

SCS Technician Works To Implement Bay Program Through Farm Improvements

BY JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent
YORK — When Ann Meyer enrolled in Penn State as an environmental resource major, manure management was not at the top of her career goals list.

In fact, the young woman from Erie had no real idea what she would eventually do with her degree. But she did know that working outdoors appealed to her far better than a job at an office desk.

And, while Ann now has her own desk at the York offices of USDA's Soil Conservation Service, the part of her job she enjoys most is being out on farms. In her role as an SCS technician, one of only a few women holding that position in the state, Ann is currently working with the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay program. Her primary responsibility is to convert the designs and drawings of such conservation measures as manure storage areas, diversion terraces and sod waterways into workable on-farm improvements.

Ann's affinity for the outdoors traces to the 90-acre family farm her father purchased when she was a child. While her dad had grown up during the Depression-lean farm years and had no desire to leave his job to return to farming, he saw the land as a retreat, for his family.

A basic agronomy course, part of her required studies, further nudged Ann's interest in a soils-related career.

"It included a lot of land use planning. The professor was very good working with students and he talked about the Soil Conservation Service's student intern program," she remembers.

In subsequent semesters, Ann enrolled in additional soils courses. She also signed up for the SCS internship and was chosen for a position the summer she completed her junior year of studies. Her assignment sent her to distant York County, where she worked with the conservationist and technicians in surveying, designing, planning, and absorbing SCS policy.

"The likelihood of my coming back to work in the same county after an internship here was nil," Ann relates.

But with SCS internship comes a greater likelihood of a job offer after graduation. Ann's was an offer to fill a position in mining-intensive Cambria County.

During the year she spent there, Ann's primary responsibilities



While helping lay out manure management pits as a technician for the Soil Conservation Service, Ann Meyer sights up depth levels using some of the tools of the trade.

focused on work with strip mine land renovation through the Rural Abandoned Mines programs.

After a year, marriage to her college sweetheart Ray Meyer took Ann from the Cambria County reclamation work. Ray was then managing a hog operation in Marietta, and later accepted a position as a troubleshooter for Pennfield, working with the firm's swine producers.

Jobs in the soil conservation field were oversupplied, and for a period of time, Ann was unable to return to her field. Instead, she worked through the winter in a fabric shop, while also holding a job with a nearby hog producer, assisting in the farrowing and processing of baby pigs.

"By July of 1982, I really wanted very much to get back to a job in conservation," she remembers. While it took a few months for her to find what she was seeking, in early 1983 Ann went to work for Baltimore County. Hired as a planner for the county's own soil conservation offices, Ann was responsible for designing ponds, contour stripping, diversion terraces and related soils-saving improvements.

When a position in the York SCS office became available several months later, Ann put in an application, and in December 1983, took her present position as an SCS technician.

Ann finds she prefers her work as a technician to that of a conservationist, for which she had originally trained.

"It includes much more of the outside work, and not as much paper work," says Ann. "I like it a lot better."

With the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay program in York County's several watersheds, manure management installations have become Ann's specialty. One of the biggest challenges she finds is pulling together all those involved in the construction of such facilities, from the designer of the manure handling facility to the farmer who will work with it and the various contractors involved in moving soils and installing pipe and concrete.

There are established guidelines for conservation programs and facilities which technicians like Ann must follow in laying out the manure pits, diversion terraces

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Ann Meyer and her two-year-old "helper" at the family's 20-acre sheep farm take a break between chores.

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