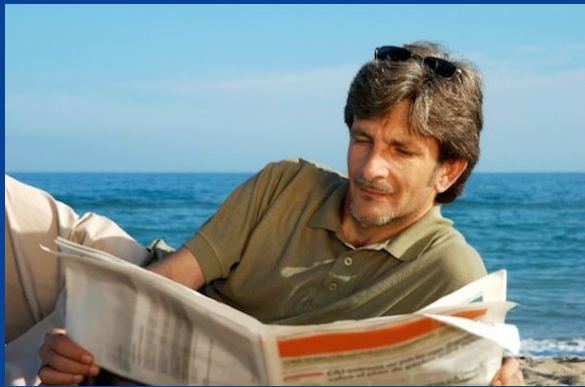




**WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK**



**Closing the Deal With Rural Landowners  
Plain Sect Landowner Focus Group Report  
9/16/2018**

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## Overview

The Land Trust Alliance, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Whitescarver Natural Resource Management, the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, and Water Words That Work, LLC are teaming up to bring the “Closing the Deal With Rural Landowners” training to the Chesapeake Bay.

Our goal is to develop a training course to help entry-level and mid career conservation practitioners successfully recruit and negotiate landowners’ participation in practices improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Our method is to explore the strategies and tactics most successful conservation field staff, those who have the knack for helping private landowners come around to the idea of putting a conservation practice in place on their property.

At the outset of the project, the steering committee developed a list of 80 conservation staff working in the Chesapeake Bay watershed that they deemed to be the leaders in field (pun intended) for working with rural landowners. Water Words That Work, LLC drafted an online survey and led two online focus groups with this group.

## Focus Group Methodology

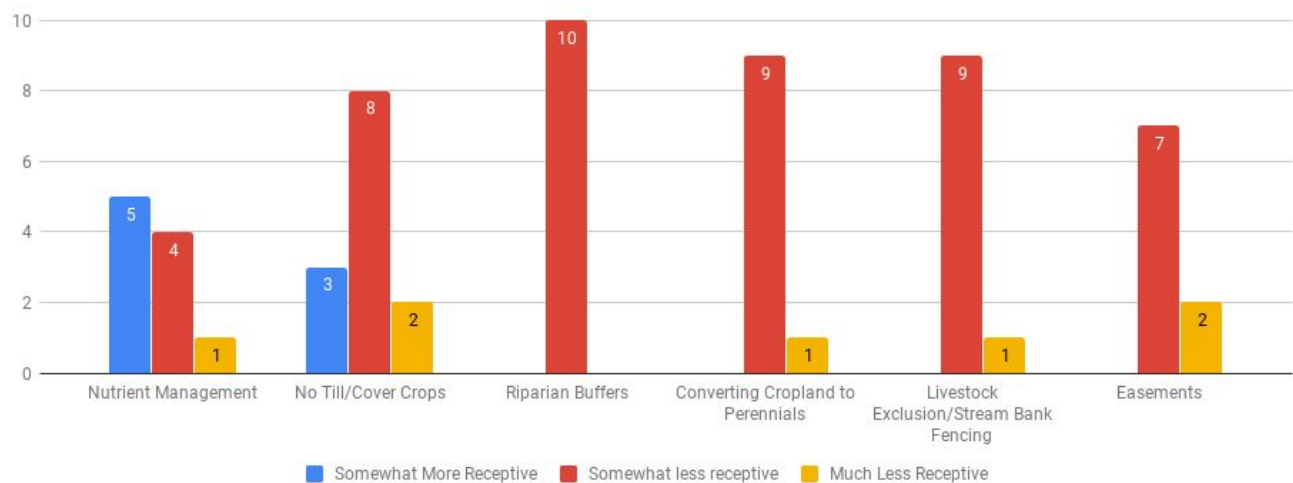
In September 2018, we conducted an online focus group with 11 field conservation “mentors” to discuss their approach to providing a good customer service experience to landowners. Eleven individuals registered to participate:

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Patrick	Fasnap	Octoraro Watershed Association
Roger	Rohrer	R Farm LLC
Jeremy	Weaver	TeamAg Inc.
Natasha	Skelton	Valley Conservation Council
Trevor	Weaver	Mifflin County Conservation District
Grant	DeCosta	Brandywine Conservancy
Dave	Hartman	Penn State Extension
Matthew	Kofroth	Lancaster County Conservation District
Ashley	Spotts	Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jenna	Mitchell	Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
John	Goodall	Brandywine Conservancy

## Top Findings

### Working with Plain Sect landowners requires creativity and persistence

Our mentors generally agreed that convincing Plain Sect landowners to put conservation practices in place is challenging, but not impossible. Compared to English landowners, they found that Plain Sect landowners were more receptive to nutrient management practices and cover crops — but less receptive to all other practices.



