The Importance of Maintaining Your Pastures

Pasture management plays a crucial role in the agricultural industry by ensuring grazing lands are sustainably used and livestock productivity is maximized. Proper pasture management practices are essential for maintaining healthy pasture ecosystems, promoting soil fertility, and enhancing animal welfare.

Health and Productivity of Livestock

Well-managed pastures provide nutritious forage for grazing animals, which helps in maintaining their health and improving their growth rates. By rotating grazing areas and managing stocking rates, farmers can prevent overgrazing and ensure the sustainability of pasture resources.

Soil Conservation and Fertility

Healthy pastures act as a natural carbon sink, sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and improving soil structure. Proper pasture management practices such as rotational grazing, reseeding, and soil testing can help maintain soil health, prevent erosion, and enhance nutrient cycling in the ecosystem.

Sustainability of the Agricultural Industry

By implementing sustainable grazing practices, farmers can reduce their environmental impact, improve water quality, and preserve biodiversity in pasture ecosystems. Sustainable pasture management also supports the long-term viability of farming operations by ensuring the availability of quality forage for livestock and reducing the reliance on supplemental feed.

Overall, pasture management is a fundamental aspect of modern agriculture that plays a critical role in promoting animal welfare, soil health, and environmental sustainability. By implementing sound pasture management practices, farmers can optimize the productivity of their grazing lands, enhance the quality of their livestock products, and contribute to a more sustainable and resilient agricultural industry.

If you have questions about proper pasture maintenance, contact the Conservation District for more information at 610-344-1360.
In-Field Manure Stacking

Spring is the perfect time to clean out that old bedded pack from the barn. If you are an Act 38 regulated operator or import from one and utilize in-field stacking to store solid manure, there are a few important considerations to keep in mind in order to comply with Act 38 and protect our local waters.

Location, location, location: the most important aspect of in-field stacking is placement. Your manure pile cannot be placed in areas of concentrated water flow or excessively draining soils, atop subsurface drainage tiles, or within 3 feet of the seasonal high-water table. Similarly, the pile must be 100 feet from water sources, such as streams, lakes, ponds, sinkholes, and water wells. Flat land is ideal; stacking on land with a slope above 8% is not permitted (and likely inconvenient!). If your desired stacking location has a slope between 3% and 8%, you must place it within 100 feet of the top of the slope. Wherever you choose to in-field stack, the location should be included in the map of your operation.

Building a better stack: Ready to stack? Your manure should be dry enough to pile 4 feet high in a conical shape to help with water runoff. If you plan to apply the manure in the field it’s stacked in, only stack the amount that can be applied in that field.

Get Scheduling: If you haven’t decided when to use up that in-field manure, now may be the time. Without an impervious cover, each stack can only sit in its original location a total of 120 days or about 4 months (or until the next grow season, whichever is less). If you’re looking to move the stack, remember it cannot be placed in the same spot for another four years!

Concentrated animal operations face slightly stricter limitations on in-field stacking, but all operators can improve their in-field stacking with best management practices. To discuss your options, please contact the Conservation District. Happy Spring!

Sacrifice Areas

We’ve had a wetter and muddier spring season than we’ve had in the past few years. This is not ideal for those who pasture animals, whether it is horses, beef cattle, dairy cattle, sheep, or goats. No matter the size, they can still do a lot of damage to pastures when conditions are wet, and this in turn can stunt grass growth and allow for more weeds to find their way into our pasture systems. How can we prevent this from happening in the future?

Sacrifice areas can assist to get your animals through the winter without destroying valuable pasture. These areas should be small and not the size of a typical paddock that is used when grazing during the growing season. What makes these sacrifice areas work even better is having a stoned heavy use area or concrete heavy use area. Depending on the type of animals, one may be preferred over the other, but both serve the same purpose. These areas stabilize the area the animals are on and can include feeding and watering areas. Once manure accumulates, it can be scraped up, and eventually distributed in pastures or crop fields to help disperse nutrients to the areas it is needed.

We will assist in planning and implemented sacrifice areas, so if you have a need to improve where you winter your animals, we would love to assist you!

WELCOME BRIANA!

Hello! My name is Briana Johanson, and I am excited to join the Chester County Conservation District as an Agricultural Resource Conservationist. I am fortunate to be coming into this position with a year and a half of agricultural experience from Berks County Conservation District, as well as my prior experience as a CCCD intern in 2020! In my new role, I will be providing technical assistance for ACAP project implementation and offering support for farmers interested in installing best management practices. My fellow CCCD coworkers are not only knowledgeable - they are also welcoming, reliable, and always happy to help county residents conserve their natural resources. I am proud to be part of the team!
MFEMP Review

One of the services offered by the Chester County Conservation District (CCCD) is the development and/or review of Mushroom Farm Environmental Management Plans (MFEMPs), which are required for mushroom substrate producers, mushroom growers, and mushroom composting operations. MFEMPs outline an operation’s existing conditions, identify resource concerns, and include the planned best management practices (BMPs) to address those concerns. The flow chart below briefly summarizes the steps MFEMPs go through for approval via the CCCD and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP).

