

Conewago Creek Watershed on its Way to becoming Federal Showcase Project

As a result of President Obama's executive order requiring additional measures to protect the Chesapeake Bay, the Conewago Creek Watershed in Lebanon County received a nod from the USDA to become a model showcase project for the six states responsible for restoring the Chesapeake Bay. The showcase initiative will be a collective and collaborative effort of federal, state and local partners working together to help landowners and communities use the land in the watershed in sustainable ways that will not adversely affect water quality.

With the majority of the Conewago Watershed being farmland, as well as 37% of the watershed located within Lebanon County, the County Conservation District took a leadership role with its district partners from Dauphin and Lancaster counties to survey the agricultural operations within the watershed and inventory the conservation practices already being implemented.

This survey, which included a site visit to each farm, enabled district staff to interact with landowners face to face, hear their concerns, and answer questions. Staff offered assistance to correct water quality problems that may have been identified. As a result, many landowners were interested in addressing resource concerns on their land with the help of the district staff.

Currently, district staff in Lebanon County is actively working with eight landowners in this watershed to develop or update conservation plans and implement various Best Management Practices (BMPs) including: stream crossings, riparian buffers, terraces, stream bank fences, walkways, and an off-stream livestock watering facility. Outreach, education, and information were provided to those that may not have been reached by other means. Through personal interactions with landowners, district staff has forged close working relationships and an on-going conservation dialog in that watershed.

In addition, three farms in the Conewago Watershed are in the process of being preserved due to the district-run Lebanon County Farmland Preservation Program.

