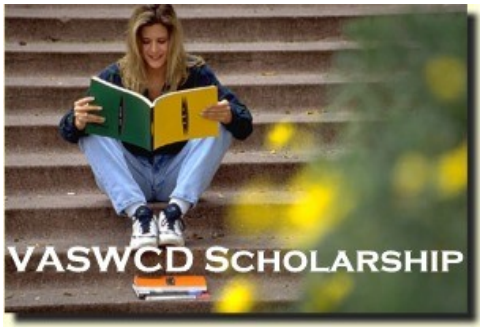
Halifax SWCD Newsletter

Winter 2018-2019

We work with the people who work the land.

Exciting Education Opportunities!

Scholarships Available from Halifax SWCD & VASWCD



Halifax SWCD will be awarding three scholarships. This local scholarship opportunity includes two J. T. Burton Natural Resources Scholarships in the amount of $1,500 and one Halifax SWCD Memorial Scholarship on the amount of $1,000. Scholarship applicants should be majoring in, or show a strong desire to major in, a college course curriculum related to natural resource conservation and/or environmental studies. A single application should be submitted to the Halifax SWCD office by March 8, 2019 to be considered for all scholarship opportunities listed above. The scholarship application and additional information is available on the Halifax SWCD website @ www.halifaxswcd.org.

The annual Conservation Poster Contest provides kindergarten through twelfth grade students the opportunity to convey their thoughts about soil, water and related natural resources issues through art. It also highlights the educational outreach efforts of conservation districts and their state conservation associations, auxiliaries and agencies. The poster contest theme follows the annual NACD Stewardship theme. This year's theme is Life in the Soil: Dig Deeper.

If you are interested in your class participating, please contact Melissa. She can come to your class, group or club by teaching about soils and help get started with the posters.

The deadline is October 1, 2019

Melissa Waller: educationspecialist@halifaxswcd.org

We are currently taking applications for the 2019 Youth Conservation Camp held at Virginia Tech July 7th-13th. The program brings together about 70 interested students for a week of learning about Virginia's natural resources from conservation professionals and faculty from Virginia Tech. Most of the instruction is hands-on and outdoors. Activities include; fisheries management, touring parts of Virginia Tech's campus, looking for macroinvertebrates, canoeing, hiking and more. This is for high school students just completed 9th through 12th grade. Students interested should come by the Halifax SWCD or ask a science or agriculture teacher for an application.

Applications are due to the Halifax SWCD office April 17, 2019

Adapt to SUCCEED Mob-grazing, strip-grazing and stockpiling all have a place in this producer's program.

Credits: Becky Mills, Progressive Farmer

Veteran cattleman Matt Poore test-drives production practices, both as a researcher and a ranch manager. It gives him a unique perspective and helps ensure he's recommending programs he has used in real world conditions. An Extension beef specialist for 28 years at North Carolina State University (NCSU), Poore also helps manage his family's beef operation, Triple Creek Ranch, in Virgilina, Virginia. Recently, he's been looking at modifications on the concept of mob-grazing, or as he prefers to call it, "ultrahigh-density grazing." The technique known as mob-grazing has been increasingly put into use in recent years. It includes high stock densities, usually around 100,000 pounds of animal per acre, and frequent rotations. The goal is to give forages long recovery periods before animals regraze them. Proponents say mob-grazing results in more deeply rooted plants, less-selective grazing and improved manure and urine distribution. And, since cattle are moved at least once a day, they are more accustomed to seeing humans and are generally calmer and easier to handle.

Meet a Challenge Poore's first introduction to mob-grazing came eight years ago when he taught a two-week summer class to Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) employees. Students were divided into groups and practiced grazing techniques using NCSU's livestock and pastures. One group decided to use mob-grazing with its assigned herd of 30 Angus cows. It worked so well that, at the end of the class, the group challenged Poore to continue with the program. For two years, he met that challenge using temporary electric fencing to graze 30 to 33 cows (an average of 45,000 to 50,000 pounds liveweight) on two-tenths of an acre a day. "I realized I didn't know as much as I thought about using temporary electric fencing," the grazing specialist says. More revelations followed. "Those cows were very unhappy the first few weeks. They didn't like being that close to each other. They were butting each other and fighting." Given a little time, that changed, he says. When he'd get to the NCSU farm, those cows would be standing at the fence, patiently waiting for fresh grass. When he turned them into a new paddock, "they would put their heads down and eat aggressively, nearly touching each other with no stress.".

