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News

River association seeks to have cattle fenced from swale

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By PETER HECK pheckchespub.com

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CHESTERTOWN The Chester River Association has sent a complaint about a Queen Anne's County farm to the Maryland Department of the Environment.

Chester Riverkeeper Tom Leigh said in a letter outlining the complaint that cattle pastured near a stream were contributing to high levels of ammonia and phosphorus entering the Chester River. The CRA identified the farm as Cedar Run Cattle Company, on John Powell Road, owned by Lew Dodd. The letter notes, "Mr. Dodd is well known locally as a seller of beef and as a merchant at Chestertown's Farmers' Market."

Leigh's letter stated that the CRA has asked the MDE and the Queen Anne's County Soil Conservation District to take steps to mitigate the problem. According to Leigh, approximately a year ago, the soil conservation district arranged for Dodd to receive funding to erect a fence to keep the cattle away from a drainage swale that was washing nutrients from cattle waste into the river. The funding also covered providing an alternate water supply for the cattle, which had been drinking from a spring in the swale, Leigh said on Tuesday.

The CRA letter continued, "Yet, almost a year later, no fence has been erected. The cattle continue feeding and generating waste where they had earlier." The letter said that the situation had been turned over to the MDE for possible action.

Dodd contested elements of Leigh's account. He said Feb. 23 that the CRA "came out and tested the water, and I worked with them." He said the testers sampled water from where it entered his property and again where it left it. He said the tester told him there was "no difference" between the two.

Dodd said he had put up a buffer strip to keep the cattle away from the stream, and that he "took no government money." He said he was working with the soil conservation district to have a fence put up, but that the winter weather had prevented him from doing so. He said he intended to put up the fence in the spring.

Dodd also said that the CRA had presented him with their findings verbally, but that he had received nothing in writing.

Leigh said on Feb. 26 that he had not had any contact with Dodd since the initial investigation, but that he had sent him a copy of the CRA's initial analysis of his water. Leigh also said that he "would not be surprised" if Dodd had also received a written copy of the final report.

As of Tuesday, Leigh said that the MDE had not responded to an inquiry on the current status of the CRA complaint.

On a MDA web site promoting Maryland farmers, Dodd and his wife Marilyn describe their meat as "free of antibiotics in the feed, steroids or growth promotants of any kind. Our cattle graze on pasture year round and are supplemented with hay and sweet corn silage during the winter." They add, "We believe that with all the health concerns in recent years that we can provide a healthy alternative to the meats and eggs found elsewhere."

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