



# CONSERVING PENNSYLVANIA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

## Conservation Success through Strong Partnerships

*Rosalyn Orr, District Conservationist, NRCS*

The principal mission of County Conservation Districts and the NRCS is to promote the stewardship of soil and water resources. In Luzerne County, the partnership and working relationship between the Conservation District and the NRCS Field Office is thriving and yielding an impressive amount of conservation success.

The partnership has flourished since 2012, when District Staff started working and assisting NRCS staff with field office workload on a daily basis. Both staff would frequently partner together for field visits, educating producers about state and federal opportunities for conservation. This outreach effort yielded increased and diversified interest from the Luzerne County agricultural community. As a result, numerous projects were developed with NRCS and District Staff working together to provide technical and financial assistance to implement best management practices.

Two conservation projects completed in Luzerne County in 2015 exemplify the success from this working relationship. Gary Moyer and Thomas Venesky raise beef cattle and grow row crops in Hollenback Township, Luzerne County. Both Moyer and Venesky have only recently worked with USDA programs. They both had earthen wintering areas for their beef cattle adjacent to high-quality streams in the Wapwallopen Creek Watershed. The animal concentration areas at both farms created discharge of nutrients and sediments into the surrounding surface waters. Both farmers sought assistance to improve existing conditions.

The District and NRCS worked together first to develop Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) for each farmer. Then, the following year, the District secured Growing Greener Grant funds, along with NRCS securing EQIP funding for Moyer and Venesky. The combined funding allowed for streamlined installation of best management practices identified in the CNMPs.

At Venesky's farm, a roofed concrete heavy use area and manure stacking area was installed, along with several supporting



*Above: Barnyard area at Gary Moyer's farm. The earthen, manure-laden wintering area was transformed into a roofed heavy use and manure stacking area, completed in the fall of 2015.*

practices to eliminate the animal concentration area, contain nutrients and runoff, and provide Venesky with manure storage. The project provided Venesky the headquarters infrastructure to better manage his pastures and eliminate his animal concentration areas.

Gary Moyer completed construction of a roofed manure storage and heavy use area for wintering his beef cattle last fall. This structure prevents nutrients and sediments from polluting the Wapwallopen Creek, as well as providing Moyer with a facility that improves his animal health. Mr. Moyer also adopted continuous no-till and cover cropping into his cropping management to improve his soil health.

The partnership continues as strong as ever in Luzerne County. District and NRCS staff continue to work together to visit more producers, solicit more interest in stewardship, and secure more funding to put conservation on the ground. The volume of work and level of conservation success could not have been

The partnership continues as strong as ever in Luzerne County. District and NRCS staff been accomplished without the strong partnership between the Luzerne Conservation District and the NRCS Luzerne Field Office.