

“Creating a Culture of Conservation from Farm to Table for Water Quality and Agricultural Community Sustainability”

Everyone eats. The most direct way to engage farmers and consumers in their shared responsibility to water quality is to touch on how food is produced and consumed.

This initiative seeks to build lucrative markets for fresh, local “Bay friendly” products, providing financial incentives directly to farmers for achieving nutrient reductions, while engaging consumers to do their part to support “Bay friendly products” and achieve their own reductions.

This National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) –funded project ties food consumption to Bay nutrient and sediment reductions in innovative ways:

- It will measure and verify the pounds of reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus and tons of sediment that farmers are making. Farmers in our project will produce food for sale in the local food system.
- It will pilot incentives to farmers making those reductions a) through promoting specific products and production practices to consumers as “local” and “Bay friendly,” and b) through direct incentive payments to farmers based on nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment reduced. Ultimately, as incentive payments are decreased or eliminated, farmers won’t need them because they are making superior money selling fresh, local “Bay friendly” products directly to consumers and institutions.
- For cooperating farmers who are part of more conventional dairy, beef and poultry markets, nutrient reductions that are verified will prepare

and enable them to participate in future market-based nutrient trading. It may also open economic windows of opportunity for them to add more food production for direct marketing and/or switch to grass based systems based on return on investment they see on other farms or experience themselves.

In looking at the magnitude of the cleanup efforts required, everyone will have to do their part to reduce nutrient loads and mitigate impacts their activities have on water quality.

This project goes beyond ordinary water quality efforts by engaging the broader community in nutrient reductions while strengthening local community through ecologically-based food system work. This is a partnership where consumers and farmers work together to achieve reductions. It is likely to succeed because consumers have a heightened awareness of their responsibility to reduce their nutrient footprint and are open to practical ideas that can help them accomplish that goal. We plan to highlight what farmers are doing to support and protect water quality, coupled with education and outreach on direct reductions in unregulated lawn fertilization and chemical use which significantly adds to Bay pollution. We will also encourage consumer purchases of Bay-friendly local foods. A full-time coordinator will be hired by VCE winter 2011 to lead this effort. Another coordinator for local foods distribution has been hired by L/R Grows.

Project partners include: Shenandoah RC&D, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Water Stewardship, Lexington/Rockbridge Grows, Shenandoah Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local, Shenandoah Valley Local Food and Farm Working Group, Washington and Lee University.



Shenandoah Valley farm



LRGrows
Lexington/Rockbridge Grows