

West Virginia Conservation Efforts Continue to Produce Good Results

For the past few weeks, *Alt vs. EPA* is being cited as a victory for agriculture over the EPA. The case boiled down to whether or not storm water runoff from chicken houses is agricultural storm water discharge; turns out that it is. This type of runoff is exempt from requiring a permit and is outside of the EPA's jurisdiction.

While storm water discharge is the general idea of the case, "reasonable care", the good stewardship and conservation efforts of the Eight is Enough farm were cited by the district court in supporting Alt's argument. Many in the local and not-so-local media, as well as the Farm Bureau, were quick to point out that Lois Alt runs a model conservation farm that has been recognized for this on numerous occasions.

She is not alone in conservation efforts. There's a lot of acknowledgment for the good job West Virginia farmers have done in cleaning things up in local streams and rivers. Our state is on pace to achieving its goals in reducing nutrients and sediments that go to the Chesapeake Bay. Exclusion fencing, water troughs, cover crops, litter sheds, nutrient management and independent effort are examples of best management practices to reduce discharges to the Bay.

Farmers are the first environmentalists; everybody wants to keep the watersheds clean. Programs with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the West Virginia Conservation Agency aid producers in doing this. These agencies put a premium on good conservation practices and dedicate funding where it helps farms and the environment.

Many farms already have a nutrient management plan—if a farm doesn't have one yet it is an easy first step to getting involved. Simply put, nutrient management plans that outline conservation practices and soil nutrient use that benefit your farm the most. It is recommended that small and medium AFOs (Animal Feeding Operations) have a nutrient management plan, but required for operations designated as a CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) to have one. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) has a staff of approved nutrient management specialists to aid farmers in doing so, creating nutrient management plans, free of charge.

The WVDA is working towards a Chesapeake Bay Midpoint Assessment in 2017, when the goals of cleaning up the Bay watershed will be reviewed. What has been found so far, however, is that West Virginians have accomplished many improvements already. One case ruling won't fix all the issues facing agriculture and the environment. These concerns can only be resolved when, following the example of Eight is Enough farm, producers exercise as much "reasonable care" as possible by practicing suitable conservation efforts.

For further information about conservation efforts for your operation or property, contact the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, NRCS, Farm Service Agency, West Virginia Conservation Agency or your local WVU extension agent.

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