
Got Voluntary Ag & Forestry BMPs?

What?

The Blue Ridge Soil & Water Conservation District is currently looking for farmers in Franklin, Henry, Roanoke Counties and the City of Roanoke to participate in the Virginia Agricultural Voluntary Best Management Practice (BMP) Assessment Program. The assessment is voluntary and will allow District staff to document the number and type of both cost-shared and non-cost-shared voluntary BMP on farm(s).

Why?

- ✚ Since the 1980's, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has collected BMP data and reported this information to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model. More recently, the federal government has set a goal of reducing sediment and nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay by 2025 and is requiring Bay states (Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, D.C., Delaware, and New York) to meet milestone goals towards that target. States must outline their strategy for meeting pollution-reduction goals in a series of Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs), which must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- ✚ In Virginia's Phase 1 WIP, it was noted that there are numerous non-cost-shared voluntary BMPs on farms throughout the Commonwealth that have not been accounted for or credited in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model. To show that Virginia's agricultural and forestry communities are making progress towards the 2025 goal, the WIP established milestone goals that must be met for Virginia's farmers to continue with the voluntary implementation of BMPs. **Failure to show sufficient progress in BMP implementation may result in the legislation of mandatory BMP adoption by farms in the Commonwealth.** Alternatively, Virginia's WIP also suggested requiring certain BMPs be used on farmland before it could be eligible for local land use taxation rates.
- ✚ The 2010 Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Bill #346 which required the Secretary of Natural Resources to submit a plan to establish a data collection system for agricultural and forestry Best Management Practices implemented voluntarily in the Commonwealth. In Secretary Domenech's plan, he designated Virginia's 47 Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to be the primary mechanism for collection and entry of voluntary agricultural and forestry BMP data. The plan further designated six (6) SWCDs to pilot the data collection, entry and reporting of BMPs. The Blue Ridge Soil & Water Conservation District will pilot the assessment program during the 2012 Fiscal Year spanning from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

How?

Data will be collected for three categories of BMPs:

1. BMPs that were installed with cost-share assistance from the Conservation District or Natural Resources (NRCS) and which meet NRCS specifications. These BMPs should already be documented in Virginia's BMP Tracking Program.
2. BMPs installed without cost-share assistance which meet NRCS specifications.
3. BMPs installed without cost-share assistance which do not meet NRCS specifications. The EPA is currently working to determine how BMPs in this category will be credited in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model.

Examples of eligible BMPs include, but are not limited to: fencing streams to limit livestock access; planting winter cover crops; establishment of riparian buffers; conservation tillage or no-till; conversion of crop ground to permanent hay or pasture; liquid manure injection; and split Nitrogen application. Many other BMPs are eligible for reporting.

Reporting a BMP under this program does **not** obligate the producer to maintain the BMP or participate in any other government programs.

If you have questions about this program or would like to report your voluntary BMPs, please contact the Blue Ridge Soil & Water Conservation District at (540) 483-5341 ext. 3 or (276) 632-3164 ext. 3 /www.brswd.org.