A new conservation option for Va.’s agricultural producers

Resource management plans are a new way for agricultural producers and landowners to preserve soil and water quality while improving their bottom line.

Plus, there’s this bonus: Farms operating under an RMP plan are deemed to be in compliance with state nutrient and sediment standards for nine years.

The program was launched in 2014 and has been endorsed by both agricultural and environmental leaders. Participation in an RMP plan is completely voluntary, and there’s funding available to help landowners initiate the program.

The program encourages farmers to have a private-sector developer create an RMP plan for their farm or a portion of it. The plan will take into account the property’s existing stream buffer, soil conservation, nutrient management and stream-exclusion practices. The developer will inform the landowner of any additional practices that need to be implemented to qualify for the RMP certificate.

Once the plan is approved and implemented, the property owner is granted certainty from state nutrient and sediment water quality standards for the next nine years.

While the program is new, it’s based on conservation practices that have been used successfully for years. The mix of practices not only helps prevent water pollution, but they keep farms efficient and profitable. Nutrient management plans and soil conservation practices can help maintain nutrients and reduce soil loss. Stream exclusion often leads to healthy herds, fewer veterinary costs and more marketable livestock.

Another positive for the agricultural community is that the program enables better tracking of practices that are in place. This ensures that farmers receive the credit they deserve for helping to protect soil and water resources across Virginia.

Funding is available through the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share program to fund both development of RMPs and the practices needed to complete one.

For more information, including contact information for certified resource management plan developers, visit [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil\_and\_water/rmp.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil_and_water/rmp.shtml). Or, contact your local soil and water conservation district.