Halifax SWCD Newsletter

Winter 2016-2017

We work with the people who work the land.

Options for Winter Wheat in 2017

A large portion of the wheat planted in Halifax Co. was planted in October and November when the tobacco and summer grain seasons were winding down. Consequently, this also happened to be the timeframe when there wasn't a measurable rain from October 9 thru November 29. This approximately six-week period was where the wheat was trying to germinate and what did germinate was searching for a water source that was dwindling. This combination resulted in many less than adequate stands of wheat throughout the county. By this point most people know what kind of wheat stand they are going to have for 2017 and for a lot of them, the 20-25 plants/ft^2 that was expected isn't there. Some research has suggested that yields at 40 bu/acre are still possible for plant populations as low as 11 plants/ft^2, but that cannot be expected. This has left many people wondering, "What should I do with my wheat this year?"

The answer to this question isn't simple and will primarily depend on the way you look at your wheat crop and the rotation that you plan to utilize. Currently, wheat prices are under $4/bu making the desire to go through the weed control and fertility in the early spring potentially undesirable when the gross income from the crop might not make over $100/acre. Along with this, adding harvest cost to the already known inputs makes it hard to see a grain harvest being profitable. Nonetheless, there are likely some fields that have better stands than others and harvest in the spring off those fields will likely provide some income. These fields should be targeted for greater management and inputs this spring to make them meet their potential. Tiller counts in late January or early February give you the last chance to determine if additional nitrogen may be needed. North Carolina State University recommends additional nitrogen applications if tiller counts are less the 50 tillers/square ft at rates ranging from 40 – 70 lbs N/acre depending on stand appearance. These counts along with tissue tests at Zadok's growth stage 30 have been show to ensure proper nitrogen is available to the plant when it is needed the most. Zadok's growth stage 30 will generally occur in early March, depending primarily on temperature, and is the point at which the growing point emerges and the plants switch from producing tillers to producing grain. The amount of nitrogen recommended will be based the nitrogen levels in the plant tissue.

If grain harvest doesn't seem desirable there, is always the option to harvest the wheat as forage. Forage harvest, even on a poor stand, can reach 5,000 lbs DM/A and when harvested at the right time can have a forage quality of 10% CP and 60% TDN. To reach these yields a nitrogen application will be necessary in early spring.

The third option is to simply leave the wheat standing and use it as a cover crop. This requires no additional fertilizer application or time associated with a harvest. There are still recommendations for productive use of small grains as a cover crop. If the intended crop is to be a corn or soybean crop then, to get the most benefit out of the cover crop, termination should be delayed as long as possible. This can even mean spraying within days of planting. The benefits to high biomass cover crops include increased soil water retention, reduced weed pressure, increase in soil organic matter, along with many others. Many of these effects are long-term; however, stress protection from weeds and water evaporation are likely to be seen within the year that the cover crop is implemented. Most no-till equipment will have no issue planting into a high biomass cover crop therefore, other than termination, no additional field passes are needed. The options for termination are primarily herbicide spray or roll/crimp. Both of these methods have been shown to be effective and when used together can provide very good termination and weed protection.

Even in poor stand years there is still an opportunity to take advantage of your situation and experiment with options that you may have never considered. Please be sure to get in touch with your crop insurance agent before following any recommendations in the publication so that any benefits you may receive are not put in jeopardy. In the end, the benefits should outweigh the concerns on any decision when it comes to agricultural production. There are resources available to help producers make decisions about their options for crop production.

New Year, New Opportunities for Virginia Farmers to Reap Rewards for Conservation Performance

Halifax, VA, January 3, 2017 – USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is now offering Virginia farmers and forestry producers more options for taking their land management to the next level with the new and improved Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

The updated CSP offers nearly double the enhancements and practices along with better reporting tools to help producers track the impacts of their conservation efforts. New software for evaluating applications will help landowners quickly see whether they are meeting stewardship thresholds and view potential payment scenarios for conservation early in the process.

NRCS accepts CSP applications throughout the year but makes funding selections at specific times. Interested individuals should contact their local service center and submit an application by **February 3** to be eligible for FY17 funding.

"Virginia farmers participate in CSP because it offers conservation benefits while helping to increase the efficiency and productivity of their operations," says State Conservationist Jack Bricker. "With these improvements, we've made a good program even better. It's more user friendly and offers greater flexibility to address local issues and priorities."

Participants can maintain agricultural production while earning payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, buffer strips, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat. Farmers can also participate in regional conservation efforts for the Longleaf Pine Initiative and adopt cutting-edge technologies and new management techniques like precision agriculture, planting for high carbon sequestration, and soil amendments to improve water quality.

Visit the new CSP portal, located at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp, to learn about available opportunities and to determine whether CSP is right for you. This one-stop shop also offers enhancement descriptions and information on national and state ranking questions, and will be continually updated as more information becomes available.

Learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, by visiting www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or a local USDA service center.

Genuine Halifax and Proud of It!

By Kimley Blanks, Halifax County Agricultural Marketing Director

"Agriculture is now, as it's always been, the basis of civilization. The…farms of the United States…form the basis of all other achievements of the American people, and are more fruitful than all their other resources." – Theodore Roosevelt

As we all know, Halifax County is an agricultural community. We built our community on agriculture and forestry, and it continues to be a driving force on our economy. We have a reputation for quality production, produce and livestock.

To build on this foundation of quality, Halifax County has started a branding initiative entitled "Genuine Halifax" in order to highlight our community. A website www.genuinehalifax.com has been started and it currently under development. Please visit the website if you would like to be a part of Genuine Halifax.

Additionally this website will serve as the go-to website for all things agriculture and forestry related. So far the areas to be highlighted are: Current producers/vendors selling Genuine Halifax products; Farmer's Markets; Agritourism; Agriculture Organizations (SVBA, SVMGA, Halifax Beekeepers Association, etc.); Commercial Production; Youth in Agriculture; Forestry, and Heritage of Halifax County.

The website will also serve to let individuals and companies outside of the county that we are an ag-friendly locality.

If you have any questions, input or a story to tell about your family's heritage, please contact me at Kimley.blanks@co.halifax.va.us or call 434-476-3300 ext. 3331.

I am a Forester

By Peter Eales, Area Forester, Virginia Department of Forestry

What is a forester and what do they do? Are they the people who welcome you at State and Federal Parks or are they the people who help manage the wildlife in the forest and oversee the hunting laws? Or are they the people who drive logging trucks down the road? Well, none of these jobs describe who or what a forester does.

Foresters fill important but often behind the scenes type of jobs. There are urban foresters who work for cities helping to care for the street trees and city parks. There are industry foresters who help grow trees for their companies so that they can later be cut to make money. There are consulting foresters who work to help landowners manage and sell their trees as a source of income. Still others are procurement foresters for logging companies or saw mills. They help supply the mills which process the trees into specific products. There are research foresters who help find better ways to grow and manage trees as a resource. Lastly, there are foresters who work for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I am the last type of forester. My job involves fighting wildfires and providing educational workshops for adults or programs for local schools. I also help landowners manage their forests. On any given day, I may have timber harvesting jobs to inspect to monitor water quality compliance. I may look at a stand of hardwood trees or pines to determine what type of management is needed to help the landowner achieve their goals which could include timber production, wildlife, recreation or just the wise use of their natural resources. It may even include checking on insect and disease infestations.

As foresters, not only do we help landowners who have decided to harvest the timber off their property, but we also help them re-plant their trees. Replanting provides many benefits. It helps to stabilize the soil and keep erosion from occurring. It helps to provide future wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities. It can also provide a future financial investment for the landowner.

You see, timber is a renewable resource and should be managed accordingly. This may mean that some areas are kept in forest in perpetuity while other areas are cut and harvested as a crop. People think of soybeans, corn, and tobacco as crops that are planted and harvested. Timber is like tobacco in that it is planted and harvested as a type of agricultural crop. They just take longer to grow and harvest than the traditional crops that most people think of.

So no matter what type of forester a person is, they each have a part in the planting, managing, buying, selling, cutting, shipping and processing of the 5,000 plus forest products that we all use every day.

I am a Forester.

Halifax SWCD is Now Online!

Please visit us online at:

WWW.HALIFAXSWCD.ORG

HALIFAX SWCD SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

We work with the people who work the land.

Scholarship Opportunities Available

Each year there are multiple scholarship opportunities available through the Halifax SWCD and the VASWCD. This year, the Halifax SWCD will award two, $1,000, J. T. Burton Natural Resources Educational Scholarships as well as one, $1,000, Halifax SWCD Memorial Scholarship. Additionally, one of the scholarship recipients is also eligible to be considered for one of four statewide college scholarships that are awarded annually by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Educational Foundation. Scholarship application information is available at our new website: **www.halifaxswcd.org**

Halifax SWCD Acquires Roller/Crimper From Piedmont SWCD

Halifax SWCD acquired a 10 ft. roller/crimper from Piedmont SWCD in the Fall of 2016. The purpose of the roller/crimper is to be able to terminate live standing cover crops for residue management. Rolling/crimping gives producers more options for terminating cover crop versus traditional spraying with herbicide. This material creates a mat that holds moisture and helps to prevent weeds from germinating. This tool will be available to producers across Southside VA, but Halifax SWCD plans to advance their cover crop program with the addition of this piece of equipment. There will be no rental charge for this equipment but producers will need to schedule a time to utilize the roller/crimper with Halifax SWCD.