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Forgotten Practices

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? Do you maintain it? Do you have questions on how to maintain it, or do you know how often to check your practices for maintenance needs? 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 our Outreach Coordinator would like to have a conversation with you.

The Outreach Coordinator for the Chester County Conservation District is Gaye Lynn Criswell. She would like to connect with you to discuss your past practices - to find out what has been a success and what needs to be tweaked. You can talk about what you need now, what works for you, changes to your management style, and whatever farming topic is on your mind. She can even walk out to the field or barnyard with you to see your vision or your challenges.

Once back at the office, she will make sure you are contacted by someone that can give you technical or program funding assistance. So, if you receive a letter or phone call from her, she is just seeing how you and your operation are doing and hoping that you will have her over for a visit. Also, if you would like to reconnect with your past practices to make them even better for your farm, you can even give her a call at 610-455-1365 to set up a visit.
Chester County has developed the Chesco Chesapeake Communities Action Plan (C3AP) to outline and recommend activities and approaches to ultimately result in the annual reduction of approximately 914,000 pounds of Nitrogen and 39,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering our Chesapeake Bay tributary streams in agricultural and urban/suburban settings.

Chester County’s distribution of State Chesapeake Bay County Action Plan (CAP) implementation funds for 2024 included a local sub-grant application process for the non-agricultural sector during late summer 2023. One application was submitted to CCCD for this subgrant and this project was awarded funding:

West Sadsbury Township has been awarded $100,000 for the project “Officer’s Run at Strasburg Road Streambank Restoration – Construction.” The project will remove unvegetated vertical streambanks and replace them with a vegetated floodplain bench that will accommodate storm flows. This project will improve water quality in the Octoraro Creek by providing water quality benefits, reducing erosion, and improving the ecology in its watershed. The township has obtained landowner agreements and the design work was funded in 2023 through Growing Greener. Implementation is scheduled to take place in 2024.


LAWN ➔ MEADOW

Chester County Conservation District is looking for landowners interested in converting parts of their lawn into native wildflowers and grass meadows!

- Financial assistance is available to support these projects through a Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) sub-grant
- There is no minimum acreage requirement, but projects areas over 0.2 acres will be given priority
- To qualify for funding:
  - Project area(s) must be turf lawn maintained under 8 inches tall
  - Landowners must be willing to perform maintenance and keep the area in meadow for 5-10 years
  - Landowners must be willing to contribute some volunteer labor or financial match for the grant

CONTACT Cori Trice for more information: ctrice@chesco.org or 610-455-1384
SURVEY:
Advancing Sustainable Practices on Chester County Farms

Introduction:
Chester County’s 2022 Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan identifies environmental sustainability practices (like those that have a positive impact on water quality, soil health, ecosystems, and climate change) as central to our agricultural industry’s growth and competitiveness as more consumers demand transparency and sustainability from where their food comes from and how it is grown. To help implement the Plan the Chester County Planning Commission and partner organizations would like to better understand farmers’ interest in adopting new sustainable practices, barriers to adoption, and what the county and partners can do to support them.

Please complete this survey and mail to:
Chester County Planning Commission, 601 Westown Rd., Suite 270, West Chester, PA 19380
OR email to: sustainability@chesco.org
If you would prefer to take this survey online, please scan this code with your smartphone’s camera:

Circle all that apply.

1. What type of farm business do you operate?
   a. Aquaculture
   b. Apiculture
   c. Certified organic
   d. Christmas trees
   e. Equine
   f. Commodity crops
   g. Fruit, nuts & berries
   h. Hay & forage crops
   i. Nursery, hemp, greenhouse & floriculture
   j. Mushrooms
   k. Dairy
   l. Beef
   m. Other livestock & poultry
   n. Vegetables, potatoes & melons
   o. Viticulture

2. Do you own or lease your land?
   a. Own
   b. Lease
   c. Both

3. Have you or others working on your farm received technical assistance from any of these organizations?
   a. Conservation District
   b. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
   c. Penn State Extension
   d. PA Association of Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)
   e. Chester County Economic Development Council
   /Ag Connect
   f. Private consultant
   g. Other ________________________________

4. Do you or your business belong to any farm-related organizations or commodity-specific groups?
   a. Farm Bureau
   b. PA Association of Sustainable Agriculture
   c. Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture
   d. PA Beef Council
   e. PA Dairymen’s Association
   f. American Mushroom Institute
   g. Farmer’s Co-Op
   h. Other ________________________________

5. Please select any practices you have already implemented or looked into implementing.
   a. Organic
   b. No-till farming
   c. Cover crops
   d. Riparian forested buffers
   e. Perennial pastured livestock
   f. Energy efficiency improvements for farm operations
   g. Solar for on-site use
   h. Leasing land for a solar field
   i. Composting
   j. Water recycling
   k. Waste conversion (i.e. methane digestion, gasification, pyrolysis)
   l. Alternative fuel farm equipment
   m. Silvopasture/agroforestry
   n. Participating in carbon credit markets
   o. Other ________________________________

