Strong Communities, Healthy Waters: Sustaining Agricultural Communities While Enhancing Our Natural Environment
"Adaptive Livestock Exclusion Project"

The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network* (CBFN) is pioneering an approach to identifying and supporting partnerships in key farming communities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Virginia's Shenandoah Valley pilot program creates partnerships in two counties, Rockingham and Augusta, and engages farmers in designing their own solutions for adaptive fencing and grazing systems. When completed, this pilot may serve as a model for other farming areas.

CBFN has provided funds to the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, a non-profit organization based in Verona, VA, to help keep livestock out of Valley waterways, ultimately the Bay, and document associated benefits attributed to this practice such as herd health, water quality, and natural stream bank revegetation.

Calves grazing near stream in Augusta County.

Project partners include:

The CBFN, Headwaters and Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Virginia State Dairymen's Association, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Virginia Tech. As part of this partnership effort, Virginia Tech will use funds received from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to target adaptive fencing in specific watersheds, with similar land use patterns, for the purpose of monitoring changes in water quality.

Technical staff are working with farmers to design adaptive fencing and watering systems that are appropriate for each farm and stream segment. Top of stream bank fencing is a minimum requirement and livestock need to be excluded from the stream for five years.

Project goals include:

- Measure water quality improvement;
- Test and implement flexible fencing options to gauge effectiveness of exclusion practice and farmer satisfaction with program;
- Document and assess conservation benefits of adoption, economic cost/benefits to farm operations;
- Serve as a model for conserving water resources in Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Development and delivery of a flexible livestock exclusion pilot program, that includes appropriate fencing and pasture management, is expected to lead to increased adoption and sustained use of grazing systems and livestock exclusion.

Adaptive fencing in Rockingham County.

*The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network is a collaboration of private non-profit foundations in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. www.chesbayfunders.org

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