May 2023

All programs and services of the District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, handicap, or political affiliation.

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Chairman’s Report

Your Attention is Urgently Invited!

All ten elected positions on the LFSWCD Board of Directors are coming up for public election on November 7. Five of our present, long-serving Directors are not running again. Right now we must, with your help, find at least one good and willing November candidate to run in each of Clarke, Frederick, and Warren Counties and in the City of Winchester. Shenandoah County is squared away.

To help ensure that we maintain in a timely way the two directorships authorized for each of our five county and city jurisdictions, I am asking for your help: please comb your respective jurisdictions and come up with November candidates who have environmental passion, are eager to learn and will make good team players. I promise the winners an entry into the fascinating world of soil and water conservation, starting with individual farms in need of Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share Practices and continuing on to local, State and Federal levels.

Director conservation responsibilities include attendance at monthly Board meetings and participation in assigned District committees. The learning process is sparked both by association with one’s fellow Board directors and by a close relationship with an outstanding staff containing conservation specialists and specialists in both Education and Information and in Administration.

Once you have identified willing candidates, please direct them immediately to your county/Winchester Registrar for instructions on filing for their candidacies. The filing deadline is 7:00 pm, Tuesday, June 20, 2023. There is no time to lose!

If you have any questions regarding serving on the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors, I encourage you to reach out to one of your own representatives, or myself. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have about our work in conservation and agriculture.

Thank you!

Richard W. Hoover
The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District (LFSWCD) is almost through a record cost-share program year, which began on July 1st, 2022 and runs through June 30th, 2023. As you know, LFSWCD received record-high levels of cost-share for the current program year totaling $8.36 million. These funds are exclusively used for agriculture producers adding conservation practices, or Best Management Practices (BMPs), to their operations.

Landowners have been keeping LFSWCD staff busy with interest in the cost-share program. So far this program year, LFSWCD board and staff have obligated 56% of the cost-share funds. Interest in the agricultural cost-share program remains high, with potential projects still in the pipeline. Some of these projects may be approved this program year, while others will be ready for approval in the new program year, July 2023-June 2024.

With the 2025 Chesapeake Bay clean up fast approaching, many producers and organizations are starting to wonder, what if?

What if the goals aren’t met in Virginia?
What if the goals aren’t met within the Chesapeake Bay?

These looming questions have become the forefront of many conversations, including those who vote and dictate what happens within legislation and the Bay agreement. The Bay Bill, which lays out the 2025 deadline, has been a topic in both the Virginia House and Senate, with the discussion of extending the deadline. 2030 was initially proposed, with compromise being set at 2028, as long as appropriate funding sources for agricultural producers is available. The date change has yet to be finalized.

Though Districts have not been provided a concrete budget for 2023-2024, we know cost-share levels will continue to be high. LFSWCD will continue to work with producers to implement good conservation within our jurisdiction, maintaining relationships with those who have completed projects and working with new landowners.

As we prepare for the upcoming program years, LFSWCD staff continue to be a part of the State’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the subcommittees (Manure Management, Stream Exclusion, Cover Crops & Nutrient Management and Programmatic). By being a part of this process, LFSWCD is able to take direct feedback, concerns and questions from landowners within our jurisdiction to try and make improvements in the VACS program.

Each year, Districts can submit recommendations to improve the VACS program, either by making edits to existing specifications or by suggesting new practices. LFSWCD staff and directors have submitted ideas to be reviewed by the subcommittees in Fall of 2023. These recommendations include feedback we’ve heard from landowners, and setbacks we’ve seen as district professionals within the program.

The recommendations from each district will be reviewed by Department of Conservation and Recreation staff and sorted to the four committees for discussion. If the committee votes to move the recommendation forward, they will be reviewed by the Virginia Soil and Water Board for approval and addition to the VACS manual. If approved by the Virginia Soil and Water Board, the recommendations will be added to the next year’s VACS manual.
The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District hosted the local Dominion Energy Envirothon on Tuesday, March 28th at the Northern Virginia 4H Center in Warren County, VA. Six teams from across the jurisdiction tested their knowledge in soils, aquatics, wildlife, forestry and this year’s special topic “Adapting to Climate Change”.

