

# Chesapeake Bay Technician Helps Farmers Keep Clean Water Clean



Streambank fencing is the latest buzz word in conservation. Martie Hetherington, a Chesapeake Bay technician for Schuylkill Conservation District, encourages farmers to fence animals away from the streambanks to prevent water pollution.

**JAYNE SEBRIGHT**  
*Lancaster Farming Staff*

POTTSVILLE (Schuylkill Co.) — Chesapeake Bay technician Martie Hetherington is a certified crop advisor, certified to write nutrient management plans, and has received her pesticide license.

Although the only certification she needs as a Bay technician is her certification in nutrient management, Hetherington applied for the other two because it helps her do her job better.

"I wanted to make sure I could talk the farmer's talk," said Hetherington. "Keeping up my accreditation helps me stay abreast of not just what is happening in nutrient management, but what is involved in the culture of crop production."

"People think that since farmers have planted crops for hun-

dreds of years, there shouldn't be too many changes," said Hetherington. "But there is always some new regulation, product, or technique that you have to learn. My accreditation keeps me from getting stuck in my box."

Hetherington works with Schuylkill county farmers who are located in the Chesapeake Bay / Susquehanna River basin. About a half of the county's farmland is located in the Chesapeake Bay area, while the other half is located in the Delaware River basin.

"In this county, most farmers sign up for the Chesapeake Bay program after hearing about it through word of mouth," said Hetherington. "My farmers are my best salespeople. Sometimes farmers can be apprehensive about working with the government. But then they see their

neighbor installing a new manure facility and find out we're not too bad to work with."

Hetherington helps farmers in the Chesapeake Bay area develop Ag Waste Storage Plans for their farms. Part of the plan includes writing a nutrient management plan and a conservation plan. Through the Chesapeake Bay program, the farmers can receive money to help fund new manure facilities and other improvements included in the plan.

"The best way to sell a farmer on developing a conservation plan and a nutrient management plan on their farm is by showing them the bottom line," said Hetherington. "You have to show them how it is going to benefit the farmer. They can save a lot of money using less fertilizer once they take into consideration the nutrients from their manure."

Hetherington coordinates the Chesapeake Bay program for Schuylkill County Conservation District. The program's funding comes from the Environmental Protection Agency, funnels through the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and then comes to the districts. It's Hetherington's job to distribute the money to farmers.

"We work with farmers to determine what Best Management Practices they would like to see installed on their farm," said Hetherington. "Our main emphasis in the program is to keep clean water clean."

Hetherington works closely with the USDA's Natural Resource and Conservation Service's soil conservationist through the program. "We install diversions around barn yards, roof gutters, and other things to prevent polluting rain water. Manure storage facilities are probably the biggest item we install, but we also try to determine what will work best overall."

Since Act 6 or the Nutrient Management law came into existence, all nutrient management plans that Hetherington writes have to be in compliance with Act 6.

"All Chesapeake Bay technicians must be certified to write and approve nutrient management plans," said Hetherington.

"I'll write a plan for any farmer who is involved in the Bay program. However, I encourage other farmers, especially farmers with concentrated animal feeding operations, to work with private consultants to write plans."

Hetherington has been writing nutrient management plans since the late 1980s. "We're very fortunate that the Chesapeake Bay program was the only program for a while that had a consistent amount of money. The sad part is I can only deal with half of the farmers in this county. The farmers located in the Delaware River basin would like help, too, but we don't have the funding for them."

According to Hetherington, the Chesapeake Bay program funding gets more limited each year. "We have to compete more and more between counties, and we seem to be losing money."

Still, Hetherington enjoys every aspect of her job, especially her ability to help farmers. She has been working for the Conservation District for 12 years.

"I grew up in a suburb in Bucks County and my mother had the county agent come look at a tree in our yard," said Hetherington. "When I met the exten-

sion agent, I thought, 'wow, what a cool job.'"

So Hetherington went to the University of Delaware to study plant science and agriculture education. She interned during college as a summer assistant and was the Bucks County horticulture extension agent for seven years. Then, after marrying a potato farmer, Martie moved to Schuylkill County to take the Chesapeake Bay position at the Conservation District.

"I've always been interested in education and in helping farmers," said Hetherington. "Between extension and this position, I feel like I am doing what I always wanted to do."

Calling herself one of the dinosaurs of the Chesapeake Bay program, Martie enjoys working with the farmers and the diversity in her job. Her quest to learn more and maintain certification in crop advising, pesticides, and nutrient management is part of her drive to go the extra mile.

"It's a personal thing for me," said Hetherington. "The farmers don't care whether I am certified or not, but it's something more I can offer them even if they don't know I have it. It helps me answer their questions and solve their problems better."



Acres of beautiful farmland are Schuylkill County's best kept secret. Martie Hetherington works with farmers to help conserve water and other natural resources while improving the bottom line with conservation planning.

## Agri-Services Agency Returns Substantial Dividend To Farmers

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — For the third consecutive year, Agri-Services Agency (ASA) has declared a substantial dividend for farmers enrolled in its workers' compensation safety group in Pennsylvania. More than \$350,000 in returned premiums has been distributed to agribusiness owners in the ASA Safety Group this year alone.

"Since the inception of the ASA Safety Group six years ago, participants have seen their workers' compensation insurance costs drop more than 50 percent," said ASA Vice President Gene Madill.

The Agri-Services Safety Group has taken important steps to monitor and help reduce the incidence of occupational injuries and illness associated with farming, explained Madill. "Our record of declaring substantial

dividends is a direct result of our emphasis on safety awareness, as well as the cost control efforts of the program. Many agribusiness owners received as much as 30 percent of their already discounted premiums back this year," he said.

At a recent agricultural reception in Harrisburg, ASA presented Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes, Jr. with a symbolic check for \$353,027, representing the dividends returned to agricultural employers in Pennsylvania.

In applauding ASA's performance, Secretary Hayes said, "Agri-Services Agency's efforts have been successful in educating Pennsylvania farmers about the need for safety, and in turn, are saving them money through the discounted rates of their workers' compensation safety group. Pennsylvania agriculture has

benefited greatly from this initiative."

Madill reported that the Agri-Services Safety Group continues to grow rapidly as a result of the value that it is bringing to agriculture employers. ASA workers' compensation coverage is available to those involved in production agriculture in most states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the country.

Workers' compensation coverage is among the many competitively priced insurance programs offered through ASA, which has been providing insurance programs to the agricultural sector for more than 30 years. As an agricultural insurance specialist, ASA also provides health, dental, life, disability, and long-term care insurance. For more information on the wide array of coverages available from ASA, call 1-800-654-8840.



ASA

Pennsylvania Farmers

\$353,027.00

Three Hundred Fifty-Three Thousand Twenty-Seven

and 00/100 Dollars

Workers Compensation Dividend

Samuel E. Hayes, Jr.  
Secretary of Agriculture  
and Vice President, Agri-Services Agency, LLC

Agri-Services Agency Representative Peter Switalski (right) presents Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes, Jr. with a symbolic check for \$353,027, representing the dividends returned to agricultural employers in Pennsylvania by the Agri-Services Agency Workers' Compensation Safety Group.