

# The South River Current



*Promoting interest and collaboration for watershed stewardship*



## Watershed Preservation: Mini Farmland Preserves

Maintaining South River water quality depends not only on riverbank restoration and preservation, but also on preserving the land and streams throughout the watershed. That's why everyone benefits when farmers participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The program is a public-private partnership that incentivizes farmers and ranchers to remove environmentally sensitive land from production and establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species. Program participants are paid an annual rental rate for the land that has been removed from production, along with other incentives specific to each agreement. Participation is voluntary, the contract period is typically 10 to 15 years, and enrollment is available year-round. Local farmer Mac Swortzel, owner of The Suffangus Farm, has participated in CREP for a few years now. His family worked methodically to fence off the banks of a creek on their land to protect the health of the river that runs through it. Actions by local farmers like Swortzel are instrumental in improving and preserving a healthy watershed. For more information about CREP, click [here](#).



## Did You Know?

- Click [here](#) to hear more about how the Swortzel family has implemented CREP practices at The Suffangus Farm.
- Know of a farm in the South River Watershed where practices that support watershed health are implemented? We'd love to highlight them in a future issue! Contact us [here](#).
- Over \$3,500,000 in funding was allocated to Augusta County producers and/or landowners through Headwaters SWCD in 2022 and 2023. Wow!



## Connections: Home-Grown Conservation

About 35% of the South River Watershed is farmland, so when farmers choose to approach agriculture with a conservation mindset, the whole watershed benefits. Many local farmers have chosen to implement natural, free-range practices and limit or avoid the use of pesticides and chemicals. Sunrise Farms in Stuarts Draft, established by the Miller family in 2003, allows its hogs to forage in the woods, and has pesticide-free pastures for turkeys and chickens to forage and cattle and goats to graze. The Millers combine their normal feeding practices with these intensive grazing and exercise habits to protect the soil and keep their animals growing healthy and strong. The owners of Long Acre Farms in Grottoes, Virginia, are committed to no-spray practices and using mushroom compost to fertilize their 21 acres of elderberry and gooseberry crops. They also keep bees, which naturally pollinate the fruits, contributing to increased yields and superior quality crops. When farmers use environmentally friendly practices, they help reduce the amount of toxic chemicals leaching into the soil and bolster the watershed.

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8,464 Acres of Cover Crops Planted	3 Miles of Streams Excluded	67 Acres of Cropland Converted
21 Acres of Stream Buffer Created	6,491 Tons of Animal Waste Treated	11 Acres of Trees Planted along Streams

## Take a Walk Back: A Bright Future for Soil Conservation

The local chapter of the Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was established in 1975 to “promote the stewardship and sustainable use of natural resources and protect lives and property through the operation and maintenance of flood control dams” in Augusta County, Virginia. This local chapter is part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which was established in 1935 (originally the Soil Conservation Service) thanks, in part, to one impassioned man and some aptly timed massive dust storms. Beginning in 1932, persistent drought conditions on the Great Plains caused widespread crop failures and exposed the region’s soil to blowing wind. On May 11, 1934, a large dust storm from the Great Plains swept fine soil particles over Washington, D.C. and 300 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. On March 6 and again on March 21, 1935, dust clouds passed over Washington, D.C. and darkened the sky just as Congress commenced hearings on a proposed soil conservation law by Hugh Hammond Bennett, a passionate crusader for soil erosion investigation and prevention. Bennett seized the weather opportunity to explain the cause of the storms and offer a solution. His efforts resulted in the Soil Conservation Act of 1935. The newly established Soil Erosion Services provided demonstrations in critically eroded areas across the country to show landowners the benefits of conservation. To read more, click [here](#).