

PA Farmers Invited to Participate in Survey to Inventory Farm Conservation Practices

Fill the survey out today at <http://src.survey.psu.edu/farmbmp>

What is the purpose of this survey?

We know that Pennsylvania farmers have done much to improve water quality and soil health. Yet many of the conservation practices that farmers have implemented are not accounted for in tracking progress toward priority water quality goals, including cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay. This is especially true where farmers have implemented practices on their own initiative, using their own means to do so.

Pennsylvania farmers across the Chesapeake Bay watershed are now invited to help us capture many of the conservation practices that have been implemented throughout the state. This survey will inventory these practices, ensuring that the agricultural community receives the credit it deserves for improving water quality.

Who developed the survey?

The survey was developed collaboratively by Penn State University, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, PennAg Industries Association, Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Farmers Union, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission, Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Questions were pre-tested by Pennsylvania farmers and agriculture conservation professionals, and the survey was refined based on their input.

Who is administering the survey?

The survey is being administered by the Penn State Survey Research Center.

How was the survey launched?

On Jan. 29, 2016, the Survey Research Center mailed a letter to more than 20,000 farmers in Pennsylvania's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, inviting them to participate in the survey. The letter provides a link to the survey online, allowing farmers to respond to the survey at the Survey Research Center's secure Web location, <http://src.survey.psu.edu/farmbmp>. Farmers receiving the letter should use the five-digit code provided in the letter to log in and complete the survey.

Do farmers have to fill out the survey online?

No. Those farmers who have not completed the survey online by mid-February will be mailed a hard copy that they can fill out and return to the Survey Research Center. Farmers will have the option of either completing the survey online or by mail throughout the duration of the survey period, which closes April 30, 2016.

What if a farmer did not receive the survey invitation in the mail but wants to participate?

All farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed are urged to complete the survey, whether they received an invitation letter in the mail or not. If a farmer in the Chesapeake Bay watershed has not received a mailing from the SRC but would like to fill out the survey, they can request a survey in one of three ways:

- First, they may visit the website at <http://src.survey.psu.edu/farmbmp> and follow the instructions to request a code number to complete online. They can also request a hard copy by mail.
- Second, they may call the Survey Research Center toll free at 1-866-898-4277 and request that a survey be mailed to them. Be sure to reference “PA Farm Conservation Practices Inventory Project” in your request.
- Third, if they attend a winter meeting where the survey is being promoted, they may fill out a “Help Tell the Story” postcard or otherwise provide their name, farm name and address to request a survey. Many of the survey partners will have winter meetings where the survey will be discussed and farmers will be encouraged to participate. Postcards and sign up sheets will be available at many of these meetings.

Does a farmer need any documents or information to answer the survey?

Farmers may need to reference some of their farm operation documents to answer some of the questions in the survey. This may include their conservation plans, nutrient management plans, manure management plans, or documentation on conservation practice installation. Farmers are encouraged to look at the sample copy of the survey, available at <http://src.survey.psu.edu/farmbmp>, to review the questions ahead of time and determine what documents they might need to answer the survey.

What if a farmer is retired and rents his ground out to another farm operator?

The current farm operator should fill out the survey. If a retired farmer received a copy of the survey, he should have the farm operator who rents his ground fill out the survey. If both the current farm operator and the retired farmer received a survey, the operator should complete only his survey. If the current farm operator completes his own survey, the retired farmer may call the Survey Research Center toll free at 1-866-898-4277 and ask not to receive any future mailings.

When does the survey close?

The survey will close on **April 30, 2016**.

What happens after the survey closes?

Once the survey closes, researchers from the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences will analyze the survey responses and provide cumulative results to DEP to document conservation practices implemented by Pennsylvania farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Upon conclusion of the survey, the SRC will randomly select ten percent of respondents for farm visits by trained Penn State Extension personnel to assess inventory results and help researchers better understand the methods used and challenges encountered when adopting conservation practices. If selected, you will be contacted to ensure your willingness to participate in a follow-up farm visit.

Is my name and location kept confidential?

All names and locational information about individual farmers and farms will be kept completely confidential. The results reported by Penn State to DEP will be cumulative by county and will not include individual names or locations. Names and addresses will be removed from all inventory and farm visit results to prevent identification of participants. Penn State researchers and the Survey Research Center have extensive experience in implementing these types of data confidentiality protocols and will ensure these protocols are strictly followed as this survey is administered.

Is participation in this survey voluntary?

Yes. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. Nonetheless we hope that all farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed will choose to fill out the survey by April 30 and help tell a very positive story about Pennsylvania agriculture's role in protecting and improving water quality of our streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.