



Lancaster County Conservation District Creates Education & Outreach Department

Many within the agriculture or construction world remember meeting someone or hearing about the Conservation District. Enter any other working world and the Conservation District may be harder to recognize. That is unless Conservation Districts reach out to new and underserved audiences. The Lancaster County Conservation District has done just that creating an Education and Outreach Department dedicated to promoting natural resource stewardship and making all citizens aware of the interrelationships between human activities and the natural environment.

Unique innovations of the Education and Outreach Department include hiring a plain sect outreach coordinator to develop relationships with the old order steering committee, plain sect bishops and ministers, and the plain sect community at large. The department incorporates partnerships with grassroots volunteers and technical assistance led by the district watershed specialist. The county also features a watershed alliance with the majority of membership from Plain Sect residents. Mill Creek Watershed is lined with many Plain Sect properties near or adjoining the stream. Residents remember fishing the stream and summer days enjoying a stream changed over time. Today Plain Sect and English members of the community are working together to restore vertical banks and improve vegetation along the waterway. A stream assessment has led to a multiple phase project. Federal, state, county, and non-profit partners will have re-shaped and re-stored nearly 10,000 feet of stream bank at the conclusion of the project.

Education reaches outside of a four walled classroom with programs developed by the conservation education coordinator. Students, teachers, and fellow county residents take part in ed-ventures that often include a classroom with a view. The Lancaster County Conservation District introduced the concept of an Environmental Education Coalition nearly ten years ago. Today, the Lancaster County Environmental Education Coalition is well established with partners who provide environmental education in the county working together to enhance and initiate programs addressing the state standards for



environment and ecology. The Coalition allows agencies to work side by side and avoid duplications of efforts. Partners have included the PA Game Commission, North Museum of Natural History, the Lancaster County Environmental Center, Penn State Extension, Lancaster County Conservancy, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, and the Lancaster County Conservation District. Many of the coalition's projects have focused on teacher trainings. Most recently, the coalition created a Junior Conservationist summer program for pre-teens along with families.

The state Ombudsman Program is the final piece to the department working with municipalities and non-farm residents to keep agriculture going in developed areas. The Lancaster County Conservation District is also seeking new partnerships that build new connections to farm conservation plans. New partners are found in Agri businesses that link farm production to compliance. Connecting compliance to business incentives has proven successful with poultry, tobacco, dairy, and organic status. Agri businesses serve as indirect change agents working in cooperation with the Conservation District.

The Conservation Foundation of Lancaster, a 501(c)(3) organization was formed to further the mission of the Lancaster County Conservation District. The goal of the Foundation is to broaden and access new sources of funding to support on-farm projects, stream and watershed projects, and educational programs. The Foundation has also encouraged sustaining agriculture in the county through the newly formed Lancaster County Agriculture Council along with improved water quality through the Lancaster County Clean Water Consortium.

Stewardship, awareness, assistance, and programs are the meat and potatoes of the Lancaster County Conservation District mission. As you can see, the Conservation District utilizes a diverse group of resources to accomplish this mission.

