



# CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

## Getting help with everyday farm challenges

Morven Allen | Maple Shade Farm | Great Barrington, Massachusetts

**M**orven Allen has had a purpose for as long as he can remember. "Ever since I was a little boy growing up on a farm, that's all I have ever wanted to do," says the Berkshire County, Mass., dairy farmer. "I look forward to getting up every morning at four o'clock and I feel incredibly fortunate to be doing what I am doing."

Having grown up on an organic dairy farm in England, Allen has been deeply passionate about his farming, his animals, and the environment for all his life.

**"My goal is to leave him something that's better than when I took it on."**

Allen began his farming career in Massachusetts 20 years ago on a very small scale. "I started with two cows and two calves, with the goal to not get into too much debt and build up slowly." Today, as a certified organic farmer with a herd of more than 250 cows and 155 acres of his own land, Morven has come a long way.

Organic farming has always been Allen's preferred method. "It just fits the way I like to do things: lower input, lower output, less machinery," says Allen, whose milk is bottled by an organic milk processor and sold to the Northeast Assistance that Allen received from the

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service over the past 15 years has helped him meet some of his biggest challenges on his Maple Shade Farm. "With the rotational grazing, transitioning to organic, installing the concrete feeding pad for the cows, diverting the water from the roof and addressing the many runoff issues. We also did a lot of work on the buildings, while still dealing with the everyday challenges of farming," explains Allen.

When Allen first started, rotational grazing was a fairly new concept, but NRCS was there to help. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Allen received technical and financial assistance for the entire system, including fencing, watering and paddock layout.

"One of the things I like about rotational grazing is that it's very environmentally friendly. You're not burning fossil fuels; it's the cows doing the work."

A manure storage facility, incorporating milk house wastewater, and the nutrient management plan were implemented on Maple Shade Farm last year. This has allowed him to store the manure, and use it as a valuable nutrient resource on his fields when the crop really needs it. "Being organic, the manure is my livelihood."

Allen's new project for 2008 is improving animal trails or walkways for the cows to get to the paddocks and cross a stream on the south end of the farm. "The cows are going through the stream. The footing is poor, especially in the spring when the snow melts, and I know it's not environmentally-friendly."



**Morven Allen, owner of Maple Shade Farm in Great Barrington has received help from NRCS to meet challenges on his organic dairy farm.**

Keeping the cows out of the stream helps protect water quality by preventing soil erosion and animal waste from entering the water.

Allen stresses how helpful the staff in the NRCS field office in Pittsfield have been, citing the assistance of district conservationist Kate Parsons, soil conservation technician Ed Drake and engineering technician Paul Benjamin. "They have gone out of their way to inform me of what is available, steer me through the projects, and help with deadlines," says Allen.

Kate Parsons explains how Allen's enthusiasm for the projects makes him a great farmer to do work with. "It has been a joy to work with Morven over the last three years. He's eager to do new

### CONTACT US:

451 West Street  
Amherst, MA 01002  
413-253-4350  
[www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov)

Photo credits, top: Red-winged blackbird ©Axel Hildebrandt; Dufourea novaeangliae by Michael Veit

projects and always thinking of ways he can improve his operation, both in terms of the bottom line and the environment," says Parsons.

Allen's passion for conservation plays a big role in his everyday life. The projects he's implemented with NRCS assistance have not only helped him manage his land now, but also conserve it for his son's future.

"I am very fortunate I have a ten year old son who is with me most days on the farm. My goal is to leave him something that's better than when I took it on," says Allen.

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Assistance that Allen received from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service over the past 15 years has helped him meet some of his biggest challenges on his Maple Shade Farm. "With the rotational grazing, transitioning to organic, installing the concrete feeding pad for the cows, diverting the water from the roof and addressing the many runoff issues. We also did a lot of work on the buildings, while still dealing with the everyday challenges of farming," explains Allen.

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Cows graze on pasture in a rotational grazing system at Maple Shade Farm, an organic dairy farm.



soil



water



animals



plants



air