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Contact:

Sandy Thompson

McKean County Conservation District

17137 Route 6

Smethport, PA 16749

(814) 887-4001

## Celebrating Conservation District Week District Holds Legislative Tour



Tour Participants L-R – Amanda Murdock, NRCS, Madi Rukgaber, Jeff Larson, District Chairman, Sean Rukaber, NRCS, Jake Tomlinson, Penn State Extension, Blaine Puller, District Director, Justin Challenger, SCC, Doug Wolfgang, SCC, Ken Kane, District Director, Adam Causer, District Watershed Specialist, Sandy Thompson, District Manager, Representative Martin Causer, Don Dickerson, Sarah Carlson, District Resource Technician, Katelynn Decker, District Conservation Technician, Kerry Fetter, District Director, Cliff Lane, District Director, Senator Cris Dush, Ann Kaufman, Congressman Thompson’s office & Commissioner Tom Kreiner.

To cap off Conservation District Week, the McKean County Conservation District Directors and Staff welcomed Senator Dush, Representative Causer, Commissioner Tom Kreiner, Ann Kaufman from Congressman Glenn Thompson’s office, Doug Wolfgang, Executive Director of the State Conservation Commission along with representatives from the State Conservation Commission, Penn State Extension and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for a Legislative Tour to promote dedicated funding for the Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program

(ACAP).

ACAP is a program administered by the Conservation District to provide landowners with funding to implement conservation practices on their land. The District has partnered with NRCS to work with participating farmers and landowners to help design and implement soil and water conservation practices. These practices are for the control of nitrogen, or phosphorus or sediment losses from their farms while improving water quality and soil health across the Commonwealth.

The Conservation District was allocated \$860,321.08 through the State Conservation Commission to be spent by December 31, 2026. To date, the Conservation District has received over \$2 million in

requests and has contracted over \$455,000. These contracts are matched with contributions through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) totaling over \$447,000. Sandy Thompson, District Manager, stated, “the District would not have been able to implement the ACAP program if it wasn’t for the great partnership with NRCS.”

During the tour, four landowners welcomed tour participants to their farms. The first stop was to the Kevin Dibble Farm in Smethport. This farm is 155 acres and has been in the family since 1884. They are looking forward to the 6th generation continuing the operation. The dairy was started in 1985 and in 1990 the current milking facility and manure lagoon were built. They generally milk 45-50 cows in various stages of lactation and house around 50 calves and heifers in a facility that was built in 2014. Over the last few years, beef animals have been integrated for direct market sales to customers and are slowly developing a large clientele which does help supplement their milk check. Ken Kane remarked, “Supporting farmers, like Kevin is important to create food security for all of America. If they ask why would we fund a private farm, tell them because that private farm is funding you every time you open the milk cooler.”

The District approved a \$249,855.10 contract with Dibble’s to Install a roofed heavy use area and waste storage facility as well as installing roof runoff structure, animal trails perimeter and stream exclusionary fencing, watering facilities, water pipeline, subsurface drain, underground outlets, and ag. crossing. This project is also receiving \$214,890.58 from NRCS. Kevin remarked, “I think this will be a fantastic project that my son can use and pass on”

The Second stop was to Larson Family Farms in Smethport. This farm is 350 acres and has been in the family since the early 1900’s. Jeff is the seventh generation to operate the farm which also includes farming an additional 800 acres of rented/leased ground. They milk 40 head of cows and have 155 head of beef cattle including 5 mature beef cows.

They applied for funding through the ACAP program that was unawarded due to funding restraints. The application was for the installation of a rotational grazing system to include perimeter and interior fencing along with watering facilities, water pumping plant, ag. crossing and silage leachate system. Larson’s are trying to implement rotational grazing practices with their beef cattle. With the District unable to fund the project, Jeff Larson commented, “we will do our best with the way it is. It’s not the best, but right now we will make it work. At some point it will limit our ability to grow our beef operation.”

The Third stop was to the Strait Farm on Annin Creek. The farm was founded in 1951 by Bob Strait. He operated the farm as a 432-acre dairy operation. Currently, it is a beef operation with 65 head of cattle. The farm is now operated by Bob Strait’s daughter Judy and son-in-law Don Dickerson.

The District approved an \$84,000 contract to install a roofed heavy use area and waste storage facility as well as to install roof runoff structure, stream exclusionary fencing, watering facilities, water pipeline, subsurface drain, underground outlets, and an access road. The project is also receiving \$116,000 through NRCS. Don Dickerson stated, “both agencies (conservation district and NRCS) have been superlative and easy to work with.”

The Fourth stop was to DB Cattle Company located on Newell Creek. This is owned by Deric & Marklyn Brown and is a 100-acre farm with 50 head of beef cattle.

Participants were shown the installation of the roofed heavy use area and a roofed manure stacking pad that was funded through a Growing Greener Grant in 2021. The project also included Exclusionary

Fencing, exterior fencing and streambank stabilization practices that included a 60' modified mud sill and 40' saw-tooth deflectors along with the installation of one 16' wide stabilized agricultural crossing. Total cost of \$249,203 with \$56,887.50 in-kind from the landowner.

The construction of the building greatly reduced sediment and nutrient runoff into Newell Creek by eliminating the large animal concentration area (ACA), which is an area where animals congregate for food, water and shade that no longer sustains vegetation.

DB Cattle Company also applied for funding through the ACAP program but was unawarded due to funding restraints. The application was for the installation of a rotational grazing system to include spring development, watering facilities and interior fencing.

During the tour, Doug Wolfgang, Executive Director of the State Conservation Commission stated, "\$141 million has been allocated to 66 conservation districts for implementing ACAP." Justin Challenger, State Conservation Commission remarked, "almost \$70 million worth of contracts either completed or near construction, with 22,000 feet of livestock watering systems, 20 miles of fencing, 10,000 square feet of heavy use area and 38 waste storage facilities constructed."

Senator Dush & Representative Causer were appreciative of the tour and will be able to use the information they received to encourage the PA General Assembly members to provide dedicated funding for the PA Clean Streams Fund by visualizing the benefits the program for the farming community and the environment.