

## History of County Farm

The Shenandoah County Farm is in a unique position to help address the issues outlined in the Background section. The farm is owned by Shenandoah County. It was released to the county in the year 1798 for the sole use and benefit of the poor. The historic Alms House located on the county farm was used for this purpose until a tragic fire destroyed the house in April 2014. The county's goal is to convert the farmland surrounding the Alms House site into this Sustainable Farm Demonstration.



## Organizations Supporting the County Farm Demonstration



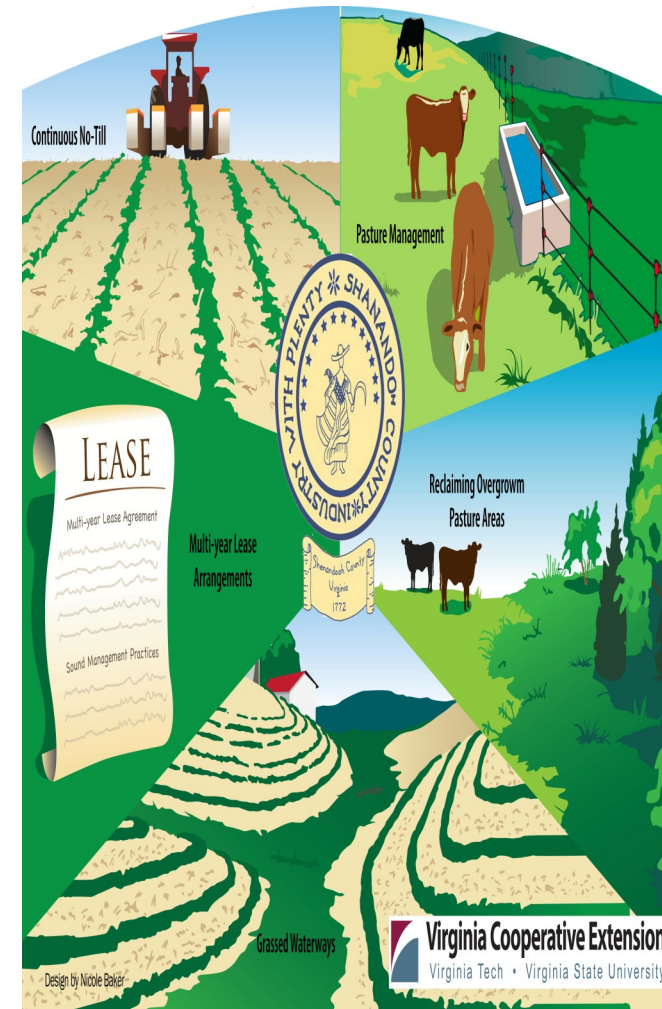
We work with the people who work the land.



### For More Information, Contact:

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## Shenandoah County Sustainable Farm Demonstration



## Overview

This project is designed to demonstrate long term sustainable farming practices at the Shenandoah County Farm. This is a full systems approach that integrates all aspects of long-term farmland sustainability. Sustainable in this context has three distinct meanings.

First, the farm demonstrations will showcase farming practices that are **environmentally sound**. A multitude of Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be installed and practiced to showcase environmentally-sound agriculture.



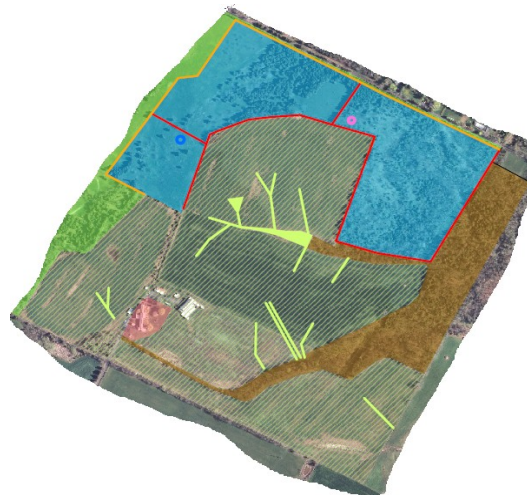
Second, the farm will be sustainable from the viewpoint of **farm profitability**. Farmers cannot stay in business without being profitable. This demonstration is being carried out by the farmer who is leasing the land.

Finally, the farm will be sustainable from the viewpoint of the **landowner**. Often landowners will not invest in fencing, building repair, or BMPs because of a lack of certainty that they will recover their investment from land rent. This project will integrate all of the agricultural lands on the Shenandoah County Farm (approximately 150 acres) into this Sustainable Farm Demonstration.



## Background

According to the Census of Agriculture, 34% of all farmland in Virginia is rented to farmers. A problem with rented land is that it is difficult for farmers or landowners to justify making long term investments to the land because of uncertainties associated with short term leases. The Shenandoah County Farm was a typical example of this type of farm. There are about 55 acres of pasture on the farm. Cattle were continuously grazed (with no cross fencing). A portion of this pasture is highly overgrown and is almost unusable in its current state.



The cropland (about 90 acres) has been farmed using no-till practices with significant crop residue for the past decade. However, gully erosion continues to be problematic. It would be beneficial to rotate some of the fields to grass hay and install grassed waterways in the gullies. The uncertainty of a year-to-year lease agreement precluded this type of long term investment. This type of scenario is repeated hundreds of times across the Shenandoah Valley.

## Demonstrations at the County Farm

**Multi-Year Lease Arrangements:** A multi-year lease allows both the farmer and landowner to make improvements (such as planting hay, building fence, and liming fields) with the assurance that they will recoup their investments.

**Managed Grazing:** Managed grazing makes pasture more productive, better quality, and reduces runoff. All this is achieved with no additional seed and minimal herbicide.

**Renovating Overgrown Pasture Area:** An overgrown pasture area will be reclaimed using sustainable farming techniques.

**Excluding Livestock from Surface Water:** Both the pond (which is now part of the park) and a stream are being fenced for water quality benefit.

**Rejuvenating Forest:** A Forest Management Plan includes a Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) Strategy for improving the woodland on the county farm.

**Grassed Water Ways:** Multiple grassed waterways will be installed to make the farmland more accessible and to filter runoff for water quality benefit.

**Continuous No-Till:** Cropland will be farmed using continuous no-till practices. Cover crops and grass hay will be part of the rotation. This improves water infiltration, prevents soil erosion, helps to build soil quality, sequesters carbon, and makes the soil more productive.

**Landowner Financial Well-Being:** This project is designed such that the farmland rent will fully pay for all improvements made to the farm. If all goes as planned, the landowner (in this case Shenandoah County) will realize a small profit. In addition, the farmer is making some improvements.

**These are practices many farmers and landowners can implement.**