Grant Mission: Clean Up Smith Creek

Two new Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) staffers have hit the ground in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, working with farmers in the Smith Creek watershed of Rockingham and Shenandoah counties where they implement conservation practices that reduce run-off.

Alston Horn and Ben Craig are focusing on cattle and dairy farms as part of the “Shenandoah Valley Clean Streams Initiative.” The goal is to reduce pollution sufficiently to remove Smith Creek from the national “dirty waters” list.

Personal outreach to farms is just one of the roles CBF is playing in an $800,000 partnership grant project to ensure that U.S. Farm Bill dollars reach farmers in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley for conservation practices.

“This is an exciting and focused effort by lots of partners in one impaired watershed,” says Libby Norris, CBF Virginia Watershed Restoration Scientist. “We’re confident the grant will make a significant difference in Smith Creek water quality and become a model that can be accomplished by willing landowners and fully funded cost-share programs.”

Smith Creek was selected because it is a large, primarily agricultural watershed with lots of conservation partners willing to work together. Located in the Shenandoah Valley, the watershed is seen as a good test of a stream from the national and state impaired waters list with concentrated outreach, voluntary participation, and conservation practice implementation.

CBF is a founding member of the Virginia Waste Solutions Forum coalition, which is partnering with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation on the project. In addition to the outreach work with farmers, CBF also will be hosting participating farmers on “Farmers to the Bay” trips to CBF’s Port Isabel Education Center and Tangier Island. The trips provide unique opportunities for farmers to experience the Chesapeake Bay and discuss water-quality issues with CBF staff and Bay watermen.

The Shenandoah effort is among 12 environmental projects in Virginia and Washington, D.C., that received a total of $6.1 million from the Chesapeake Bay Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to reduce pollution to local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.

Diversity Matters in Native Grass Mixtures

By: Ben Tracy and Catherine Bonin

Native prairie grasses (e.g., switchgrass, big bluestem etc.) have great potential to supply forage during the hot summer months when tall fescue and bluegrass usually cannot. Prairie grasses can also provide valuable habitat for grassland birds, help with carbon sequestration and have biofuel potential. Planting mixtures of these grasses (as opposed to a monoculture) is usually recommended, but how much diversity is really needed though to provide consistently high yields? We recently completed a 4 year study that addressed this question.

We grew 10 native prairie species alone and in mixtures of 2, 4, 6, and 10 together. Species included 5 grasses, 3 native legumes, and 2 broad leaf species. It turned out that mixtures with 10 species were the most consistently productive over the 4 years. Mixtures with 4 species were also very productive, but yields were not quite as consistent. The mixtures suppressed weeds very effectively because of their high productivity. The productivity of these mixtures actually surprised us. After 4 years with no fertility or irrigation, mixtures with 4 to 10 species still yielded 7 tons of hay (per acre basis). Forage quality was not great by year 4 but usually adequate for non-lactating beef cows. Harvesting earlier than we did (early July instead of August) would greatly help improve forage quality though. We concluded that fields down with a mix of 4 to 10 prairie species work very well during the early establishment years. Mixtures should include some short-lived broadleaf species (e.g., black eyed susan worked well for us) in addition to perennial grasses (e.g., indiangrass, big bluestem).

Why Bother to Control the Weeds in a Pasture?

By: Blox Daughtery

Why bother to control the weeds in a pasture? The productivity of “Biomass” per acre is constant for a given amount of soil moisture and fertility, so a pound of weeds allowed to grow means a pound of forage LOST. So if you went out and baled all the “weeds” in a given year, you would know exactly how much grass you lost. Why not grow more grass, lower feed costs, and increase your rate of return on assets? I met a cattleman who could actually tell me what the forage yield was in his pasture. It was pretty high, four and a half tons hay equivalent per acre. There’s no way he could have done that in a continuous grazing system. With that information, he knew how to set a stocking rate, and maximize his gains per acre. Its not hard to sample forages for yield. A hula hoop or a square made out of wood, a pair of grass shears, a scale, and some mathematics, and viola! What new science project for a child or grandchild! And then you could have them compare fertilized vs. not fertilized, or weedy vs. no weeds, go to www.rangeandpasture.com, download the AUM Analyzer, and calculate various stocking rates for different areas. Like I said, it makes a great science project for a youngster with an interest in raising livestock.