Broadly speaking, according to one mentor, “any oversight or influence from outside the farming community is greeted with a certain level of resistance.”

One word that mentors used repeatedly was “creative.” They emphasized that succeeding with Plain Sect landowners required conservation field staff to come up with creative solutions to the farmers’ concerns about appearance, maintenance, and money.

### Conservation field staff should be creative about preserving the tidy appearances of Plain Sect farms

Our mentors report that Plain Sect farms are generally immaculate. “They don’t like the area to look wild or messy,” one mentor said about forested buffers. Our mentors discussed solutions like this to deal with this objection:

- **Riparian Buffers.** Some mentors reported proposing planting fruit and nut trees and flowers in the riparian buffer. This would help the landowner see the land as remaining in production at some level — and may entice his wife to see the buffer as an extension of her garden.
- **Livestock Exclusion Fencing.** Some mentors reported that the landowner may perceive the fence as “tidy” if there was a strip to mow between the fence and the buffer on the other side.

## Conservation staff should be creative about financial support

Our mentors described Plain Sect landowners as savvy business people who are focused on the bottom line. “The Amish can’t resist a good deal,” according to one mentor. But like all farmers, they are subject to the whims of a volatile market. In late 2018, Plain Sect landowners may be feeling “restricted by the low milk prices right now.”

Our mentors report that many Plain Sect landowners are comfortable accepting government cost share dollars, but that some will object to that unless the funds are routed through a nonprofit partner. In some cases, the landowners will take their cues from their local bishop about the acceptability of a program. Our mentors advised briefing local bishops about their programs and how they work, to avoid misunderstandings on this crucial point.

## Conservation staff should be creative about marketing to and networking with Plain Sect landowners

Most of our mentors recommended holding workshops and preparing briefing materials that are tailored to the local Plain Sect audience, and conducted in their community. This provides an opportunity to speak directly to their concerns about maintenance and funding, and the locations would be accessible to those who lack automobiles.

One mentor reported a highly positive experience putting a retired Amish farmer on retainer to serve as their “Plain Sect liaison.” This well known individual helped make introductions to bishops and landowners, and served as sounding board when conservation staff were working on practices and promotional materials.

## Gender roles are not the barrier they appear to be

At first glance, Plain Sect gender roles appear to be rigorously separated. The husband farms, and the wife gardens, raises the children, and takes care of the house. This leads questions about whether Plain Sect landowners may be reluctant to work with female conservation field staff.

Our mentors report that the reality is more nuanced. Some said that they never spoke with the wife and believed she was out of the decision loop, but others had a different experience. According to one mentor, “when contracts need to be signed I find the wives engaged and knowledgeable about the work despite not hearing it first-hand from me.”

One mentor even suggested arriving at the farm between 11 and noon was a useful technique. The wife would often invite the guest to lunch — and the conservation staffer could brief the whole family.