(OVER)
6. Please select any practices you are interested in learning more about:
   a. Organic
   b. No-till farming
   c. Cover crops
   d. Riparian forested buffers
   e. Perennial pastured livestock
   f. Energy efficiency improvements for farm operations
   g. Solar for on-site use
   h. Leasing land for a solar field
   i. Composting
   j. Water recycling
   k. Waste conversion (i.e. methane digestion, gasification, pyrolysis)
   l. Alternative fuel farm equipment
   m. Silvopasture/agroforestry
   n. Participating in carbon credit markets
   o. Other ________________________________

7. Thinking about the previous question, where would you go to seek out more information about sustainable practices you’re interested in implementing?
   a. Trade organizations (which ones? ________________________________)
   b. Agronomist, nutritionist, consultant
   c. Farmer’s Co-Op
   d. Lenders
   e. Suppliers/vendors (which ones? ________________________________)
   f. Websites (which ones? ________________________________)
   g. Other ______________________________________

8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Please use a number to answer.
   Answers: 1 = Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Agree

   a. I feel pressure from my customers to adopt sustainable practices, or to measure and report on sustainable practices. ________
   b. I am interested in implementing sustainable practices in my operations and on my land. ________
   c. I know where to find information and resources to implement sustainable practices. ________
   d. I am aware of financial options and sources of available public funding to support the implementation of any sustainable practice I’d choose to implement. ________
   e. I feel that adopting sustainable practices and communicating their impact will give my business a competitive advantage. ________

8. Continued…
   f. I/my business would benefit from a central location online where all information related to sustainable practices, funding and financing sources, and technical assistance opportunities can be found. ________
   g. I/my business would benefit from a new marketing label highlighting sustainable, Chester County-made farm products. ________

9. If your farm has implemented sustainable practices, has your experience been:
   a. Positive
   b. Negative
   c. Too soon to tell

10. If your farm has not yet implemented sustainable practices, or if you have and experienced challenges, what have the barriers been?
    a. Lack of time
    b. Lack of funding/too expensive
    c. Lack of expertise/technical assistance
    d. Not a priority
    e. Too much risk
    f. Not interested

11. Do you currently market your product under a label that highlights sustainability practices? If so, which one?
    a. Certified Organic
    b. Grown using organic practices
    c. PA Preferred
    d. B-Corp
    e. Local
    f. Grass-Fed, Free Range, Certified Humane, etc.
    g. Other: ______________________________________

12. Please share any other comments you have related to implementing sustainability practices on farms in Chester County.
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________

Thank you for your participation!
Dirt & Gravel Low Volume Roads Program

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.

Below you will find a snapshot of the Tapeworm Road project that will be improving water quality in West Marlborough Township. Please visit our website at https://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 tributary to Doe Run. The grant total for this project is $185,792.00. This Dirt and Gravel Road project has the following work elements implemented: two stream crossings improved, road banks improved, road surface stabilized, stormwater improvements.

In addition to the above project, two more projects will be under construction in 2024: Jaine Lane – a D&G project in West Vincent Township and Chestnut Hill Road – a LVR project in North Coventry Township. Both projects are scheduled to be finished in June of 2024 and will improve water quality to the streams in each municipality.

DEP Chapter 102 Pilot Program for Individual NPDES Permits

Starting May 1st through the end of 2024, the Chester County Conservation District will be participating in a pilot program that DEP is offering for all individual NPDES permits. This goal of the program is to streamline the review process for eligible individual NPDES permits, cutting the review time from 176 to 103 business days. The program does have eligibility requirements that can be found on the DEP E&S Resource Page, found at: https://www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Water/CleanWater/StormwaterMgmt/Stormwater%20Construction/Pages/E-S%20Resources.aspx#pilot

A series of two pre-application meetings must be held with the engineer and applicant in attendance. The first is an informal meeting with the District to discuss the eligibility for the pilot program and an overview of the project. The second pre-application meeting would be a formal meeting with the District and a member from DEP. At this meeting, the plans should be complete and presented to DEP for a spot check for eligibility. The application must be submitted within 22 business days from the date of this second pre-application meeting.

An applicant may only submit one application each quarter for the pilot program. The fees associated with the pilot program will still have the same administrative NPDES filing fee of $1,500 and disturbed acre fee of $100 per acre. However, in addition to our regular district service fee, we will also charge our expedited review fee (that is equal to two (2) times the district service fee). This program is similar to our expedited review as it will be up to our staff availability on whether or not we can accommodate the review at the time of submission. If you have any other questions about this program, please reach out to Shannon Healey at shealey@chesco.org or 610-455-1377 for more information.
Chester County Conservation District
674 Unionville Road, Suite 105
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610-455-1360
610-455-1361 (fax)
chesco.org/conservation

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