Forage utilization by cattle increases with weed control because they don’t like to graze near the plants that have thorns, which cause physical damage. If forced to do so, they can get scratched up, and injure their internals and eyes, creating a way for some bacteria to cause problems (pink eye is an example). Several of these “weeds” are toxic to livestock, and livestock producers should be well informed. The NC State website is a great resource, and Dr. Ahaya at VA Tech has done a nice paper on them. The problems are usually subtle until the number of toxic plants get high and animals can no longer avoid them. Some are lethal, like white snake root, which mama cow eats and then her milk becomes a poison, or any member of the nightshade family, including honesnnettle. Most intakes will be by young animals learning what’s good and what’s not, and even if they don’t die or get real sick, ingesting them will cause them to perform at less than capacity. So toxic plants need to be identified, and dealt with.

Chemical weed control is an investment that should have a very good rate of return. But the only real problem we know that can be controlled in pasture and grasslands are the perennial weeds. The better products that are now available will usually take them out and provide a yield increase for more than one season, which means that weed control in pastures is an event every two, three or four years. The costs of that investment, spread over several years, makes it one of the most economical weed control programs in existence, with a very low chance of failure.

The programs for pasture weed control can be simplified by stating that the costs of chemical control are directly related to the degree of soil salinity and contamination with weeds. For example, if you are in a situation where weed control is regularly practiced, where we might expect some biennial thistles, horsetail and some summer annuals, a low level of product like Forefront R&P or Grazon P&D may be all that is necessary. Where weed control is not regularly practiced, where we would probably see more perennials like Canada thistle, ironweed, or goldenrod, a higher level of the same products would be required. In situations where there has been a high level of neglect, and some woody species like buckbrush, blackberries, or multiflora rose are also present, the addition of Remedy Ultra or PastureGuard to those of Forefront R&P or Grazon P&D, or using Sarmount, would be necessary. And in a lot of situations with tall brush species, we may have to go after some individually with Remedy or PastureGuard, or some tank mixes of these with ForeFront R&P or Grazon P&D...

There are not many chemicals labeled for range and pasture. I like to think of them in two groups, the ones that have good soil residuals, which make them last throughout the growing out seasons because their seeds germinate in the soil, in addition to being great products for plants that are already up, and the ones without residual. All will be very hard on clovers except 2-4-D. All will pass through an animal in three days, unabsorbed. Most of the residual types will persist in animal urine and manure until it the soil microbes break them down. Before the soil microbes break them down, they can be taken up by some plants that you would rather not kill. So leave the manure in the field. Don’t collect it and use it to fertilize the roses or the garden, because if you do, those roses or garden plants will not do well this year, and beyond. What about legumes? They make nitrogen that the plants in the pasture can use, so they are valuable plants in our pastures.
Clean Drinking Water: Better for Cattle, Better for Profits

Water is one of the most essential nutrients for livestock. Water requirements vary with temperature, forage type and stage of growth, and livestock class and species. Table 1 shows the water requirements for various animal classes at cool (50 degrees F) and warm (90 degrees F) temperatures. Providing clean and fresh drinking water to livestock can help to reduce potential disease problems. Limiting livestock access to streams and ponds can be beneficial for both livestock and the environment. This article describes some of the options that producers might use for limiting livestock access to streams and ponds.

Table 1. Water requirements for various animal classes at 50 and 90 degrees F.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal Class</th>
<th>Water Needed @ 50 degrees F</th>
<th>Water Needed @ 90 degrees F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry beef cows</td>
<td>8-12 gallons/day</td>
<td>20-30 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactating beef cows</td>
<td>12-20 gallons/day</td>
<td>25-35 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactating dairy cows</td>
<td>20-30 gallons/day</td>
<td>30-40 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-pound weaned calves</td>
<td>6-9 gallons/day</td>
<td>10-15 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>8-12 gallons/day</td>
<td>25-35 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep and goats</td>
<td>2-3 gallons/day</td>
<td>3-4 gallons/day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Watering Systems for Serious Graziers, USDA-NRCS Publication, Columbia, MO.

Off-stream watering systems. Choose the best system for your needs based on the availability of an electric source, the water source, the required water volume, pasture layout, reliability, cost, and personal preference. Options might include pressurized and gravity flow watering systems. Flowing waterfed troughs or frost free waterers. Generally speaking, pressurized systems are the most efficient and effective with a dependable well and powered by electricity will be one of the most dependable and in many cases economical alternative water sources.

