Farm Conservation Buffers
Key Messages

Farm Benefits of Conservation Buffers:

- Conservation buffers make good use of areas that often should not be cropped or pastured.
- Take unprofitable land out of production and possibly get paid for it.
- Ensure safe drinking water for you and your neighbors.
- Located in environmentally sensitive areas, buffers provide another line of defense to filter both surface and shallow groundwater before it enters streams and lakes.
- Keep the nutrients on the land for use by crops.
- Reduce crop losses from flooding, which can erode valuable cropland and deposit debris in fields.
- Streambanks without buffers tend to have higher rates of erosion, particularly when grazing livestock are present.
- Fencing livestock out of the stream can improve herd health (reduce the risk of gastrointestinal diseases and improve udder, foot and leg health).
- Restricting livestock access to streams can improve biosecurity. Efforts to control diseases on one farm may be undone if livestock have unlimited contact with a stream used by herds upstream.
- Providing an alternative water supply, particularly if a stream's water quality is poor, may provide better drinking water for livestock and as a result increase milk production as milk cows are particularly sensitive to drinking water quality.
- Improve pasture management. Once electrified stream bank fences are in place, creating additional paddocks is cheap and easy.
- Improve integrated pest management by providing cover for predatory insects and insect-eating birds.
- Build good will in the community by showcasing your commitment to protecting the land for future farmers.
- Conservation buffers are a visual demonstration of your commitment to land stewardship.
- Like the trim on a house makes the house look better, well planned conservation buffers improve the appearance of a farm.

- Conservation buffers may help you meet federal, state or local pollution control requirements.
- Help avoid regulation by being pro-active
- Buffers can reduce the setback requirements for manure and agricultural chemical application along watercourses.
- Boost the bottom line with cash crops from the buffer itself.
- Buffers are a proven, time-tested way of working with the land and protecting the environment.
- Significant funding support is available to install and maintain conservation buffers, no competitive offer is required and there is no waiting period.

How Do Farm Conservation Buffers Benefit Communities?

- **Improved water quality**. Conservation buffers reduce the amount of nutrients, sediments, farm chemicals and bacteria from entering streams. This protects water uses of many types, from fisheries, to contact recreation like swimming, to public water supplies. Studies have shown that riparian forest buffers if properly designed and maintained can reduce nutrient runoff by up to 90% and remove as much as 80% of the sediment in runoff and are the primary mechanism of pesticide removal. Studies have shown that a 30 foot grass buffer strip can reduce atrazine runoff by 59 percent.
- **Improved watershed functions**. When a substantial portion of a watershed has conservation buffers installed, flood frequency and severity decrease and groundwater recharge increases. Streambank erosion and sedimentation is reduced, which can be of major economic importance in terms of damage prevention and avoided maintenance costs to communities downstream.
- **Enhanced fish and wildlife habitat.** Fencing livestock out of the stream and installing buffers can have a profound effect on fish habitat. Forested buffers reduce stream temperatures, add leaf litter to feed invertebrates which provide food for fish and provide large woody debris for fish cover. Stream corridors are wildlife magnets used by a wide range of animals from small game species, to waterfowl to songbirds.
- **Wetland restoration.** Restored wetlands provide documented benefits for water quality and wildlife and can also reduce downstream flooding.