

## **Farm Stewardship Program with Berks County Conservation District**

*Submitted by Berks County Conservation District*

Berks County Conservation District (BCCD) partnered with Stroud Water Research Center in January 2015 to administer their Farm Stewardship Program (FSP) in Berks County. This program is designed to entice farmers to install at least a 35' wide Forested Riparian Buffer on all streams on their operation and in-turn receive "vouchers" for \$4,000 per acre of installed Forested Riparian Buffer to help cover cost of approved Best Management Practices (BMPs) on their operation. The maximum voucher amount is \$20,000 per operation. Typically, partnering programs and agencies participated in conjunction with BCCD to help the operator address all resource concerns on the farm, provide planning assistance, financial assistance and technical assistance. For example, a farm operator could sign up for a 5 acre Forested Riparian Buffer through the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). BCCD or Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff provide planning assistance by developing a Conservation Plan for the operator. After identifying the recommended BMPs, the operator could decide to apply for additional financial assistance programs such as a NRCS contract, Growing Greener Grant, Schuylkill River Restoration Fund Grant, and Pennsylvania Tax Credits through Resource Enhancement & Protection Program (REAP). Stroud Farm Stewardship vouchers are then used to install BMPs or help to offset the out-of-pocket cost when linked to another funding source. The Farm Stewardship Program was a tool for BCCD staff to use to assist farmers in covering some financial burdens of implementing BMPs that improve the operation and protect the environment with a special focus on water quality improvements.

Between 2015 and 2018, BCCD enrolled 24 sites in the Farm Stewardship program, of which 22 were farming operations. In three years of the Farm Stewardship Program in Berks County, a total 105 acres of Forested Riparian Buffers were installed, over 57,000 feet of streambank protection that covered over 33,000 feet of stream and planted over 8,000 trees and shrubs along streams. Through these cooperators, we had 263 BMPs installed including 44 Plans (Conservation Plans, Manure Management Plans, Nutrient Management Plans), 62 Forested Riparian Buffer related BMPs and additional 157 BMPs on farm operations.

BCCD and Stroud continue to provide maintenance assistance and knowledge to help these operations with their Forested Riparian Buffers to be properly maintained to retain a high survival rate and make sure they can continue to be successful over time. This program has proven to be a successful tool for BCCD staff to sell Forested Riparian Buffers as part of a Conservation Plan to manage marginal land areas and improving water quality. Both, BCCD and Stroud, hope to continue this program in Berks County and ag impaired watersheds by obtaining additional grants and resources. BCCD looks forward to seeing these Forested Riparian Buffers grow in the future, see water quality improvements on the local streams and to add additional acres of Forested Riparian Buffers along ag impaired watersheds in Berks County.



*Figure 1: Before picture of a nonbuffered stream on a farm operation in Maiden Creek Watershed.*



*Figure 2: After picture of Forested Riparian Buffer installed on the farm operation in Maiden Creek Watershed.*



*Figure 3: Before picture of resource concerns on a farm operation in the Maiden Creek Watershed.*



*Figure 4: After picture of installed BMPs to address resource concerns on the farm operation in the Maiden Creek Watershed.*