Fencing out streams. Fencing animals out of streams and ponds protects stream banks and keeps manure and urine out of the water and on pastures where they belong. Even fencing as simple as poly wire can be helpful for keeping cattle out of streams. The key is providing livestock access to alternative shade and water sources. Limiting access to streams and ponds. In some cases pressurized or gravity flow watering systems are not feasible or cost-effective. Even fencing as simple as poly wire is not feasible. Forage and livestock producer it is your responsibility not only produce a nutritious and palatable product for consumers, but to do it in the most environmentally friendly manner possible. Protecting our soil and water resources benefits everyone.

Upcoming Events

**July 26, 2012**
Southern Piedmont AREC
Annual Field Day
Blackstone, VA
434-292-5331

**September 9, 2012**
Family and Farm Day
Blackstone, VA
343-292-5331

**January 9-11, 2013**
AFGC Annual Conference
Covington, WV
www.afgc.org

**VFGC Summer Forage Tours**
Southwest Virginia
June 19, 2012 Craig County
Northern Virginia
August 15, 2012 Delaplane Virginia
Southern Piedmont
August 23, 2012 Halifax County

**January 21-23, 2013**
2013 VFGC Winter Conferences
www.vfgc.org
Nutrient Management in Grazing Operations

By: John Welch

A fair bit of my role as an extension educator recently has been consumed with the implications the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) might have on farmers in Virginia. In response to the EPA, the Commonwealth indicated that it would achieve agricultural target loads through the adoption of voluntary best management practices (BMPs). In their Phase I Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP), Virginia outlined specific BMPs and the rate at which they must be adopted to achieve the required nutrient and sediment loads. Nutrient management is one of the priority BMPs listed and will require increased adoption for goals to be met. The WIP specifies goals for nutrient management of land used for the production of crops, hay and pasture. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model estimates that as of 2009, only 5% of pasture acres in the Commonwealth were covered by an official Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). A target of 20% of grazing land has been established and must be reached by the TMDL end date of 2025. When compared to the required NMP adoption rate for cropland (95%), it is clear that the EPA believes grazing acreage to be much less of a threat to water quality than their row crop counterparts. This begs the question, are grazing operations truly more environmentally friendly?

As part of a symposium on Dairy Cattle Grazing in the Southern USA, Mississippi State Researchers explored this same question. They noted that “grazing dairies do not seem to fit the typical description of a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation.” Unfortunately, the EPA and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) do not share that opinion and even the Mississippi State researchers concluded that grazing operations “must also make waste and nutrient management a top priority.” It certainly stands on reasons that operations utilize feed nutrients created predominantly on the farm should cycle those nutrients much more efficiently.

A publication on Profitable Grazing-Based Dairy Systems by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) backs up this notion of increased nutrient cycling. It notes that “nutrients are effectively cycled onsite in well-managed grazing systems. Between 75 and 80% of the nitrogen consumed by grazing dairy cattle in feeds and forages passes through them and is returned to the pasture.”

So how has Virginia’s grazing farmers really earned the environmental accolades the government seems to believe they are owed? You will note that many of the statements endorsing grazing are predicated by statements such as “well-managed” or “management intensive.” Traditional grazing systems may have cycled nutrients more efficiently but this does not necessarily mean that they were kept on-site permanently. Traditionally grazed pastures are prone to having areas of nutrient accumulation and sparse vegetation in the areas where animals drink, shelter and congregate. The threat of nutrient and sediment runoff from some of our minimally managed grazing operations is real.

I believe that grazing, in and of itself, is not a BMP. Grazing is not the least cost and effort way of raising livestock. As producers we have much to gain in increased productivity by investing more time and effort into our grazing operations. The fact that this will also improve water quality for the “hard” of folks downstream from us is an added bonus, and recognizing that we will have then rightfully earned.

Nutrient Management for Grazing Begins at the Cow’s Tail

Richard Fitzgerald - NRCS Agronomist
Richard.fitzgerald@va.usda.gov

For more than twenty years my work in nutrient management throughout the Shenandoah Valley had me focused on the nutrients from animals after they wereproduced, collected, stored and ultimately applied to the land. Cropland and hay were the land-uses of concern. Utilized manure was significant, both with my present responsibilities in USDA’s “Showcase” Smith Creek watershed, I have spent a great deal of time engaged with nutrient issues as they apply to grazing land and animals that are not confined. This attention to pastureland with my colleagues at NRCS and our conservation partners reminds me that while there is not a “pile” of collected manure to deal with on pasture, similar nutrient issues prevail. Not the least of these is nutrient distribution and recycling nutrients back onto the land.

