement Program

In addition, DEP began the fourth year of its Agricultural Plan Reimbursement Program, which provides farmers across the watershed funding to help with the cost of having a technical expert develop their management plans for manure, nitrogen, or erosion and sediment. Small farmers are especially encouraged to register.

Consultants’ services generally cost from $500 to $1,500 per plan, depending on the size of the farm. Landowners will be repaid the cost of plans developed on or since January 1, 2019. More than one plan may be submitted for total reimbursement of up to a maximum of $6,000. The deadline to register is April 1, 2021. Find more information and register at Agricultural Plan Reimbursement Program. The first three years of the Agricultural Plan Reimbursement Program provided farmers more than $1.5 million for more than 1,900 plans, covering approximately 350,000 acres in the watershed. The program is supported by the Environmental Stewardship Fund and other state funds.
PA Farmers Encouraged to Apply for Conservation Assistance

Pennsylvania agricultural producers and landowners are encouraged to apply for technical and financial assistance to improve and enhance natural resources on their farm and forest land. Funding is available through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program, Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) administered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The first application cutoff date for fiscal year 2021 is October 16, 2020 for AMA, EQIP, and two ongoing RCPP-EQIP projects. In addition, producers who have participated in the Farm Service Agency’s ARC/PLC program and are eligible to participate in the Grasslands Conservation Initiative option under CSP, should file an application by October 16 if they wish to be considered in this application cycle. A signup date for the regular CSP program has not been set, but producers interested in that program should consider filing an application now.

Producers can apply for RCPP-EQIP funding in Chester county, in cooperation with the Chester County Conservation District’s Partnership for Chesapeake Bay Water Quality project. Producers can apply for RCPP-EQIP and for RCPP-ALE in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Perry and York counties with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s Implementing Conservation Practices and Certified Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) on Pennsylvania Preserved Farms RCPP project. RCPP-EQIP projects fund on-farm water quality improvement practices and RCPP-ALE funds agricultural land easements. AMA applications are being accepted from producers in NRCS’s Northeast Pennsylvania area, which includes the counties of Bradford, Carbon, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Juniata, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne Wyoming counties. AMA will fund activities such as high tunnels and irrigation systems.

EQIP assistance is available to help farmers and landowners plan and implement conservation practices to improve water quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations, establish or improve wildlife habitat and achieve other environmental benefits on cropland and pasture, forestland, and associated agricultural land including farmsteads. Popular practices include those that support manure handling and storage systems, such as waste storage structures; soil health improvement, such as cover crops and no till; pasture improvement, such as prescribed grazing and watering systems; forest improvement, such as forest stand improvement; and habitat improvement, such as early successional habitat management. Additionally, NRCS offers special initiatives through EQIP, including:

- On-Farm Energy Initiative: helps producers conserve energy on their operations.
- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative: helps producers install high tunnels designed to extend the growing season into the cold months, increase productivity, keep plants at a steady temperature, and conserve water and energy.
- Organic Initiative: helps producers install conservation practices on certified organic operations or those working toward organic certification.
- Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative: helps landowners establish or improve young forest habitat to benefit the golden-winged warbler, in targeted priority areas.
- National Water Quality Initiative: helps producers in special targeted watersheds in Bedford (Beaver and Upper Yellow Creeks), Berks (Maiden Creek), Dauphin and Lebanon County (Swatara Creek), Mifflin County (Upper Kishacougillias Creek, and Northumberland County (Warrior Run) implement water quality improvement practices.

ALE provides funding to cooperative entities to preserve agricultural land with a focus on preserving prime and statewide important soils. WRE provides funding to private landowners to preserve land for wetland wildlife habitat. WRE includes a restoration component where the hydric soils are taken out of production and returned to their natural state as a functioning wetland.

NRCS conservationists will work with producers to develop a conservation plan on their land to identify concerns and opportunities, help determine objectives, and recommend solutions. “Our high-quality, comprehensive conservation plans can provide farmers with step-by-step recommendations they can use to improve their water quality, soil health and more -- all while reducing input costs,” said Denise Coleman, Pennsylvania NRCS State Conservationist.

NRCS accepts applications year-round but makes funding selections at application cut-off deadlines. Pennsylvania producers with applications in by October 16th will have a higher chance of application approval in 2021, as funding is limited. Applications received after that date will be accepted and considered for funding in additional ranking review cycles, if funds remain. December 18, 2020 and February 19, 2021 are the dates for second and third application review cycles.

To participate in USDA conservation programs, applicants should be farmers or farm or forest landowners and must meet eligibility criteria. To take advantage of NRCS technical assistance and expertise or federally funded conservation on your farm or land, please contact the Coatesville USDA NRCS Field Office at (610) 466-7502 x 3 for information.
Uncontrolled runoff from barnyards and open lots can contain nutrients and manure. If allowed to enter nearby surface water, it can cause significant harm both near and far. Runoff caused by rain may wash away manure from barnyards, stables, or open lots. Once the runoff touches manure, all the water flowing through the lot is polluted. This is considered a pollution event and/or a water quality issue. Not only can this present an issue for the health of your farm and local community, but it can be subject to regulation. Knowing what to look for can help prevent these issues in the future.

**What’s wrong with this picture?**
The operation is being responsible with their manure in the sense that it is collected and stacked properly. The location of the manure stack is the issue. It is on a hill, which drains downhill and across the street, into an impaired stream.

**How can this be fixed?**
This can be fixed with continuous manure management. The manure stacked should be moved to a flat location, with appropriate runoff diversion. The CCCD can assist in determining a proper location and appropriate management.