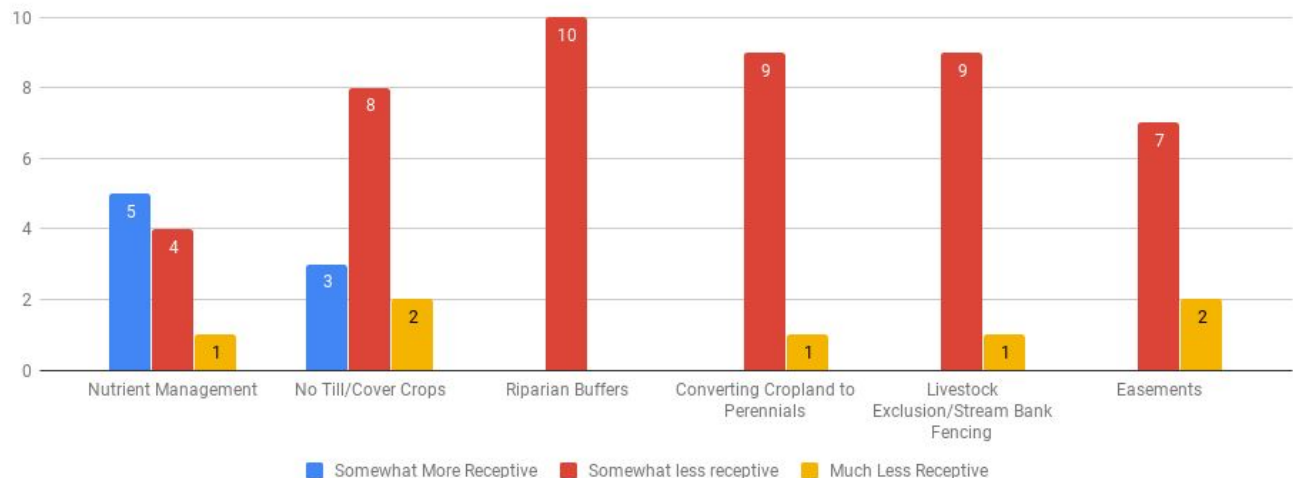
Our mentors reported that Plain Sect landowners are used to dealing with female accountants, veterinarians, and other professionals outside their community. "Plain Sect are used to holding themselves apart," said one, meaning that Plain Sect landowners don't expect "English" conservation staff to conform to their traditional gender roles.

"My team is primarily female -- we have not met a farmer unwilling to work with us because of our gender," reported another. "We feel that the fact that we are female provides us the opportunity to also work with wives and we have done this on a few occasions."

# Focus Group Questions

## Topic #1: Conservation Practices

Question #1: Compared to "English" landowners, how receptive are Plain Sect landowners to these practices:



Question #2: In your experience, do Plain Sect landowners perceive the pros and cons of BMPs differently from other landowners? If so, what are the differences?

Here are their verbatim answers to this question:

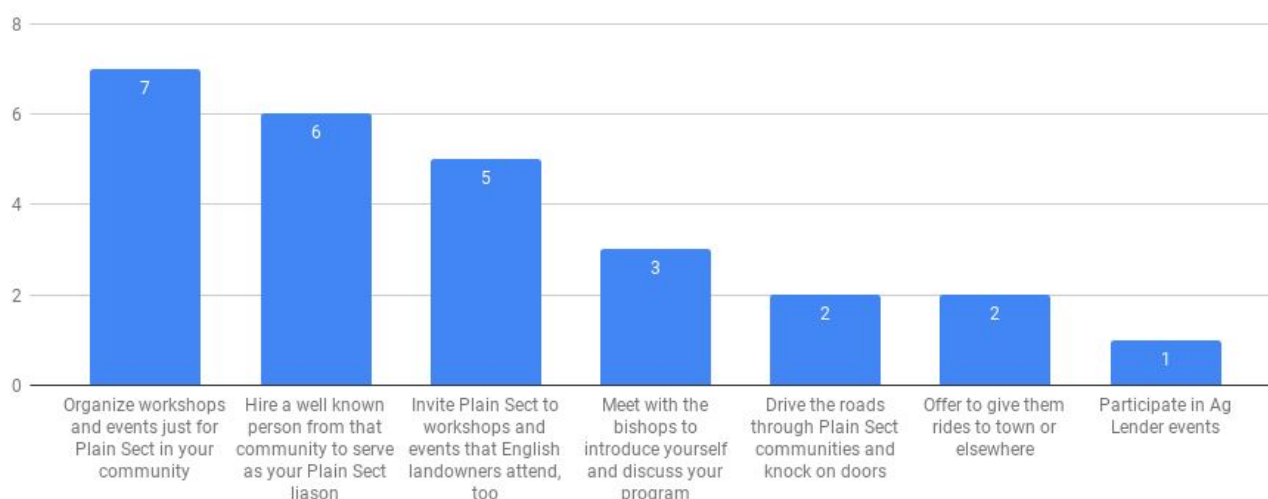
- No
- Yes, they are less willing to make changes, they are also restricted by the low milk prices right now. Also less interested in government cost sharing. So they may want to install BMP's but it is a financial challenge with current low mlk prices
- Yes -- How they change the aesthetics of the farm, how they add to or decrease their workload
- yes, to some degree- I think they have to, especially when it comes to management and long-term maintenance of the BMP's using horses, less manual labor, robotics, etc...I must clearly discuss OM when designing BMP's to consider labor for the length of the BMP.
- They are very similar to other major producers in our area, but different from many non-farming other landowners. Any oversight or influence from outside the farming community is greeted with a certain level of resistance.
- sometimes, may look at long term maintenance and who will do this if not involved in a government funded program.



