

# The Delmarva Farmer

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## Macomber making a ewe turn

*With sheep and chickens, 'We are trying to be more self-sustainable'*

By **JANE W. GRAHAM**  
AFP Correspondent

**RADFORD, Va.** — People come to farming in many different ways and for many different reasons. Shaunda Ma-

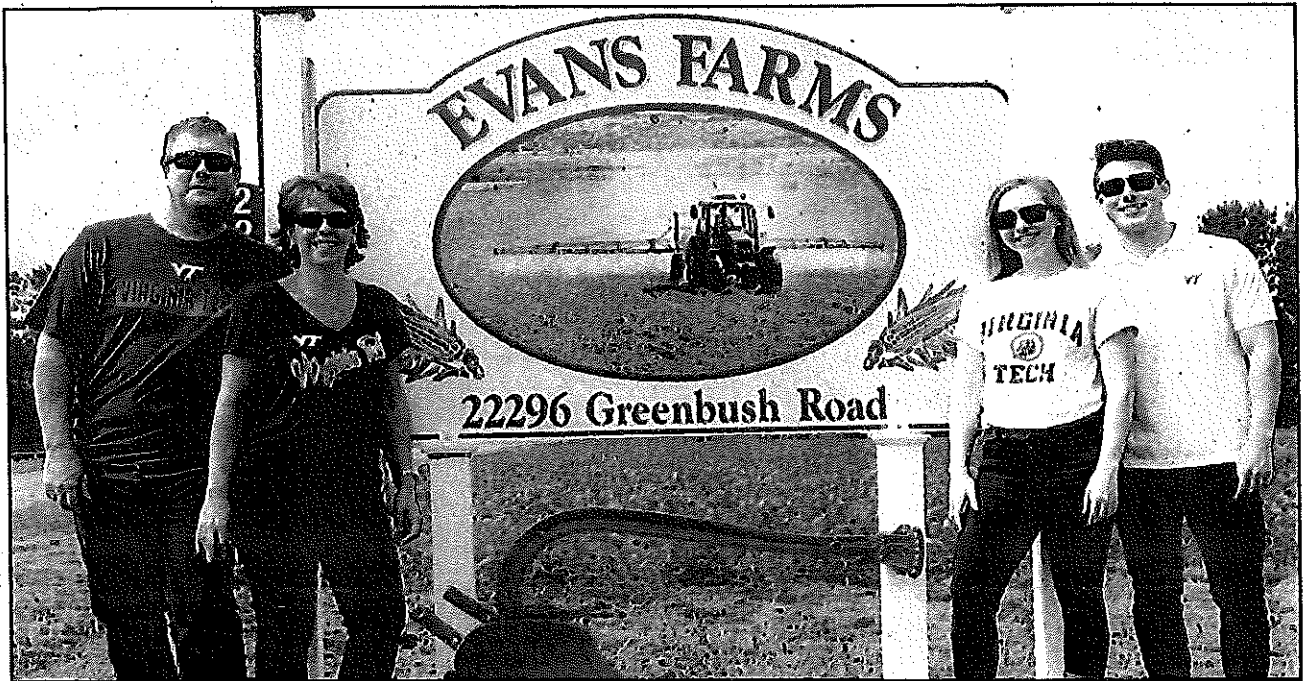
comber's path started with a borrowed chicken named Maggie.

Now a homesteader on 17 acres in Southwest Virginia, Macomber recalled when she was young, her brother was working on a Boy Scout merit

badge and needed a chicken to finish the project.

A church member loaned her brother

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Blending technology with sound agronomy has generated conservation benefits on Evans Farms, a 2022 Clean Water Farm award winner. From left is Jim; Cheryl, Claire and Jake Evans.

Photo courtesy of the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District

## Grand Basin Award winners named

*Honorees 'among our most innovative stewards of the land and water'*

**RICHMOND, Va.** — The annual Virginia Clean Water Farm Awards recognizes farmers who implement conservation practices and do their part to preserve water quality.

Grand Basin winners represent the

most exceptional of these awardees, according to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, which sponsors the program in partnership with Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

"DCR is proud to sponsor this awards program with the soil and water conservation districts," said DCR.

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# Winners ...

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Director Matt Wells. "These farms are shining examples of the agricultural community's commitment to helping Virginia meet its water quality goals. Their leadership in keeping nutrients out of waterways and conserving soil resources is inspiring and helps ensure that their farms will be best-in-class for generations to come."

Last month, Gov. Glenn Youngkin announced the 10 winners of the Virginia Grand Basin Clean Water Farm Awards for 2022. The awards recognize farmers or farm owners doing exceptional work to protect soil and water resources. One winner is selected from each of Virginia's major river basins.

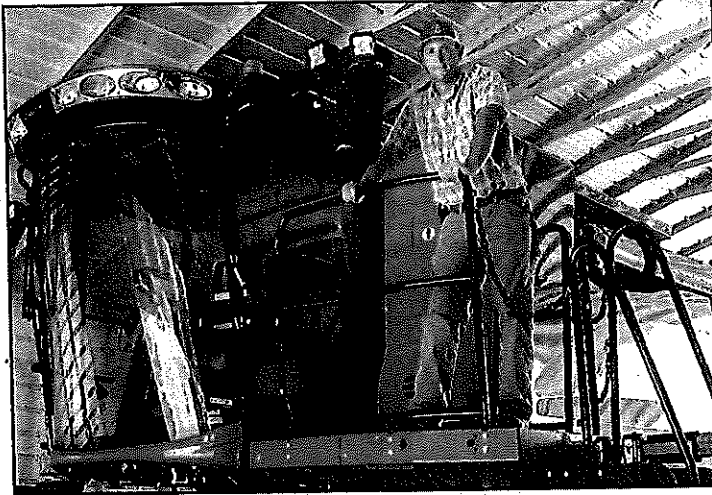
"Virginia's farmers are vital to the Commonwealth's work to restore the health of streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay," said Youngkin. "The Grand Basin Clean Water Farm Award winners are among our most innovative stewards of the land and water, and Virginians owe them a debt of gratitude for their outstanding conservation work."