Weed Consumption Poore says in mob-grazing, the herd started to eat things he'd never seen them eat, challenging the idea of what is or is not a weed. "When you have 30 cows on two-tenths of an acre, and they realize that's what's for breakfast, lunch and dinner, they will eat every bit of it," he says. Horsenettle, for example, tested at 16.5% crude protein and was no obstacle to the cows. Milkweed, on the other hand, was something they never learned to eat. Poore says they might take a few bites, but they mainly just stomped it. That new mindset, when it came to what cows would and wouldn't eat, was put to the test during Poore's second summer of mob-grazing, a year of drought. Despite micromanagement, the cattleman was almost out of grass. He spotted a former mud hole, a 4.7-acre sacrifice pasture where NCSU workers had fed calves. It had lambsquarters high enough to hide a full-grown giraffe. The manager had plans to cut it when Poore asked if he could use the lot. There was fescue under those weeds.. Using the same two-tenths-of- an-acre-per-day forage allowance he perfected on the other pastures, he got 24 days of grazing out of that weed-choked 4.7 acres. That's 214,500 pounds per acre of stocking density for 184 cow days per acre in the middle of a summer drought. "It was pretty amazing," Poore says. "There are times you can use mob-grazing to great advantage."

Poore earned his mob-grazing stripes that summer. There was just one water trough and limited shade in the pasture. He did some creative fencing to establish lanes that went back to the trough and shade. The experience underscored that for many farmers, mob-grazing would be too much of a challenge without an infrastructure that could support it in terms of water, shade and fencing.

Grazing Fits While mob-grazing worked at the NCSU farm, Poore knew it wasn't the best fit for his family's Virgilina operation. Instead, they stuck to a continuous stockpiling/ strip-grazing routine. Perfected during the last 28 years and used almost year-round, the system lets the family manage 110 cows, replacement heifers, weaned steers and bulls on 350 acres of forage. They make the most of 16 permanent water sources, which include pressurized water troughs, gravity-fed troughs and limited access areas to ponds and creeks. Temporary electric fence is used to create a 1-acre strip of forage, mostly tall fescue and clover, next to a water trough. Each day, the fence moves to give cows another acre. The process repeats until cows have grazed a pasture for seven to 10 days. There's no back-fencing, eliminating the need to make lanes back to a water source. "They'll walk back to water, but, if you give them a fresh strip, you'll see very little back-grazing. They like the fresh area, and they'll stay in it most of the time," he reports. "You get the benefits of mob-grazing, but there is some extra area for them to get in." The extra area also means there is less likelihood of baby calves getting trampled. Typically, in and intensive rotational system, cows get aggressive about getting in a new piece of grass. If calves are bedded down in the deep grass, they might get trampled. Poore reduces the risks to baby calves by delivering in a larger sacrifice pasture. Most calves come in October, which is when he feeds hay as summer grasses go dormant, and stockpiled fescue and no-tilled winter annuals aren't ready to graze. He explains calves are given priority when it comes to grazing. Poore says they forage-finish half of the calf crop for local markets and graze them on winter or summer annuals, feeding them the grain as needed. Cows can hold their condition on older grasses. While strip-grazing is better fit for Poore's operation from a logistical standpoint, he says it's also less labor intensive than mob-grazing. He describes what he's doing on the home ranch as adaptive grazing where they use a variety of techniques and a critical eye to achieve the goals set for the operation. Whatever the terminology or the system, Poore hopes producers will try rotational grazing. "I started strip-grazing stockpiled fescue in 1981," he says. "There was no Polywire and no tread in posts. I used 14-guage wire and tobacco sticks with insulators wired to them. It was well worth the effort." And in 2018 he says it's still worth it. "We feed a bale and a half of hay per cow total with our grazing system. We save a ton and a half of hay per cow. If we can graze them for 75 days instead of feeding hay, we save $100 per cow."

Environmental Gains Fencing cattle out of creeks and ponds is often the first step in any type of rotational-grazing system. Matt Poore says without it, animals can quickly degrade banks. "When 110 cows are spread out over 350 acres, it isn't so bad, they'll come down to water in creeks 10 or 15 at a time. But, when they are confined to a small area around the creek, they'll tear it up," he says. Poore tested water upstream and downstream of his hay-feeding pasture in March 1999. Upstream, iron levels were 0.75 ppm (parts per million), and ammonium was 0.35 ppm. Downstream, iron rose to 14.8 ppm, and ammonium was 1.31 ppm. To remedy the situation, he and his family turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Halifax Soil and Water Conservation District. They provided cost-share money to help with the cost of additional fencing around the creeks and ponds. Poore retested the water in March 2001 after fencing out the creeks. Upstream, iron was 1.01 ppm, and ammonium was 0.0 ppm. "The vegetation around the creek has dramatically healed in two years", he says.

