

After Fence Installation, FFA Members Witness Dramatic Improvements To Stream Bank Quality

ANDY ANDREWS

Lancaster Farming Staff

RONKS (Lancaster Co.) —

Before 1991, Pequea-Mill Creek Project leader Frank Lucas said he couldn't find anything in the farm stream that even resembled a fish.

Clair Witwer, ag science teacher at Pequea Valley High School, said that after rains, the stream was nothing but a mudhole.

Water quality was low. Water species simply didn't exist.

But, in April 1991, with the help of a \$500 Chesapeake Bay Foundation grant, wooden posts kept by the project office, and help from staff and students at Lancaster Mennonite High School, noted Lucas, stream bank fencing was installed at the Jonas Beiler farm near Pond Road in Ronks.

Last week, it was evident that not only was the stream bank secured, but vegetation was in place. Pequea Valley FFA members were in wading gear, searching for signs of life.

Where once before all that could be found in the stream, with ero-

sion from cow trampling, were leeches and some pollution-tolerant species, last week the FFA'ers discovered crayfish, shiners, salamanders, midge, blackfly, beetle, and crane fly larvae, snails, scuds, darters, and other aquatic life.

It's a sign that the stream has regained a lot of health in seven years.

"What the students are looking for and what they find in the stream will indicate the water quality," said Clair Witwer, who pointed out the more than dozen FFA members who came along to perform tests on the water.

"No doubt, some of the improvement is due to the fact that cows aren't tramping in the streams," noted Witwer. The cows are electrically fenced out into grazing paddocks.

The stream eventually feeds into the Muddy Creek, said Frank Lucas of the Pequea-Mill Creek Project office. The Muddy Creek eventually feeds into the Mill Creek, leading to the Conestoga River, and gradually to the Sus-



Clair Witwer, Pequea Valley FFA adviser and ag science instructor (In dark vest jacket), spoke about the improved nesting quality of the stream bank at the Beiler farm.



Water quality was under examination from Pequea Valley FFA members, from left, Missy Fisher, Brandy Clarke, and Jared Artus.



The stream at the Jonas Beiler farm near Ronks has been revitalized because of the fencing.

quehanna River.

The area studied by the Pequea Valley FFA includes a corridor 137 feet long by 27 feet wide, said Witwer. They have been monitoring the site, near a cattle crossing built of rejected concrete hog slats, for about eight years, according to Matthew Ehrhart, Pennsylvania habitat restoration specialist.

In part of the fenced-in stream, there was nothing but bare soil and a pool of algae. Now a distinct channel runs through it with lots of vegetation — "directly due to fencing," said Witwer.

What landowners and producers should be aware of, in addition to improving the water quality on the farm, the fenced-in stream bank can improve overall herd health, reducing hoof problems and mastitis.

Two types of assessments were done by the Pequea Valley FFA members and ag science students: water quality and biotic index.

Water quality looked into the available oxygen content and other factors of the water. The biotic index looked into the aquatic species present.

The biotic index proved an abundance of life in the stream,



Pequea Valley FFA'ers perform biotic studies on the stream. From left, Missy Fisher, Bob Stewart, and Matt Ehrhart, Pennsylvania habitat restoration specialist with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

including crayfish, sowbugs, salamanders, shiners, diving beetles, water boatman, beetle, midge, crane fly and blackfly larvae, scuds, snails, and darters.

Plant seedlings were also installed a few years ago by the

FFA members to further improve quality of the stream bank.

Also, Witwer pointed out to the students that he saw a lot more muskrats and other nesting on the banks — signs of improved stream bank quality.

Land O'Lakes, Dairyman's Cooperative Creamery Move Toward Unification

ARDEN HILLS, Minn. — Members of the Land O'Lakes and Dairyman's Cooperative Creamery Assn. Boards of Directors have strongly endorsed and unanimously approved a plan for consolidating the two organizations. Next, the proposal will be presented to members of both organizations for their approval.

The two organizations have been business partners since 1983 when Dairyman's began producing butter for Land O'Lakes at its processing facility in Tulare, Calif.

"This is an exciting opportunity to build an even stronger nationwide organization committed to creating value-added markets for

members and providing maximum returns to members," said Jack Gherty, president and chief executive officer of Land O'Lakes. "A merger would combine Land O'Lakes marketing strength with Dairyman's strength as the best, least-cost manufacturer in the West."

Jack Prince, president of Dairyman's said, "We have carefully considered ways by which we might provide greater, long-term value for our members through expanded product manufacturing and creation of a branded, value-added market for our milk. Our board and management strongly believe this merger will help us achieve those goals."

Both Gherty and Prince said the two cooperatives will provide members with comprehensive information on the proposed merger prior to approval in late May. If approved, it is expected the unification would be implemented July 1.

Land O'Lakes, headquartered in Arden Hills, Minn., is a food and agricultural cooperative owned by farmers and ranchers in 27 states. It markets branded dairy products across the U.S. Dairyman's, based in Tulare, Calif., is a dairy processing cooperative and operates the largest, single location dairy processing facility in the nation.

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