Small Farm Water Quality Improvement Project
Washington State Department of Ecology CCWF grant #G9900128
Final Report July, 2001

Education has been the focus of our outreach through the Small Farm Water Quality Improvement Project. As more small acreage farmers move into Clark County and traditional agricultural operations go out of business or move to more rural areas we find our outreach approach has changed.

The traditional farmer had very little time to attend workshops or seminars on manure management or rainwater control and was more interested in cost-share assistance to install practices we recommended through technical assistance site visits. These operators usually had a background in agriculture from generations of family farm experience.

We are finding, however, that the small acreage farmer normally has a full time job, lives on a small number of acres and has only several head of livestock. The practical experience they bring to this situation is usually minimal. Many of these people acquire a farm with visions of a green Kentucky farm and horses running across thick, grassy fields. The reality of their situation is that they have too many horses on too few acres, standing up to their knees in mud and manure. Naturally, these folks focus on their regular jobs and any time or effort spent on their property is secondary. Many times their problems lie in the lack of knowledge and education in best management practices. We have found in the course of this project that offering workshops and seminars is more appealing to the small acreage farmers than providing cost-share assistance in implementing recommended practices.

To accomplish this end we have embarked on a program of providing educational workshops to meet the needs of the small acreage farmers. We have partnered with WSU/Clark Cooperative Extension, Clark County, Southwest Washington Health District, and Livestock Advisors to present workshops on:

- Mud and Manure Management
- Pasture Management
- Wells and Septic Maintenance
- Manure Composting
- Fencing

Twenty-three workshops were offered over the two-year period. The usual attendance was 25-30 people per workshop.

Presentations other than the workshops mentioned above were given to:

Watershed Stewards classes (3)
Winter Livestock School
Horse Symposium
Clark County Mounted Patrol
Clark County 4H Leaders
WSU/Clark Cooperative Extension Livestock Advisors
Clark County Executive Horse Council
Clark County Cattleman's Association
Battle Ground Kiwinas
WSU Natural Resources Class

In addition to workshop training, displays were presented at:

- Clark County fairs (2)
- Home and Garden fairs (2)
- Winter Livestock Schools (2)
- Horse Symposiums (2)
- Extension Livestock Advisors Farm Tour
- Watershed Stewards Opportunity Fair

Information presented ranged from introducing the grant program to Best Management Practices fact sheets and demonstrations.

Printed materials were also developed over this time period. The Tips on Land and Water Management for Small Acreages in Southwest Washington was produced in partnership with Clark County Public Works Water Resources Department and WSU/Clark Cooperative Extension. Also, a revised version of the Streamside Planting Guide was published in partnership with Cowlitz Conservation District and Pierce Conservation District.

The Tips on Land and Water Management brochure was distributed at the 2001 Home and Garden Fair, and at the last workshops presented during the grant period. Copies were mailed to landowners on a database that was narrowed and defined by Megan Petrie, an intern with the WA Department of Ecology at the Vancouver Field Office. This database targeted landowners in a region of the Salmon Creek Watershed that had a concentration of small acreage farms. Participants in the earlier workshops were also mailed a copy of the brochure. During the grant period and in the future, copies of the brochure were/are being mailed out to new septic system permit applicants by the SW Washington Health Department.

Brochures are available to pick-up at the Clark County Public Works Water Resources Department, WSU/Clark Cooperative Extension office, Hazel Dell Sewer District office, USDA Farm Service Agency office, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service/Clark Conservation District office. The Llama and Alpaca Affair (a livestock show) also requested copies to be given out at their event. The brochure will be given out at all future workshops and fair display booths and are sent to small farm landowners who contact our office.

The Streamside Planting Guide is available upon request at the Conservation District office and will also be available at fair booth displays. Many are sent to landowners when they call with questions on riparian planting and native plants.

The Tips on Land and Water Management brochure has also been converted into a web page format and will be placed on the WSU Cooperative Extension website. We are working to establish links from other websites to our webpage. Possible link include Clark Public Utilities, SW WA Health District, Clark County, City of Vancouver.

Also during the grant period, technical assistance and site visits were provided for those landowners requesting our help. We were able to give assistance to those coming to our office, over the telephone, by contact at display events and after workshops and through site visits. The appointments are documented in the monthly reports. Many times the first site visit turned into a number of visits to assist the landowner in their natural resources conservation goal.

Several riparian projects came out of these visits. Two were cost-shared fencing and/or planting (Moore and Svendsen). Other landowners did install best management practices other than riparian planting and fencing after they received assistance from the Conservation District. A manure composting system was installed as well as gutters and downspouts to prevent clean water from mixing with mud and manure.

A follow up survey to help assist the Clark Conservation District in improving our program. The "usefulness survey" was sent to participants of our workshops. Surveys were sent to 200 participants. Four surveys were returned because they were not deliverable. Of the 196 remaining, 53 surveys were received (27%).

The following are survey questions:

I changed or plan to change my management practice(s) because of the information I received. This box was checked by 29 people (55%).

I was able to solve and/or identify problems on my land. This box was checked by 31 people (58%).

I did not find the information useful. No one checked this box!

I would attend additional workshops if offered. This box was checked by 38 people (73%).

The final question was: What other topics do you suggest?
Some people felt we should keep the same rotation of classes, other responded with the following list of suggested topics:

- Water management (streams, wetlands, floodplains, water conservation)
- Barn/handling systems
- Equipment selection
- Weed ID and control
- Horse Health and Care
- Hoof care with mud management
- Feed and Nutrition
- Pump maintenance
- Cattle management
- Alternatives to burning
- Community co-op gardening (organic)
- Herbicide/pesticide reduction and alternatives
- Maintaining a newer septic system
- Fire retardant plants
- Animals and fly control
- Plants for privacy and animal protection
- Barn designs
- Drainage ditches

These topics will be discussed with our partners to see where the topics fit into our program or what other group would be the best to present this information.

Another partner in this grant was Clark Public Utilities. They provided the match for our grant through water quality monitoring in the Salmon Creek watershed. Annual reports on the water testing results were submitted to project officer Dave Howard.