Halifax SWCD 2016 Poster Contest

This year, the Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District sponsored the National Conservation Poster Contest. Each year the contest gives kindergarten through twelfth grade students the opportunity to create and submit entries into the conservation themed contest. The theme for the 2016 contest was "We All Need Trees". Contest winners are first chosen at the local district level and then the first-place winners for each category are submitted to the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts for judging at the state level. Winners of the state contest are submitted to the National Association of Conservation Districts for the national competition.

For the 2016 local contest, we had a total of 104 entries representing students from third grade through twelfth grade. The number of places awarded in each category varied due to the number of contest entries in each category. The 2016 winners of the Halifax SWCD poster contest are: (2nd-3rd grade) 1st- Kaiyah Stephens; (4th-6th grade) 1st- Lainne Taylor, 2nd- Ann Bottoms, 3rd- Jessica Wilborn, 4th- Alexis Chandler, 5th- Makayla Roach; (7th-9th grade) 1st- Eden Collins, 2nd- DeMeisha Canada, 3rd- Asia Crawley, 4th- Tiaja Moore, 5th- Jayden Bomar; (10th-12th grade) 1st- Shaniqua Ward, 2nd- Bobby Doane. Due to an exceptionally high number of contest entries in the 7th to 9th grade category, the Education Committee of the Halifax SWCD also awarded 5 Honorable Mentions within that category. The Honorable Mentions went to (listed alphabetically): Sa'Mya Alvarez, Starr Brooks, Essence Carrington, James Langford, and Jakiya Mitchell.

The Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District would like to thank all the students who participated in the contest as well as the Halifax County teachers and school administrators that helped promote the contest and allowed students the opportunity to participate. We hope to continue to provide opportunities and resources for conservation education and outreach efforts throughout Halifax county.

2016 Halifax SWCD Awards Banquet

The Halifax SWCD held their Annual Awards Banquet on the evening of November 9, 2016. This year's award winners are featured below. (Photos courtesy of Ashley Hodge/Gazette-Virginian)

Outstanding Cooperator Award: Conservation Specialist, Rick Brown recognized the late James Nestor and presented the award to his wife, Brittney Nestor; son, Shannin Nestor; Tommie and Dolly Glasscock, Michael Hudson, and Scott Hudson.

Clean Water Farm Award: District Director and Vice Chairman, Larry Layman presented the award to Craig Church and James Church(not pictured).

Forestry Award: VA Department of Forestry, Area Forester, Tom Burke presented the award to Dr. Carlyle Franklin.

Wildlife Conservation Award: Private Lands Biologist, Lorien Koontz presented the award to James Farley, Jr.

Wildlife Food Patch Awards-Junior Division: District Director, Dr. Bobby Hall presented awards to Savannah Terrell(1st), Caleb Bomar(2nd), Samantha Burns(3rd tie), Dylan Love(3rd tie), and William Anderson (5th).

Wildlife Food Patch Awards-Senior Division: District Director, Dr. Bobby Hall presented awards to Taylor Crews(1st), Heather Griles(2nd-not pictured), Sabrina Covington(3rd), Austin Crews (4th tie), and Jacob Davis (4th tie-not pictured).

Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District
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Board of Directors:
Page Wilkerson—Chairman
Larry Layman—Vice Chairman
Bruce Pearce
Bobby Hall
Jason Fisher—VCE Appointment
Blair Hall—Associate
Hudson Reese—Associate

Staff:
Rick Brown—Conservation Specialist
Janice Jackson—Administrative/Technical Assistant
Todd Puckett—Education & Outreach Specialist

Upcoming Events:

January 17 – Halifax Ag Breakfast Series (Topic: Pesticides)
January 17 – Forage Profit Seminar – Person Co., NC Extension Office
January 18 – Tobacco GAP Meeting – Meherrin River Hunt Club
January 19 – Forage Profit Seminar – Iredell Co., NC Extension Office
January 19 – Tobacco GAP Meeting – Olde Dominion Ag Complex
January 19 – "Knee Deep" Grazing and Pasture Management Workshop Series - Verona
January 23-24 – American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting – Hotel Roanoke
January 25 – Tobacco GAP Meeting - Scottsburg VFD
January 25 – 2017 Virginia Cattlemen's Association Winter Producer Economic Outlook Discussion, SPAREC
January 26 – "Knee Deep" Grazing and Pasture Management Workshop Series - Verona
January 28 – 2017 Virginia Beef Cattle Health Conference
February 2 – "Knee Deep" Grazing and Pasture Management Workshop Series - Verona
February 8 – Halifax Ag Breakfast Series (Topic: Grain)
February 9 – Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
February 22 – VA No-till Conference – Rockingham County Fairgrounds
March 8 – Halifax Ag Breakfast Series (Topic: Value-Added and Marketing)
March 9 – Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
March 14 – Soybean Production Meeting – Two Locations: Midway Baptist Church, Phenix (9:30-1:30) & Meherrin River Hunt Club (5:30-9:30)
April 13 – Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
May 20 – Farm and Market Stroll

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