

OUR COMMITMENT TO AGRICULTURE

The development of the French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan has met with skepticism by some members of the agricultural community. There has been a general misunderstanding that the Plan is intended to produce more regulations and infringement on private landowner rights. This is simply not the case, as the Plan is a public document that only makes recommendations for watershed protection. Recommendations in the Plan stress voluntary, incentive-based programs and cooperative efforts between land owners, environmental agencies, municipalities, industry, businesses, and conservation organizations. These are the same ideals that the partners in the French Creek Project have worked under since its inception in 1995.

The following pages include detailed descriptions of the ecological values of French Creek and the natural and human landscape that surround it. What becomes clear upon review of this information is that the French Creek watershed is rural and dominated by agriculture. In fact, because the region has not seen the same level of industrial and commercial development that has occurred elsewhere, the stream has remained surprisingly diverse, one of the Commonwealth's biological gems.

The sponsors of the FCP – Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Allegheny College, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, and now The Nature Conservancy – recognize that agriculture is a critical part of the local landscape and economy. We view agriculture in a broad fashion that includes silviculture. Farming and logging have occurred in this watershed for over two centuries and, with a little luck and the hard work of the people who live here, will continue into the future.

Agriculture is important to people and the stream. The health of the Creek depends on the participation of the friendly farmers of the French Creek Valley. As a result, we are working aggressively to support farmers and to preserve agriculture in this watershed. Our cooperative approach brings resources to this region, providing mini-grants for upgrading operations and introducing best management practices.

During the last five years, we have invested several hundred thousand dollars on farms that border the Creek and its tributaries. We have worked cooperatively with the county conservation districts and U. S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). And, all of the farmers who have participated have done so voluntarily. We have also encouraged those counties that have not adopted an agriculture preservation program to do so. We are committed to agriculture.