In addition to the field tests, student teams gave a 20-minute presentation on a problem based on the special topic. The student teams were asked to prepare a presentation for the City of Hopewell “Keep Hopewell Beautiful” committee on three suggestions to get ahead of climate change. Suggestions from the student teams included everything from renewable energy, public transportation, best management practices, to community farms and public education.

The top three teams from the local competition are invited to move on to the Area Competition scheduled for April 27th at Grand Caverns Park in Grottoes, VA. The top three teams at the Area competition will progress to the State competition in May at Virginia State University.

The following teams ranked in the top three at the LFSWCD local competition:

1. Massanutten Regional Governor’s School, Team A
2. Massanutten Regional Governor’s School, Team B
3. Massanutten Regional Governor’s School, Team C

LFSWCD staff have worked with the MRGS teams to improve their presentations and complete training on topics in order to be better prepared for the Area competition.

LFSWCD would like to thank the following partners for volunteering at the LFSWCD Envirotlonh competition: Natural Resources Conservation Service, VA Department of Forestry, Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, and the VA Department of Wildlife Resources.
It is officially Spring, which means staff have been busy with events, outreach programming and public education!

LFSWCD actively participated in Earth Day on April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2023. Staff hosted the Strasburg Community Garden Earth Day Workday to build new beds, complete general maintenance projects and clean up the garden area. 14 volunteers participated in the work day, including plot holders, LFSWCD staff, the Strasburg United Methodist Church and local students from Strasburg High School and Massanutten Regional Governor’s School.

Staff also participated in Front Royal’s Earth Day celebration by setting up a booth with resources, giveaways and information on the two state cost-share programs. The event had hundreds of attendees and featured over 30 environmentally focused organizations and agencies. LFSWCD outreach focused on the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP), as Front Royal is a target area for the urban stormwater cost-share program.

As mandated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation grant agreements with soil and water conservation districts, LFSWCD hosted two agriculture outreach events for landowners in our area. The outreach events were structured to be inclusive to any agricultural producers. The goal was to invite all landowners to connect them with the various conservation agencies and organizations that have resources, programs and funding available. The first event was Monday, April 3\textsuperscript{rd} at West Oaks Farm Market; the second event was held on Wednesday, April 12\textsuperscript{th} in the Shenandoah County Board Room in Woodstock, VA. While attendance at both events was low, those who attended, including the conservation professionals, complimented the set up of the event and found it useful.

LFSWCD also participated in the Farm Self-Assessment Workshop in Shenandoah County hosted by Virginia Working Landscapes in partnership with the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative. Staff met with multiple landowners to discuss their interests, goals for their operations and determine eligibility for programming. From this workshop, staff scheduled six initial field visits with landowners for the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS), including potential stream exclusions, permanent cropland conversion, tree plantings and manure management.
Recently staff have made it a priority to learn more about rotational grazing systems, preparing grazing plans and the importance of livestock grazing. Proper grazing practices can be beneficial for operations in various ways, and is encouraged in the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) Cost-Share Program (VACS).

In the efforts to learn more, staff have attended many grazing trainings, including grazing cover crops, soil health and fertility, forage capacity and nutrition needs, and writing plans for landowners. These trainings have been provided by partner agencies like Virginia Cooperative Extension and American Farmland Trust, and also local professionals.

As a soil and water conservation district, many of our Best Management Practices focus on water quality, especially as we get closer to the Chesapeake Bay cleanup deadline. Rotational grazing is connected to water quality as it increases soil health, which in turn increases soil’s ability to hold and filter water and also improve herd health. There are many benefits to proper grazing that make it cost-efficient for the producer.

Staff are dedicated to learning and sharing resources with landowners on various agricultural topics. The Board of Directors encourage and support the professional development of the LFSWCD staff, as it aids in the development and impact of the VACS program within the Lord Fairfax District.

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<tr>
<td>• Increased soil fertility and health</td>
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<td>• Increased forage capacity</td>
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The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Funding is also provided by Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren Counties and the City of Winchester.