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TMDLs and the Shenandoah Valley's Agricultural Community: Balancing Costs and Benefits of Conservation

Nesha McRae

TMDLs and the Shenandoah Valley's Agricultural Community:



Balancing Costs and Benefits of Conservation

Nesha McRae

VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation

Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) in Virginia

- Targeted watershed restoration for impaired waters
- 3 step process
 - TMDL Study
 - Implementation Plan
 - Implementation
- Legal background
- Voluntary implementation



TMDLs and Shenandoah Valley Farmers...like oil and water?

- The Valley's Farming Community:
independent, steeped in tradition,
many experiencing declining cash returns
- Total Maximum Daily Loads:
a legally mandated process used by the
government to clean up impaired
waterways

Finding Common Ground



- Public participation is critical
 - Strong sense of community = active participation
 - **SCALE** is important
- Soil and fertilizer are valuable resources

What do we need from farmers?

- Livestock exclusion
- Stream buffers
- Soil conservation
 - Conservation tillage
 - Cover crops
- Prescribed grazing
- Manure storage



How does this impact their bottom line?

- Economic benefits of some BMPs are clear
 - Rotational grazing
 - \$419M spent on feed in 2007
 - Cover crops: \$30/acre
- Others are more complex...
 - Loss of land in buffers vs. cost share payments and bank stabilization
 - Fence maintenance vs. improved herd health
 - Nutrient management and manure application



Accounting for Costs and Benefits in Plan Development

- Community water quality goals versus TMDLs
- Cost effective BMPs
- Accounting for existing BMPs (including voluntary)
- Outreach recommendations
 - Peer to peer discussions
 - Farmer testimonials



Accounting for Costs and Benefits in Implementation

- Funding projects
 - Staff
 - Cost share
- Increasing flexibility
 - Shenandoah RC&D Flexible Fencing
 - Changes to state cost share program
- Promoting economic benefits



STREAMSIDE LIVESTOCK EXCLUSION:

A tool for increasing farm income and improving water quality

BY R. ZECKOSKI, B. BENHAM, C. LUNSFORD

“I have seen weight gain increases of 5-10% over 9-10 months since removing my beef cattle from the stream and providing water from springs and wells.”

Scott Campbell
Augusta County

Increased weight-gain translates into more money per head (Table 1).

Table 1. Example of increased revenue due to installing off-stream waterers³⁵.

Typical calf sale weight	Additional weight gain due to off-stream waterer	Price	Increased revenue due to off-stream waterer
500 lb/calf	5 % or 25 lb	\$0.60 per lb	\$15 per calf

What the Future Holds for TMDLs and Agriculture

- Marketing conservation to the consumer
- Ecosystems services
- Chesapeake Bay TMDL
 - VA estimated cost of full implementation > \$7B
 - Implementation of agricultural BMPs to remain voluntary
 - Potential for regulatory approach exists

