

# Continuing Conservation History on Herring Farm, Schuylkill County

**By Nancy Dusko**

When you ask beginning farmer, and Schuylkill County's 2019 Conservation Farmer of the Year, Jeffrey Herring, about the conservation efforts that he has made to his farm, you are bound to get a laid back response: "made my life easier," he said with a grin. However, there is nothing laid back about the conservation that Herring has implemented since taking over Herring farms in 2015. Within the last few years, Herring has made the kind of changes to his farming operation that could often take decades.

Jeffrey Herring and his partner Sheila Ludwig farm 660 acres of cropland in Schuylkill County in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and operate a 2,400-

hog finishing operation, as well as a 60 head beef cattle finishing



*Herring Farms in Schuylkill County, Pa.*



*Sheila with their beef cows.*

operation. While Herring's initial farm goal was to renovate his beef operation, working with the Schuylkill Conservation District (SCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has resulted in a complete overhaul of their operation. The first major change to the operation was in 2016, when Herring converted all cropland acres from chisel and harrow plowing to 100% no-till. When asked if he is happy with the transition, Herring quirked about the plow, "I'll never own one again," he said.

Along with significant financial investments of his own, Herring partnered with the SCD's Chesapeake Bay Program, NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the PA Department of Agriculture's Resource Enhancement Protection





*Manure stacking pad in adjoining roofed heavy use area.*

underground outlets and reception pits for the first manure storage.

Schuylkill County's Chesapeake Bay Program Coordinator Martie Hetherington helped to facilitate the family's first conservation project and has been instrumental with the most recent SCD and NRCS projects helping to take conservation on the farm to a whole new level. Martie says "in a relatively short period of time, with an amazing amount of positive energy, determination and assuming a considerable financial commitment, Jeff and Sheila have made important and substantial improvements to their farm with the installation of best management practices to address environmental resource concerns, improve water quality, and reduce erosion."

Program (REAP) to get conservation on the ground.

Even more noteworthy are the water quality improvements Herring has made to the farm. Since 2016, he decommissioned the outdated hog facility including a liquid waste storage that no longer functioned properly and replaced it with a state-of-the-art, energy efficient swine facility with under-barn manure storage. The former beef lot has also been decommissioned and the cattle now utilize a roofed heavy use area adjoining to a manure stacking pad to hold the bedded pack manure.

Within the last few years, the nutrient management has improved greatly on the farm, but Herring is not finished yet. He is currently working to transition to a manure injection system for the hog manure to better utilize the nitrogen in the manure and decrease overall fertilizer inputs. Overall, this will be both a win

for conservation and a win for his bottom line.

While Herring is new to managing Herring farms, he has a long history of conservation. Jeff's father, William "Bill" Herring purchased the home farm in 1968. Bill was one of the first participants to work with the Chesapeake Bay Program in Schuylkill County, installing one of the county's first manure storages for his swine finishing operation in 1990. Jeff recalls how his dad let him and his brothers skip school to help with installation of the

