

AGRICULTURE

2023 Schuylkill River Restoration Fund Bus Tour Highlights Ag Workgroup Partner Successes

On Friday, September 8th the Schuylkill Action Network and Schuylkill River Greenways hosted the annual Schuylkill River Restoration Fund (SRRF) Bus Tour and Press Event. The tour group had the opportunity to see firsthand two SRRF-funded projects in Berks County that are making a big impact on the Schuylkill River's water quality.

The first stop on the tour was Willow Run Farm, owned and operated by 3rd generation dairy farmer Steve Miller.



Nick Ramsey, USDA NRCS District Conservationist for Berks County describes improvements at Willow Run Farm.



The recently built manure storage facility at Willow Run Farm.

Willow Run Farm is preserved via an easement with the Berks County Department of Agriculture and drains to two tributaries to the Manatawny Creek, and ultimately the Schuylkill River. Before the improvements, frequently wet and flooded barnyard and pasture areas contributed manure to these tributaries. Now, with the help of USDA NRCS, Berks Nature, and the SRRF, the farm boasts streambank fencing, animal crossings, and improved waste management facilities that reduce the mixing of rain water and manure.

“The cycling of nutrients with a manure storage is so much better for the crop production...and for the environmental benefit.” - Nick Ramsey, USDA NRCS Berks County District Conservationist



Jennifer Brooks, Environmental Education and Outreach Coordinator with Berks County Conservation District shares the history of the Pine Creek Restoration project with the tour participants.

The second stop was the Pine Creek Streambank Restoration Project. The Pine Creek, located in the Schuylkill Highlands, had been hit by severe flooding in 2018 that realigned the stream and severely eroded its banks.

The impacted landowners teamed up with the Berks County Conservation District and Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association on this restoration project which helped restore the stream's natural beauty and ecological integrity using bioengineering and hundreds of native tree and shrub plantings.

The buses returned to our initial meeting spot and then it was time for a press event and a delicious lunch. The SRRF awardees were announced, and the Philadelphia Water Department pledged to increase their funding allocation in 2024 from \$100,000 to \$250,000!

The theme of the benefits of collaboration in achieving big improvements for the watershed carries through the day through our interactions with our amazing SAN partners and the efforts to restore and preserve the Schuylkill River watershed.



A segment of the Pine Creek Restoration Project.