

The theory of the problem: Lancaster County, PA has the second highest population of Old Order Amish in the United States, second to only Holmes County, Ohio. A primarily agrarian society, they are a very insular and do not welcome outside involvement with what they call the “English” culture. In general, they do not have electricity, phones in their home, or access to the Internet and social media; all of which we have become accustomed to using for communications. The Amish do not respond to mailings, rarely attend meetings, and generally cannot be reached by phone. They are also not allowed to ask for or receive government funding. This is particularly a problem when it comes to managing their farms for runoff. Plain sect farms are a significant source of non-point source pollution for waterways in Lancaster County and downstream. Because of their insular culture and mistrust of the “English” and government, it has been difficult in the past to get them to implement best management practices (BMPs), such as riparian buffers and streambank fencing, on their agricultural lands to prevent polluted runoff that harms water quality locally and within the Chesapeake Bay.

The theory of change: Because of the difficulty with communicating about water quality and BMPs to the plain sect communities in the past, our experience shows that one-on-one visits at their home, as well as visits with church leaders, while accompanied by an Amish Liaison, is the most effective means of disseminating information and enacting change. Mr. Pat Fasano began visiting plain sect farmers in the Octoraro Reservoir watershed in the late 1980s to discuss ways they could improve their farming practices to reduce nutrient and sediment loading. In 2001, Mr. Fasano came up with the concept of having an Amish Liaison visit plain sect farms with him, which has increased his success in outreach to that community. This tool continues to be used to this day and has been replicated by several other organizations. The Liaisons, such as Mr. Paul Fisher, are retired Amish farmers who have preserved their farms, and are well respected in the Amish community. Mr. Fasano has personally visited more than 1,000 Amish farms in Chester and Lancaster counties and has gained great insight from the liaisons regarding the plain sect culture. RiverStewards will convene a meeting with Mr. Fasano and Mr. Fisher, as well as one or more representatives from Lancaster County, to discuss this problem and our recommended solution, which is described below. Together we will have a tangible impact on improving water quality in Lancaster County, and thus within the Chesapeake Bay.

The theory of action: Using Mr. Fasano’s and Mr. Fisher’s expertise on working with the Amish, as well as RiverStewards’ knowledge of BMPs and water quality restoration, collectively we will develop a framework for working with plain sect communities to clean up the most impaired waterways in Lancaster County. This will involve one-on-one, in person visits with Amish farmers and church leaders to create a mitigation bank specifically for plain sect farmers within the Mill Creek watershed, as a test case. The mitigation bank will trade water quality pollutant load reductions within the watershed that stem from BMPs implemented on Amish farms in the area for a reduction or elimination of the “dues” Amish members must pay to their collective. Other benefits will be generated for Lancaster County as the BMPs can be counted as offsets for its municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) and total maximum daily load (TMDL) permits. The church leaders will administer the mitigation bank, with assistance from our team, when requested.

Budget and timeline to be determined.