



American Farmland Trust BMP Challenge

July, 2010

In the course of our conversations with farmers in the Shenandoah Valley about farming and conservation practices, WSI began hearing comments and debate about whether it necessary to apply starter phosphorous fertilizer in cold and wet spring conditions even if the soil test showed sufficient, even excessive levels in the fields. Our view that it was not necessary was confirmed by a review of the relevant scientific literature from the mid-Atlantic region, which we distributed to farms considering this practice. But in order to further test and demonstrate the effects of this practice on farm fields in the immediate community, WSI partnered with American Farmland Trust and their *BMP Challenge* program. This “conservation guarantee” program is allowing three Shenandoah dairy farmers to conduct a risk-free experiment to see for themselves whether the reduced phosphorus application will impact yields. Results will be reported on the WSI website and the community at large during the winter of 2010/2011.

The [BMP Challenge](#) is an adoption tool that compensates for any lost income that a farmer may experience when they try a new BMP. While it sounds like insurance, it is more akin to a warranty. A warranty induces a person (farmer) to purchase a product (BMP) - even though the failures of the product are not common. In this case, the three farms are applying starter phosphorous (the traditional practice) to a check strip in a corn field, and **not** applying it to the rest of the field (the best management practice). Yields and savings on fertilizer cost will be analyzed to determine if a payment is to be made. Then further agronomic and feed quality analysis from each demonstration will be conducted and discussed with the farmers and others after harvest.

American Farmland Trust in the Chesapeake Bay:

AFT was founded in 1980 to meet the challenge of sustaining farmland and farming based on direct input from farmers and conservationists, sound research, and sensible policy development. Recognized as the nation's leader in saving America's farm and ranch land, promoting healthy farming practices and supporting farms and farmers, AFT has worked in the Chesapeake Bay region for over 25 years to establish and support farmland protection, farm viability and agricultural conservation programs.