Cool season grasses abound all across the Valley region and the suitability of “stockpiling fescue” for winter grazing has long been documented. Adding a grazing technique called “strip-grazing” once this stockpiled forage has been produced, returns a forage utilization efficiency that will offset any increased land cost to this practice. “Strip-grazing” is allowing cattle to graze a new portion of stockpiled forage to meet the nutritional needs of the herd for one to several days.

While we all gathered in February to evaluate the utilization of the forage by looking down at the ground, my nutrient management instincts kicked in and all I could see was the uniform distribution of manure across the area that had just been grazed. Even more apparent to my gaze were the stains on the grass from the fresh urine deposits. Between the distribution of the manure solids and the liquid portion, the cattle had spread both portions of the daily manure produced back onto the land they were grazing. As uniform as it had been spread mechanically, but there was no manure pile to weigh, measure and test. So how could I estimate the nutrient management impact of this combination of practices?

Using the Midwest Plan Service’s Manure Utilization Handbook, the 24, 1000 pound cows of Mr. Fox’s deposited 54,40-45 per acre of total N-P-K on the grazed acres over 87 days. This seems high compared to the traditional winter feeding process where feed is hauled to a feeding area where manure is collected and is left exposed to environmental breakdown and loss throughout the winter months. Typically...
From Page 9 Grazing

2012 Southern Piedmont Equine Extravaganza Attracts Big Crowd

The 2012 Southern Piedmont Equine Extravaganza was held on April 6 at Virginia Tech’s Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center located outside of Blackstone, VA. The conference attracted just over 100 participants that ranged in age from 3 to over 60 years old. Scott Purdum, a nationally known horse trainer with his own TV program on the Rural TV Channel, Advantage Horsemanship, was the keynote speaker. Scott shared his vast knowledge of horse behavior with conference attendees as he discussed building a stronger and healthier bond with your horse.

Dr. Chris Teutsch of Virginia Tech spoke to participants about maintaining healthy horse pastures. He discussed the importance of selecting well adapted forage species and then managing those species properly. He also talked about forage establishment in outdoor demonstration following lunch. Dr. Marty Adams of Southern States Cooperative discussed designing nutritional programs for your horse at all stages of its life.

Dr. Brandy Phelps, DVM talked about emergency and preventative medicine for your horse. She also described how horse owners can most effectively work with their vets in emergency and routine situations. Theresa McManus of Keymon Farm talked about the foundations of riding and how to properly fit a saddle and tack to your horse.

This meeting was planned by a multiagency group which included the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Southern States Cooperative, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and private horse owners and was a partially funded through a generous grant the Virginia Horse Industry Board. In a post meeting survey, 100% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this meeting was good value in terms of both their money and time spent attending.

applied rates of solid collected manures would provide nutrient contributions at less than 30 percent of that recycled from the nutrient intake by grazing using average semi-solid Va. test values.

While few processes provide 100 percent recovery, strip-grazing spreads the daily manure produced at the back of the cow certainly more uniformly than random grazing over the 100 acre farm. It is important to remember that as much as half of the nitrogen and potassium is in the liquid portion of the excreted manure which is rarely collected at feed site to be spread back over the land. Thus the controlled grazing maintains a 3 inch grass cover that would improve nitrogen recovery by reducing ammonia loss and runoff. While there is little research to document these efficiencies, the practice does achieve commonly accepted erosion control guidelines. Strip-grazing can impact a nutrient management plan on pasture by providing maintenance levels of available plant nutrients to the field being grazed and allow farm resources to be targeted to fields needing higher levels of fertility. Under these assumptions, the fertilizer value of this practice alone is $75 per acre.

Manure and urine distribution after strip grazing herd for three days

From Summer Tours Front Page

America’s #1 Ryegrasses!
Marshall Jackson
Superior Varieties of Southern Peas
Top Pick Pinkeye
Top Pick Brown Crowder
Top Pick Cream

Virginia since last October. Registration will begin at 3:00 pm with the program running from 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm including an evening meal provided by local sponsors. The field day will highlight the Winstead’s management intensive grazing techniques for their stocker operation and the improvements to their forage base due to their management. Activities will include a pasture walk through grazing paddocks, a rainfall simulator demonstration as well as a producer discussion concerning alternative marketing. Please reserve June 19, 2012 to join us in Craig County. Pre-registration is required, so contact the USDA-BSIstack Service Center at 540-977-2698 extension 3 or email bill.keith@va.usda.gov to register for your meal. Visit the VFGC website at www.vaforages.org for more details closer to the event.

