



2017 FINALIST

Environmental Farm Plan Stewardship Award

Willow Pond Farm, owned and operated by Larry and Pat Ward, is a scenic beef farm located in Higginsville, Halifax County. The farm is comprised of 33 Hereford cows and their calves, 25 acres of pasture, 100 acres of hayfields, 100 acres of woodlot and three wetland areas. Having a great herd of Hereford cattle is one of the Ward's main goals and raising them in a healthy, natural way is important to them.



As self-proclaimed "city kids", the Wards bought the farm in 1973 and since then have made numerous farming decisions that have contributed greatly to the surrounding environment. One major contribution is the farm's impact on wildlife habitat. Over 35 years ago, the Wards cooperated with Ducks Unlimited (DU) to create a very large wetland at the back of the farm property. This wetland provides habitat for numerous water fowl, shorebirds, raptors, fish, amphibians, turtles and small mammals. Over the years, the Wards have also planted shrubs, trees and plants around the farm that encourage many different wildlife species. The farm recently completed an Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation (ABC) plan through the Department of Natural Resources, which identifies wildlife habitat on the farm and provides recommendations on how to make enhancements. The Wards plan to continue their work with DU and upgrade the fencing around the wetland and do some more shrub planting. They also plan to work with the local 4H club to build and place owl nesting boxes along the edges of the hayfields.



The Wards believe in the importance of protecting soil and water resources. The farm has a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP), which includes soil and manure testing every three years. The plan provides manure, fertilizer and lime application rates to improve soil fertility and crop production while not contributing to nutrient buildup or losses to the environment. Cattle are rotationally grazed, which improves pasture productivity and reduces over-grazing. The pastured cattle access water from a water tub which is gravity fed from a large dug pond. This low input method provides good quality water to the cattle when they are pastured away from the barn and has allowed the Wards to fence cattle from watercourses. The farm uses a no-till seeder to renovate pastures. This improves the health and productivity of the fields and helps prevent soil erosion.



Additional efforts have been made on the farm to protect the local environment. The manure storage consists of a concrete floor and walls and was upgraded in 2010 to ensure adequate storage capacity. The diesel tank was upgraded to a double walled tank and is located inside a fuel storage building.

The efforts that the Wards and Willow Pond Farm have made to reduce their environmental impact have made them one of three finalists for this year's Environmental Farm Plan Stewardship Award. The award is an initiative of the Environmental Farm Plan Program created through a partnership of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Nova Scotia Environmental Farm Plan and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.

The award recognizes producers who make land, water and habitat stewardship a significant part of their farm operations. To be eligible for the award, farmers must have a current Environmental Farm Plan. The voluntary plan helps them identify, assess, and reduce environmental risk on their farms. Since the program's inception in 1999, more than 1,800 farmers have developed Environmental Farm Plans for their operations.

The Environmental Farm Plan Program is supported under *Growing Forward 2*, a five-year agricultural agreement between the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia.