Here are the 2022 Grand Basin winners:

**Evans Farms, Coastal Basin:** Accomack County native Jim Evans farmed evenings and weekends throughout a 20-year teaching career before building a large crop operation across land that had been farmed by three generations of his family.

He primarily grows corn and soybeans on his 4,000-acre farm, and has partnered with another local producer to farm an additional 700 acres. Evans said his regimen of wheat and barley cover crops, along with minimal tillage, boosts soil health and reduces loss by maintaining the soil's organic matter and biological activity. Evans uses precision, variable-rate nitrogen application equipment and low-drift spray nozzles to most effectively fertilize his cropland and curb runoff. He has also planted 2 acres of pollinator habitat to attract local insects and enrich the ecosystem for other wildlife.

His daughter, Claire, is now following in his footsteps as she acquires the conservation farming skills that have helped the family operation.



John Shepherd of Shepherd Grain Farms said his proudest accomplishment in farming is using conservation best practices to transform once-eroded, degraded soil into rich, fertile farmland.

**Shepherd Grain Farms, Chowan River Basin:** In his 14-year farming career, John Shepherd has taken Shepherd Grain Farms from 25 to 3,100 acres, but he said his proudest accomplishment is using conservation best practices to transform once-eroded, degraded soil into rich, fertile farmland.

Planting cover crops, practicing continuous no-till and applying alternative fertilizers such as poultry litter on his farm have delivered highly productive soils with minimal costs. He added he monitors and continuously improves his land and crops through soil testing, grid sampling and precision-applied nutrients. Shepherd is also enrolled in DCR's Resource Management Plan program to bring in additional best practices that will reduce water runoff and erosion. Plans for grassed waterways, critical area plantings and buffers are underway. He is also working to replant pine and hardwood trees across his forestland. To provide wildlife habitat, Shepherd is planting pollinator and wildlife food plots and creating cover and nesting habitat by leaving dead trees and building brush piles.

**Clover Green Farm LLC, James River Basin:** Clover Green Farm has been in the Teel Family since the late 1700s. Today, it features 190 acres of mixed pasture, 20 acres of vineyard and 130 acres of woodlands. The Teels run 52 registered Hereford brood cows

through an intensive rotational grazing system that maximizes grazing efficiency and productivity. Using permanent infrastructure, portable fencing and quick connects, they move the herd to new grass each day in a grazing rotation that typically allows at least 45 days' rest for each paddock. This rotation system has increased grass productivity and generated fescue stockpiles for winter grazing. It also reduced the required number of hay bales to just 30 last winter — down from almost 250 bales per year in generations past.

In September, the Teels began overseeding some of their pastures with a rich variety of vegetation to improve organic matter, break up compaction and foster rich soils. More than 30 acres of riparian buffer developed in the last few years have protected 21,000 feet — almost 4 miles — of streambanks and invited wildlife back to the farm. Now deer, turkey and bear are abundant, and quail that had not been seen in years have been spotted on the farm in the last year.

**Heaven's Hollow Farm, Rappahannock River Basin:** Young farmers Jennifer and Jacob Gilley — who met through 4-H — steward Heaven's Hollow Farm, 200 acres on the border of Madison and Orange counties, raising beef, pork, chicken and eggs. A conservation highlight of their operation has been the creation of 14.6 acres of

riparian buffer along Beautiful Run and its tributaries by installing 9,800 feet of livestock exclusion fence. Prior to the stream fencing projects, the farm had a total of seven fields for the livestock to graze, but now the farm rotates its cattle through 13 fields, improving the pasture quality significantly. And their 35-foot-wide buffers have enhanced habitat for grassland birds, pollinators and other wildlife.

**Brian Hall, IJN LLC, Roanoke River Basin:** Brian Hall operates a 150-cow-calf herd on more than 300 acres of pasture. He was previously recognized as 2018 Cooperator of the Year and was the local Clean Water Farm Award winner in 2019. A long-time participant in best management practices, Hall most recently has been working with Virginia Cooperative Extension testing soybean plots on his farm. He grows full-season soybeans and double-crop soybeans and wheat, and plans to add corn in his rotation next year. Planting cover crops is a consistent practice for Hall, who puts in as much as possible on over 1,000 acres of cropland each season. He said he recently began aerial seeding his cover crops in order to stabilize the soil faster and trap nutrients longer. Hall also participates in the chicken-litter transport program and uses litter on cropland and pastures. All of his cattle are excluded from streams and ponds, with more than 65,000 feet of exclusion fence creating forested buffers. Hall follows a nutrient management plan, conservation plan and a prescribed grazing plan that includes rotational grazing, strip grazing and grazing a portion of his cover crops.

**Cedar Ridge Dairy, Inc. Shenandoah River Basin:** Weldon and James Heatwole's Cedar Ridge Dairy maintains a herd of 135 milk cows, 20 dry cows and 175 heifers. Cedar Ridge regularly earns the Virginia's Finest designation for producers who meet strict milk quality standards. The tradition of stewardship extends across the family, and Weldon's other sons have been recognized with Clean Water Farm Awards. All of the Heatwoles continue to incorporate new technology into their operations to be more efficient, productive and environmentally friendly. The Cedar Ridge Dairy milking

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