The VFGC Northern Regional Forage Field Day is tentatively planned for Sky Meadows State Park in the northern Blue Ridge in Delaplane, VA, on Wednesday August 15, 2012. The program will likely begin around 4:00 pm and end at dusk with an evening meal provided. Program topics will likely include stockpiling fescue, cattle grazing management and system design, and the impact of recordkeeping on profitability. The program is provided in partnership with the Blue Ridge Cattlemen’s Association, Virginia Cooperative Extension and the John Marshall SWCD. Mark your calendar and visit the VFGC website at www.vaforages.org for more details closer to the event.

Corporate Sponsors

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800-873-2352

Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau, Inc.
540/885-1265

Best of What's Around LLC
Chris Schmidt
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336/605-2804

Dow AgroSciences
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Evergreen Seed Co.
L. E. “Butch” Johns
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GrassWork USA, LLC
Bobby Umberson and Linda K. Reed
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Stay-Tuff Fence Mfg., Inc.
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Winfield Solutions

To JOIN the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council a membership form can be found on the web at http://vaforages.org - Contact Margaret Kenny at makenny@vt.edu or call 434-292-5331
President’s Message

The Future of Virginia Forages

Stop for a moment and think of outside forces that may impact the forage industry in Virginia. Specifically think of the ever increasing demand for energy in our Country and Worldwide. As I understand it, the ethanol subsidy has ended but the ethanol blend requirements remain the same and will be increased from 10 percent to 15 percent. At the same time we have relatively inexpensive natural gas but no well developed infrastructure to utilize this resource in widespread transportation fuels.

In my area I have noticed many a well-established pasture or hayfield being converted to cropland for corn production. Certainly the price of corn appears to be part of the reason for this conversion. How will this affect us down the road if the ethanol blend requirements come almost 50 percent? Will the blend requirement come from foreign sources, ethanol derived from cellulose material or just more demand for corn?

On the other hand what will happen if Congress decides to abandon the higher ethanol blend requirements and promote traditional and alternative fuels systems based on natural gas? What will this do to the price of corn, feed costs, demand for forage, and land rents? What will happen to Midwestern land prices that have jumped significantly in the past few years based upon higher grain prices? Would we be looking at the second coming of a major real estate crash and the fallout of such an economic scenario?

If you are a Virginia forage producer what should you do to be prepared? The answer may be relatively simple. In my mind everyday is a good day to be in the forage production business if you are a efficient producer. Low overhead costs and low debt load combined with effective forage production techniques quite often results in a profitable outcome regardless of background economic conditions.

Yes, as producers we have likely experienced increased input costs in the last few years and we cannot always control what is received for our product. Regardless the underlying business model of efficient forage production makes sense and is sustainable over a broad array of economic scenarios. That is comforting especially when none of us really know what policy decision Congress is going to come up with next or what affect the most recent case of BSE will have on market prices. In other words, anytime is a great time to be in the forage production business.

On a side note please keep an eye out for our upcoming summer forage tours in your area. Your VFGC Board of Directors and others have been busy planning the summer tour of the annual Crop and Pest Conferences in December and our Winter Grazing Conferences in January 2013. The AFGC Winter Conference will be in Cincinnati in January 2013. The AFGC National Farm Tour will be held in Virginia in May 2013 and will be an added treat featuring down home cooking and Virginia hospitality at Graves Mountain Lodge in Syria, Virginia. I hope to see you soon and have a great growing summer season.

Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

VFGC Holds Fencing Schools

Properly constructed fences are an essential component of any grazing management system. Red clovers need reseeding every few years. Time to seed is a good day to be in the forage production business. Low overhead costs and low debt load combined with effective forage production techniques quite often results in a profitable outcome regardless of background economic conditions. Yes, as producers we have likely experienced increased input costs in the last few years and we cannot always control what has received for our product. Regardless the underlying business model of efficient forage production makes sense and is sustainable over a broad array of economic scenarios. That is comforting especially when none of us really know what policy decision Congress is going to come up with next or what affect the most recent case of BSE will have on market prices. In other words, anytime is a great time to be in the forage production business.

