

# Watershed Project Sign-Up

**ANDY ANDREWS**

Lancaster Farming Staff  
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

—For community water improvement projects to succeed, groups must work in unison and as partners. This kind of interest and leadership must come from the grass-roots level if federal project money is to be used to ensure safe drinking water, according to the head of the Lancaster County Conservation District.

Don Robinson, district manager, indicated that time is running out for farmers to sign up for cost-sharing for the Chickies Creek Watershed, including townships inclusive of and west of Manheim, under the national Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP).

Under EQIP, farmers and other landowners in parts of Rapho, Penn, East Donegal, West Hempfield, and Mount Joy townships can qualify for up to \$50,000 a person for the total of a five-year federal allocation of \$1.5 million (\$300,000 each year) to be spent on environment watershed protection projects.

The sign-up, sponsored through the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Lancaster, runs from Feb. 2 through Feb. 20 this year. The money for programs may be paid after Oct. 1 this year for qualified landowners, Robinson noted.

To qualify, landowners must submit a proposal to aid in the improvement of water quality on the property. Those improvements could include the establishment of stream bank fencing, barnyard runoff control, storm water diversion projects, grass waterways, or some other water quality protection and soil conservation efforts.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service can provide free technical assistance and can write conservation plans, provide plans for terracing, contour strips, and other erosion control plans, and consult on proposals for the EQIP program. However, EQIP intends to look at those proposals that will provide "the greatest return for the dollars spent on the projects — if several proposals are submitted, those with the greatest environmental 'return' will get funded," said Robinson.

The FSA County Committee of farmers will make the selections and approve the ranking of projects. The committee will meet in March to make the final approval.

Recently the district sponsored water quality awareness meetings in the county to gauge what type of interest there was, literally, out in the field. The district and the EQIP program, however, is looking at "grass-roots" support from groups established to protect the water quality of the watersheds.

"The people who live in the watershed determine what the problems are and how to approach them," he said.

Robinson pointed out that a typical group is the Save Our Creeks Association working toward improving the quality of the Cocalico Creek in Ephrata Boro.

The 12 different Lancaster County watersheds are identified in a map supplied in the district's annual report.

One successful "partnering" project, Robinson indicated, was the Donegal Creek improvement task undertaken by several organizations on a 6.7-mile stretch of the Donegal Creek. Groups who worked together to improve the riparian aspects of the creek included the Donegal Fish and Conservation Association, the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, the conservation district, and other groups.

Interested landowners can contact the Farm Service Agency at (717) 397-6235 or the conservation district at (717) 299-5361.

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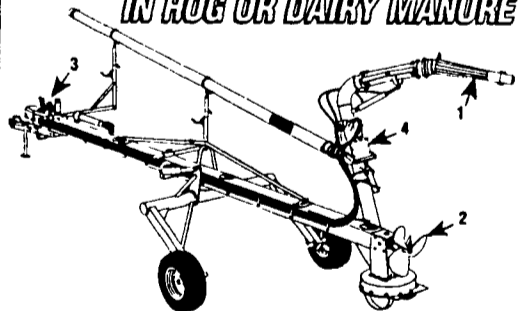
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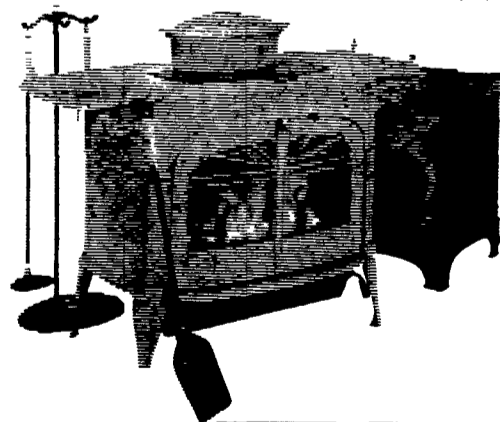
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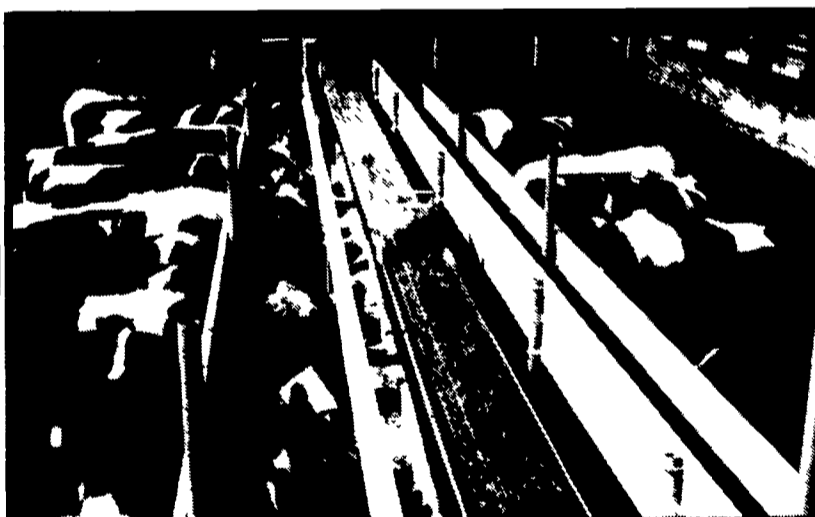
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