

Make the Most of Your District Newsletter

Market research shows that Virginia farmers like to read Soil and Water Conservation District newsletters. Take advantage of this opportunity—make strategic use of your publication to promote the “conservation with production” message.

Print timely BMP articles that include economic benefits. Use your newsletter to focus farmers’ attention on priority BMPs. Time the article to run before sign-up begins. DCR will be providing you with articles/news releases about five sets of key practices. You can enhance the effectiveness of your articles about other BMPs by:

- *Including a statement about how much money is available*, especially if it is more than in previous years (and note the % increase). Farmers told market researchers that they felt as if they never knew whether a practice would be funded from year to year, and whether there would be enough money to go around.
- *Noting the value of the potential Cost-Share payment.* Indicate the % of costs that the Virginia Cost-Share Program may cover, whether farmers may be able to qualify for additional state incentives by adopting complementary practices (such as riparian buffers complementing livestock stream exclusion), and whether farmers may be able to qualify for related federal incentives.
- *Highlighting BMP production benefits, and quantifying these where possible.* DCR is developing fact sheets for farmers and white papers for district staff that do this for the five sets of key practices. For example: planting cover crops can reduce nitrogen costs by as much as \$___ per acre.

Feature farmers as well as staff. Wherever possible, quote and/or profile local producers in your articles about BMPs. Farmers told market researchers that other farmers influence their consideration of conservation practices. “Naming names” (with permission) gives Cost-Share non-participants a role model and potential peer resource; it also provides positive recognition for Cost-Share participants.

Demonstrate partnership. Make your job easier! Solicit articles about the production aspects of BMPs from local Extension and NRCS staff. Include their events in your newsletter calendar, and ask them to include your events in theirs. Farmers told market researchers that they want districts to work more closely with other conservation partners.

Hit them between the eyes. Punchy, factual headlines that “sell the benefit” make sure your message reaches both readers and skimmers. Keep your articles brief (you’re not publishing a magazine) and you’re more likely to hold reader interest. Vary the format as appropriate, for example, bulleting a list of economic benefits will make it stand out. Wrap up your article by letting the reader know who to contact for more information, and provide multiple ways to do so.