

Creating a Culture of Conservation from Farm to Table

******* A Funded Grant Proposal *******

Water Stewardship, Inc. (WSI) partnered with the Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development Council on a proposal submitted to the Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund: Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants. The project, “*Creating a Culture of Conservation from Farm to Table*” has been funded. The project proposes to reduce nutrients and sediments to the Bay by better optimizing nitrogen and phosphorus management in food and fiber production on a regional scale.

Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development Council have been working in partnership on local food systems throughout the Shenandoah Valley Region for more than four years. VCE brings its network of agricultural extension agents and campus research to bear on projects that affect real lives. The Shenandoah RC&D is a federal/non-profit partnership that allows for maximum flexibility in pursuing projects at the local level. Led from the ground up, the RC&D has piloted innovative projects such as flexible fencing that has resulted in statewide policy changes and has the experience of making direct payments to farmers for practices such as these.

WSI has developed and tested protocols and programs to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus water pollution through verified continuous improvement. Water Stewardship will work with the project partners to engage all segments of the food industry, animal and crop producers (farmers), food distributors, and food corporations. WSI will work with 25 producers who are involved in direct marketing to establish Continuous Improvement Programs (CIPs) to meet needed nutrient reductions and will verify performance. Based on the high nutrient loads in the Shenandoah Valley, WSI expects that implemented CIPs will reduce nitrogen and phosphorous losses by about 40% or 30 lb/A/yr and 2 lbs/A/yr, respectively. If the average farm in the project is ~150 acres, it is anticipated that this will result in total nitrogen load reductions of 112,500 lbs, and total phosphorous load reductions of 7,500 lbs plus 3,750 tons of sediment.

Through the Farm to Table educational activities, consumers will be asked to estimate their nutrient footprint using a tool such as Chesapeake Fund’s Nutrient Footprint Calculator and to reduce their loads by the same amount as the farmers (40%). While the reduction per consumer will be small, our goal will be to engage enough consumers to match the total reductions from the farmers, thus achieving both a sense of equity and partnership in improving water quality.