Halifax SWCD Awards Banquet

On Tuesday, November 13, 2018, the Halifax Soil and Water Conservation District hosted its annual Awards Banquet at Ernie's Restaurant in South Boston. Approximately 60 invited guests, district directors and staff attended.

Justin Smith, Conservation Specialist with Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District, recognized Joseph Russel with the 2018 Wildlife Conservation Award. Mr. Russel has converted crop and pastureland into highly managed pines and wildlife habitat. He selflessly manages his planted pines knowing he may not see the financial gain from the harvest, but knowing it is the best for the land, wildlife and future generations. Mr. Russel was not able to attend the banquet.

Justin Smith also recognized the districts first Educator of the Year Award. This recognition went to William McCaleb. Mr. McCaleb was not in attendance either. Rebekah Slabach accepted the award on his behalf. Bill McCaleb, a Master Gardener with Virginia Cooperative Extension – Halifax has partnered with Halifax SWCD for twenty years. Two of the main programs he has assisted with have been the districts annual Youth Conservation Camp for the county middle school students, and numerous rain barrel workshops. Mr. McCaleb is truly a wonderful asset to Halifax SWCD.

Dr. Bobby Hall, District Director and Education/Youth Activities Chairman, presented the Wildlife Food Patch Contest Awards to the young conservationists who had outstanding food plots in the annual competition sponsored by the district and. This year seed packets and planting instructions were made available to 11 area youth provided by Non-Typical Outdoors. This year's winners were; 1st place – Noah Terrell, tied for 2nd place – Austin Crews and Jewel Williams, tied for 3rd place – Savannah Terrell and Jacob Gravitt, and tied for 4th place – Caleb Bomar and Noah Waller

Mr. Tom Burke, Virginia Department of Forestry recognized brothers Joe and Clark Graves for outstanding accomplishments in forestry. Burke discussed the Graves use of prescribed burns and other forest management techniques to create suitable habitat for quail. They have gone to great lengths to create wide, permanent fire breaks across their property and complete burns several times a year safely and efficiently. Department of Forestry often uses their property as an example of good forest management for multiple resources.

Mr. Larry Layman, District Director and Vice Chairman, presented the 2018 Clean Water Farm Award to Ronnie Waller, Ray Waller and Blair Hall of Waller Brothers Farm. The Clean Water Farm Award was established by Governor Baliles in 1986 to recognize deserving farmers and landowners who practice good conservation practices to improve water quality. The Wallers history of doing practices with the district goes back 18 years. Since that time, they have implemented 72 acres of long term cover crop, 150 acres of cover crop, over 17,000 feet of stream bank protected and over 23 acres of stream buffer. These efforts prove that water quality, reducing erosion, and soil health are very important to the Wallers as well as the longevity of a productive farm.

The evening concluded with the presentation of the 2018 Outstanding Cooperator Award, given annually to individuals who do an outstanding job of conserving natural resources and cooperating with the Soil & Water Conservation District on implementing conservation. Mr. Bruce Pearce, District Director, recognized Mr. Brian Hall of the Nathalie community. Mr. Hall has been involved in several conservation practices such as stream exclusions, long term vegetative cover on cropland, cover crops and installing a riparian forest buffer. Mr. Hall has been a great supporter of Halifax Soil and Water Conservation District.

Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District

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Office: 434-476-7923

Board of Directors:

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Hudson Reese—Associate

Staff:

Justin Smith—District Manager

Luke Hudson—Conservation Specialist

Melissa Waller—Education & Outreach Specialist

Upcoming Events (Multiple Agencies)

February 11—Pesticide Recertification
February 12—Ag Breakfast Series; Row Crop Production
February 14—Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
February 20—Farm Safety Program, Wedgewood Golf Center
February 25—Cattleman's Assoc. Winter Banquet
February 26—Market Ready Workshop
March 6— SWCD Area V Spring Meeting
March 8—Spring Beef Conference; Blackstone
March 11—Small Farmer Orientation Wedgewood Golf Center
March 12—Ag Breakfast Series; Forestry Management & Generation Next
March 14—Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
March 14—Southside Soybean & Crop Production Meeting; South Hill
April 3 &4—Agritourism Conference; Roanoke
April 5—Halifax Youth Conservation Camp
April 11—Halifax SWCD Board Meeting
April 25—Area V Envirothon
April 29—Halifax County Livestock Show (Ag Marketing Center)
May 3-4—Heritage Festival (Fairgrounds)

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