

2023 Conservation Farmer of the Year Award

John D. Kitz - The Kitz Farm



John and Kelly Kitz

The Kitz family has a successful partnership with the Westmoreland Conservation District that dates back to 2012. Then, John G. Kitz worked with the District to establish several conservation practices on the family farm, leaving a legacy of sustainable farming practices that continue to be maintained since his passing in late December 2021.

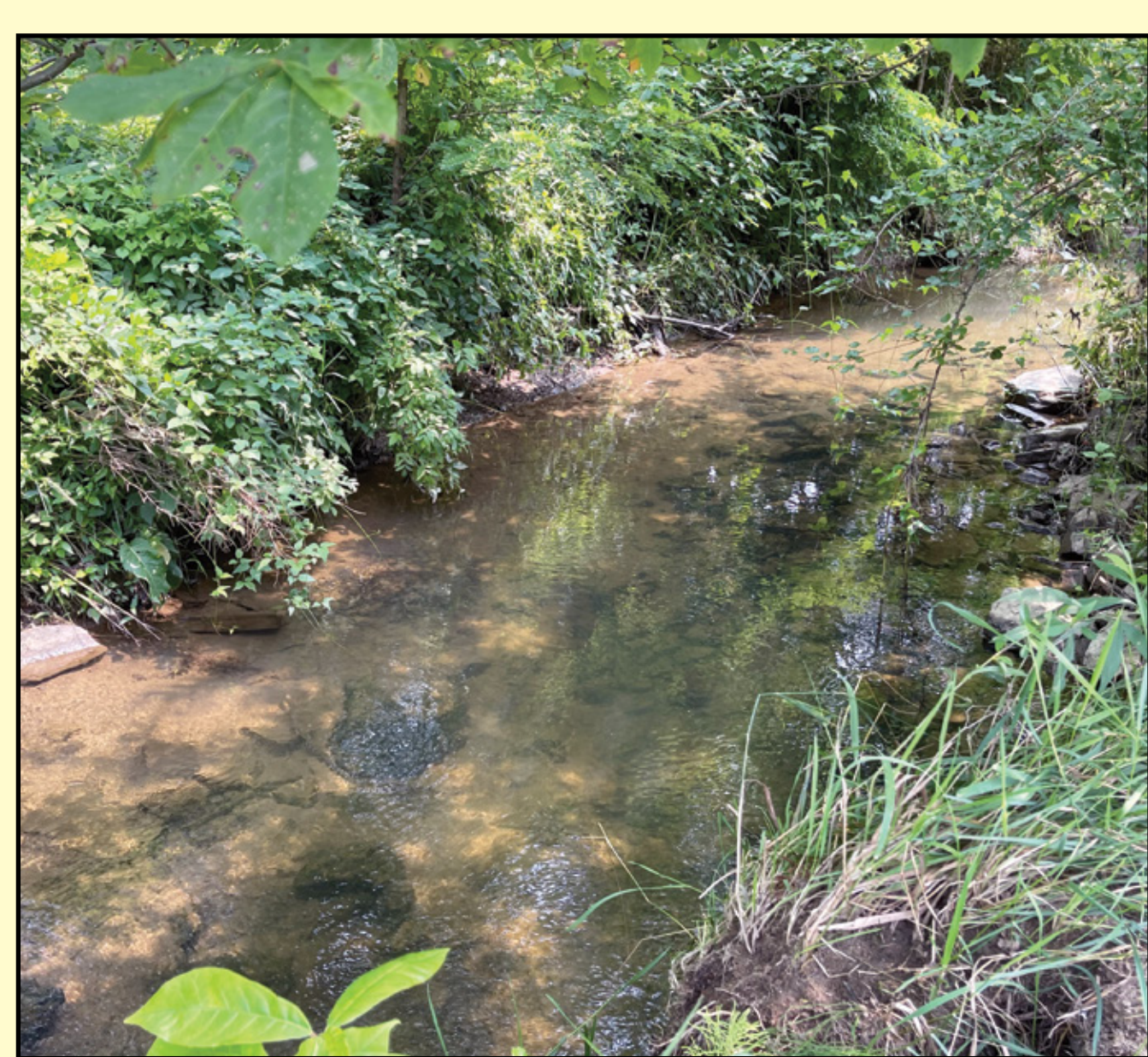
The Kitz Farm, a 140-acre cattle farm in Mount Pleasant, is now managed by John G. Kitz's son - John D. Kitz, with help from his wife, Kelly, and four sons – Johnathan, Joshua, Jeremiah and Jacob. The farm was established in 1963,

and currently has about 80 black angus cattle, which are grass fed and finished. John supplements their foraging with hay grown on the farm and thus maintains a self-sustaining operation.



John currently practices rotational grazing, a conservation best management practice (BMP) that gives pastures a chance to regrow between grazings, allowing plants to establish deeper root structures. Using this method, soil better retains moisture, protecting it from wind and water erosion.

Conservation BMPs were established on the farm about 11 years ago when John G. Kitz connected with the District to discuss ways to improve the streamside areas on their land. The first project entailed installing fencing along 3,000 feet of the stream (Brush Run) and planting a riparian buffer with trees and shrubs. Two stabilized stream crossings were also



left - In 2012 Brush Run on the Kitz Farm had little streambank protection.
right - Today it is protected by a beautiful mature buffer and fencing.



The mature buffer helps prevent erosion and runoff along Brush Run. Streambank fencing keeps cows out of the water and in the pastures.

installed: one where the bank was stabilized with gravel so cattle could cross without disturbing the streambed; the other, where a culvert was installed so cattle could cross without walking through the streambed at all. A water trough was added to provide another water source. Reducing cattle access to a stream keeps the streambank stabilized, minimizes erosion, and decreases the amount of manure and sediment that enters the water. Both John and his father understood the importance of these practices. "Before, there was mud everywhere. I knew that something should be done, and once something was, it was never an issue again," John says. John recalls that before the project, there was "nothing" along the stream. Now, there are well-established trees, shrubs, and flowering plants, and a healthy stream.



The roofed animal heavy use area

Other BMPs established on the farm include a roofed animal heavy use area (AHUA) built in 2022, which serves as a shelter and a feeding area. AHUAs provide protected surfaces from animals' hooves and prevent concentrated areas of mud from forming. AHUAs decrease sediment movement and reduce excess nutrient transport to streams. John plans to build a second AHUA in the near future. John's AHUA also has an area to stockpile manure since he does not spread manure in the winter.

Plans for conservation practices on the farm will continue into the future with Pennsylvania's Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) funding, which will improve another 3,500 feet of streambank.

In addition to farming, John and his sons run a lumber company called Better-Built Wood Products, LLC., established by John's father in 1978. The company produces wood pallets and crates. John and his family grow and sell sweet corn on approximately two acres, and also have chickens, ducks, and guinea hens.



The Kitz Family also owns and operates a lumber company at the Kitz Farm, which specializes in high quality wooden pallets and crates.
l-r: John Kitz and sons Joshua, Jeremiah, Jacob and Johnathan

Westmoreland Conservation District