



Engagement with the Plain Sect Community For Water Quality Improvements

Basis of Understanding:

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 an insular and typically 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 the rest of the population has 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 reluctant to ask for or receive government funding.

Within the Amish community in the United States, a National Steering committee of 3 men oversees policy and financing issues, as well as lobbying for the entire Amish community throughout the United States. Two of these men are based in southeastern Pennsylvania and one in Ohio. Policies are based at the church district level, made up of one Bishop, two ministers, and one deacon; all decisions are generally based on the Bishops’ recommendations. A church district typically contains 20 to 25 families, with roads used as boundaries. There is no higher leadership than a Bishop in the Amish culture.

Because of their insular culture they have some mistrust of the “English” and government, communicating with, and trying to educate Amish farmers, can be a significant challenge, especially when it comes to managing their farms for pollution reduction. Plain sect farms are a significant source of non-point source pollution for waterways in Lancaster County and downstream, and yet it has been difficult in the past to get them to implement best management practices (BMPs), such as riparian buffers, stream/floodplain restoration, and streambank fencing, on their agricultural lands to prevent polluted runoff that harms water quality locally and within the Chesapeake Bay.

Scope of Work:

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. This is what we are proposing in the following Scope of Work for 2019-2020.

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” – someone who is a well-respected retired farmer - 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.

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. Mr. Paul Fisher, one of the Amish Liaisons, is a progressive Amish man (although not a retired farmer) looking to assist fellow farmers in protecting the land while effectively managing their finances.

Mr. Fasano believes that initial work on this project should focus on the Conestoga, Conowingo, and Octoraro watersheds within Lancaster County, as he has many contacts there, the population of Amish farmers is significant, and they tend to be less conservative than Amish in the southern portion of Lancaster County and in the southwestern portion of Chester County. The project will be rolled out in phases within those counties to account for time and monetary resources.

One challenge with this approach is that municipalities, church districts, and watersheds do not align. Therefore, we propose a separate but concurrent municipal component that will focus on Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) compliance issues within the selected watersheds – using outreach to Amish farmers and their implementation of BMPs to meet municipal regulatory requirements. The two separate endeavors will eventually be blended together into a cohesive report for replication in other portions of the county.

Deliverables:

RiverStewards convened a meeting with Mr. Fasano in March of 2019 to discuss this problem and potential solutions, which are described below. Together we will have a tangible impact on improving water quality in Lancaster County, and thus within the Chesapeake Bay.

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, starting with the Conestoga, Conowingo, and Octoraro watersheds. This will involve an initial meeting among Mr. Fasano, Mr. Fisher, and the Steering Committee members, ideally followed by one-on-one, in person visits with Amish farmers and church leaders to create a mitigation credit system specifically for plain sect farmers.

The establishment of a municipal stormwater bank creates potential benefits for Amish farmers/landowners by creating opportunities for them to purchase credits from excess water quality and quantity capacity generated by a suite of restoration practices including, but not limited to, floodplain restoration, stormwater basin retrofits, agricultural best management practices, and bioswales. Restoration may be targeted and prioritized per a Watershed Action Plan that will emphasize larger scale, performance-based projects. For instance, if a farmer wants to build a 600-square foot structure on their property, local ordinances require them to offset this additional impermeable surface via an on-site stormwater management and maintenance BMP, such as a rain garden, detention pond, swale, etc. The permit fees, engineering plans, and other requirements add thousands of dollars to the construction costs. However, if the farmer could purchase stormwater mitigation bank credits from a floodplain restoration project, the structure could be built more affordably without the need for the creation and maintenance of an isolated BMP on the property, while still protecting local water quality and quantity.

By bringing in a non-governmental social change investment entity like Stifel, potentially partnered with the "Amish Helping Hands" program, which helps Amish farmers who are struggling financially get back on their feet, we can help fund the BMP projects and mitigation bank initially, while providing a Return on Investment (ROI) for Stifel's investors in the form of cleaner water into the Chesapeake Bay. Other benefits will be generated for Lancaster County as the BMPs can be counted as offsets for its MS4 and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) permits. The church leaders will administer the mitigation bank, with assistance from our team, when requested.

The first step in developing the municipal stormwater bank is to develop the value of the stormwater management unit, which will measure how much credit is given for water quality and quantity benefits, and how plain sect farmers will go about applying for credits. As more farms get involved with the bank, RiverStewards will evaluate the progress and determine next steps to move forward on expanding the idea of stormwater mitigation banking for all plain sect farms in Lancaster County and beyond. The project team will also seek out social change investors like Stifel to begin securing the long term funding needed to scale up the mitigation banking and BMP implementation for this project.

Project Team:

RS and subcontractors (Mr. Fasano and Mr. Fisher) will coordinate and lead the activities required to complete the proposed Scope of Work. All parties involved are dedicated professionals with experience working directly with the plain sect community and/or on natural resource conservation projects similar to those outlined above.

Timing & Compensation:

It is anticipated that the Scope of Work highlighted here will require approximately one year to complete, following execution of a Consulting Services Agreement, which will be forwarded upon approval of the scope. The work will commence with a meeting between all involved parties to discuss the best means of getting buy-in and approval of key members of the plain sect community in Lancaster County.

The anticipated budget for this project is as follows:

- \$50,000 Mr. Pat Fasano and Mr. Paul Fisher for project coordination
- \$50,000 to RiverStewards for project implementation

In addition to the fees proposed above, RiverStewards and its subcontractors will be reimbursed for all reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, including but not limited to lodging, food, local transportation, and car rental incurred in performing the Scope of Work as described above.

The tentative project schedule is:

- March 2019 – project kick-off meeting with Mr. Fasano and RiverStewards
- Late March through May 2019 – operational set-up period (creation of Scope/Business Plan, target funders, etc.)
- April 2019 – meetings between Mr. Fasano and Dennis Eby, the Amish Project Coordinator for the Lancaster County Conservation District, and Chris Thompson, District Manager for the Lancaster County Conservation District
- April and May 2019 – meeting with Mr. Fisher, Mr. Fasano, RiverStewards and potentially other stakeholders to plan next steps
- May through October 2019 – review progress, make necessary adjustment, and plan for 2020 tasks