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President, VFGC

From Page 7

Ruminant Livestock Specialist

Dr. Brian Campbell has been hired as the Ruminant Livestock Production Specialist at the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Dr. Campbell received a BS in Animal Science from Texas A&M-Commerce in 2005 and his MS and PhD in Animal Science from University of Tennessee in 2008 and 2012, respectively. His research focused on incorporating winter annuals into fall fescue based forage systems for stocker cattle production. Additional research he conducted examined cow/calf production incorporating reproduction, genetics, and environmental factors. One aspect of this research involved determining the efficacy of a genetic marker for identifying beef cattle that are resistant to tall fescue toxicosis. He also compared fall and spring calving production in a forage-based system. His extramural projects will yield more efficient use of the forage base and information on the consequences of calving at different times of the year.

Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

From Page 11

Virginia Tech Has a New
Ruminant Livestock Specialist

specialty in the endophyte fungus that lives in fescue. Research indicates that if we can get 25% of the pasture into legumes, we do not need to use any nitrogen fertilizers. (The flip side of that statement is that if we only have 10%, then we should be doing some nitrogen fertilizing, right?). Most range and pasture herbicides will

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Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

VFGC Holds Fencing Schools

Properly constructed fences are an essential component of any grazing management system. Red clovers need reseeding every few years. Time to seed is a great way to hold three schools in different parts of Virginia next year. If you have the ball. Your most important management ingredient is to take some “Action”. So go do those soil tests, start pushing the pencil on profitability and rate of return on assets, lay out where you want to put that hot wire to padlock off some pasture, decide which areas you will do some weed control on which to “give this stuff a try”, and follow up on countless other ideas that come to you as you think about your pasture as your most important crop.
The Chesapeake Bay watershed includes 64,000 square miles of diverse land use across six states, plus the District of Columbia. If we are truly to improve the water quality of the Bay, we must continue to work to reduce the sources of pollution that flows into the Bay. However, one challenge of working with such a large land area is that many people in the watershed do not have the luxury or experience of enjoying the Bay and instead feel disconnected to what we ask them to hold dear. The key to changing this detachment is to help them make a connection to the Bay through the water quality in their own community and their local streams and rivers. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, along with many partners, has focused restoration projects and outreach efforts on upstream landowners, farmers, and urban centers as a way of reducing nutrient runoff that eventually ends up in the Bay. In addition to on-the-ground restoration projects that are installed along local rivers and streams, many of the activities also offer an opportunity to educate the public on current policy and funding needs.

For the past 10 years, the Farmers to the Bay Exchange Program has aimed to connect farmers that live primarily in the upper watersheds to the Chesapeake Bay. The purpose is to show how their land use upstream can affect the Bay located miles downstream. To that end, CBF has partnered with the Virginia State Dairyman’s Association and others to bring groups of farmers on overnight trips to an island education center located near the center of the Chesapeake Bay. During these three-day events, farmers learn about Bay ecology through hands-on activities and about the historic watermen’s community of commercial fishermen on Tangier Island, Virginia. Connections are quickly made as the farmers begin to understand how they are very much like the Tiger watermen and how each of their communities and ways of life are surprisingly similar.

After several years of partnering with local agricultural groups to bring farmers to the Chesapeake Bay, a pilot exchange was also conducted in which a group of seven Chesapeake Bay watermen visited farmers. This trip was the first Watermen to the Valley Exchange Program. The local farming community provided a warm welcome to their visitors as the group toured different types of agricultural operations, learned about local water quality and local land use issues. The watermen learned more about farming the land, and the farmers continued to learn more about the Bay and its issues. During the three-day trip, the watermen assisted local farm groups at the Rockingham County Fair, and on their final day, several watermen worked with local dairymen to milk their first cows, while others helped to pick sweet corn or harvest vegetables with small produce farmers. Each new experience helped the farmers and the watermen to better understand each other.

Planning for the VFGC Summer Forage Tours Begins Early This Year

Local planning committees are busy coordinating with progressive farmers to put together interesting summer forage tours in different regions of Virginia. Listed below are two programs that are shaping up quickly for the western and northern regions of the state. The tour in the Shenandoah Valley is planned for Rockingham County in late May with a focus on forages in dairy systems. The Southern Piedmont tour is likely to be held late summer or early fall. As the details for these summer forage events finalize they will be posted on the VFGC website at www.vafarmgeo.org and advertised to the membership. So get your summer travel calendar ready and try to attend one or more of these informative events while enjoying the richness and beauty of agriculture throughout Virginia.

Western Region
The 2012 VFGC Southwest Regional Forage Field Day will be hosted by Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Winstead of Craig County, Virginia on Tuesday, June 19, 2012. This farm operation was featured in the 2011 Gaining Ground Successful Graziers Tell Their Stories video viewed and distributed throughout much of Virginia.