**What’s wrong with this picture?**
The operation has no differentiation between their barnyard and their pasture. The animals have easy and unlimited access to the stream. This is considered a pollution event, as pollution is being directed to the stream.

**How can this be fixed?**
This can be fixed by limiting access to the stream. This would typically mean creating a stream buffer and placing fencing around the stream. By limiting access and creating a buffer, it prevents direct nutrient pollution. The CCCD can help with stream and pasture management, to prevent these issues.

**What’s wrong with this picture?**
The operation has allowed manure to runoff their exercise lot, which is upstream. This could be a management issue or a structural issue (the lot has been structurally compromised). Luckily, these are both easy fixes!

**How can this be fixed?**
This can be fixed by either repairing the structural issues of the lot, and/or placing an emphasis on proper manure management. Perhaps the issue here is the lot is not scraped as often as it should, or it is often times compromised by rainstorms. Either way, the CCCD can assist with halting these issues.

- How are perfect crop circles made? Using a pro-tractor.
- The farmer took his Conservation Plan to an A-team convention because he wanted to meet T.
- Why did the farmer get a manure management plan? He is a steward of the land and it was his doody.
- The farmer griped when he saw what the young goats did to his garden “Kids these days…”
- The farmer keeps a jar of soil from his great-grandfathers farm on his mantle because it holds sedimental value.
- How much milk does a person who lives in Germany drink at breakfast? A whole stein.
- I don’t like jokes about Ducks because they’re always fowl.
Over the past year, the agricultural engineer and team had the opportunity to extend our conservational efforts into Philadelphia County within a public park, in order to help an equine operation address their paddock erosion issues. Through collaboration with NRCS, the equine facility was eligible for a cost sharing program and technical assistance. The District helped to survey, design, and provide quality assurance throughout the project.

Because surface runoff was frequently running through earthen animal concentration areas and creating muddy and uneven surfaces, it became difficult and dangerous for the horses to move around. First, we looked at measures to redirect water around the horse dry lots. Gutters, downspouts, and surface inlet boxes were installed and piped underground to a stabilized outlet below the paddocks.

The landowner decided upon installing a stabilized stone heavy use area to replace the earthen paddocks. This comprised of 6” of a base stone, 4” of a surface stone, and a dusting on top to be comfortable for the horses. The paddock is constructed so runoff is evenly distributed into a grass buffer, which helps avoids rills and gullies from forming. Installing stone equine dry lots helps to keep the horses and the ground dry - the stones allow for water infiltration, reducing water pooling and muddy areas.

Chester County was excited to be able to assist in reducing erosion and improving water quality in a typically non-agricultural area. If you are looking for help in stabilizing horse paddocks or other erosion issues, contact the agricultural team at the District today!
The Dirt and Gravel Low Volume Road Program’s purpose 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.

Please visit our website at https://www.chesco.org/1992/Dirt-GravelLow-Volume-Road for more detailed information on our ever growing program.

**Newlin Township – Kelsall Road:** A snapshot of the Kelsall Road project that will be improving water quality in Newlin Township is above. A dirt and gravel road near a tributary to the West Branch of the Brandywine that includes ditch improvements, road bank improvements, stormwater improvements, road base improvements, and stream crossing improvements that will greatly benefit water quality and prevent future stream scour and bank erosion.

Grant allowance - $ 202,803.10

In addition to the above approved project, we have one dirt and gravel road project in West Marlborough that will kick off in 2021 and one Low Volume Road project in Franklin Township that was recently approved, and hopes to be finished in December 2020. In 2020 we have seen several new municipalities jump on board the program in an effort to improve water quality to their streams.
It is no shock that 2020 has had many tropical storms to date. These bring heavy rains and washouts to many construction sites throughout Chester County. Maintaining perimeter controls along with other stormwater measures can help sites stay in compliance. Keeping the BMPs maintained throughout construction is one of the factors in staying compliant with the NPDES permit.

One tool that’s provided is the *Visual Site inspection form*. This has been provided by DEP for sites with an NPDES permit. The form should be filled out on a weekly basis and after every measurable rainfall event. The report should be kept onsite wherever the permit and approved plans are located.

One example of BMP failures to document would be compost sock blowing out during a storm event. This type of event should be listed in the “Problems Observed” section of the report, and the District should be notified when it occurs. Once the BMP has been fixed, a new report should be done to document these changes. This is just one way to help stay compliant to the NPDES permit during heavy rain events.
With five months of digital submissions under our belt, our Ch. 102 permitting group now have a stabilized process which is helping us to focus all of our energies back into the review, processing, and inspection of NPDES permitted sites. Since the last Back 40 issue Shana Stephens, Resource Conservationist for the last 8 years at CCCD, was lost to another employment opportunity. We have been navigating the task of managing that shifted workload and refilling the vacant position. Luckily we have our Outreach Coordinator, Gaye Lynn Criswell, to pick up the field work slack from the vacated territory and the rest of the Urban Team to handle the office workload. If there are questions regarding permitting or pre-application meeting requests in the territory that Gaye Lynn is covering please reach out to Gordon Roscovich, Urban Team Leader.

DEP is still working towards a shift to ePermitting, which will be starting with new, General NPDES permit applications, so please stay tuned for any updates later this fall. At CCCD, our goal is to be agile enough to adapt to the ever changing needs dictated by our leading health professionals and the DEP program we are delegated to implement. We look forward to continue working with our stakeholders and familiar faces in our office, albeit remotely or outside.
The Back 40
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