- No, I don't think they perceive them any differently. We can't really generalize them as a group this way. I think it is more by individual. Although, the Plain Sect may perceive some of the BMPs to be harder for them to implement.
- I work mainly with forested buffers and at times they do see them differently. They don't like the area to look wild or messy. We see these sites as great wildlife habitat and some of the beneficial herbaceous plants that we want to see are seen as weeds or problems plants to them at times. I have had guys make mentioned they were required to install a buffer even though CREP is a volunteer program.
- Yes they tend to be more focused on the direct impact on them. Working to show them the BMP fiscal benefits to their operation and then the secondary benefits to the watershed community (water quality) resonates
- Yes, they do. While there are some similarities...funding, working with government agencies, and appearance definitely are top cons among the Plain Sect community.

## Topic #2: Networking With Plain Sect Landowners

Question #3: In your opinion, which **THREE** of these techniques are the best way to develop relationships with Plain Sect landowners in your community:



Question #4: In your own words, how do you account for gender roles among landowners and field staff when building relationships in the Plain Sect community?

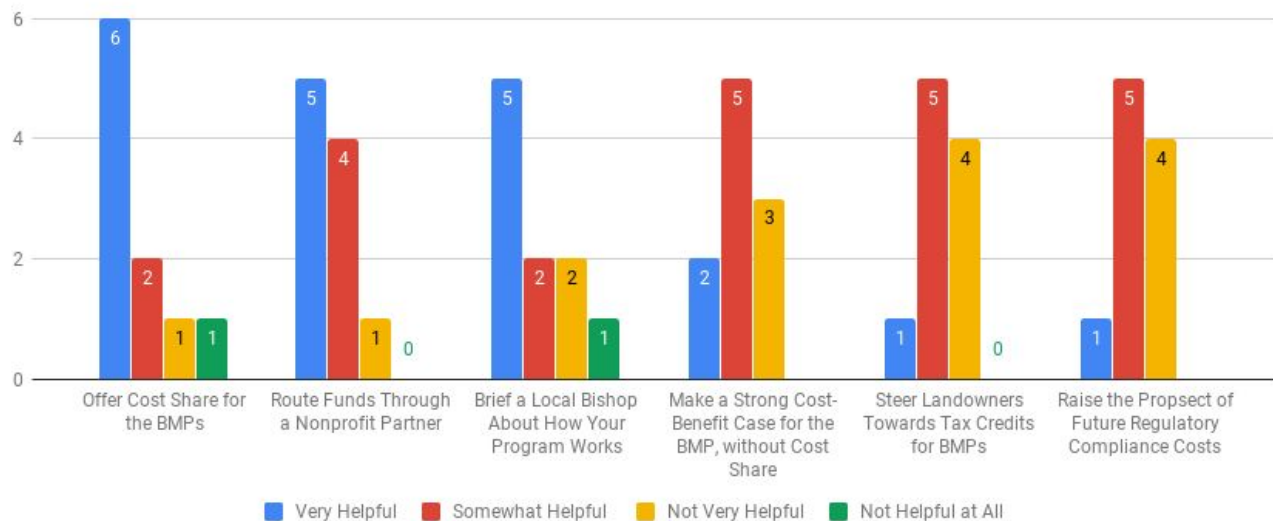
Here are their verbatim answers to this question:



- Follow their lead, understand the likelihood for a gender dynamic to be evident, but also be mindful that behind the scenes may be different than the public display.
- i generally speak with the male as the decision maker. those bmp discussions are had in the barn. However, I have started asking to meet at the kitchen table, especially for buffers, so the wife can be brought into the discussion.
- Pretty much have only interacted with the male owner/operator in these communities. Assumed they make most of the, if not all of, the decisions.
- My team is primarily female -- we have not met a farmer unwilling to work with us because of our gender. We feel that the fact that we are female provides us the opportunity to also work with wives and we have done this on a few occasions -- we plan to build out a greater strategy to connect with wives on conservation opportunities
- If the wives are around they participate in the conversations, but if they aren't they generally don't. However, when contracts need to be signed I find the wives engaged and knowledgeable about the work despite not hearing it first-hand from me.
- Hard question...understand who you are, who you are talking with, and above all be respectful.
- We have worked a lot on having the wife's become more vested in decision making. The Old Order Amish in our watershed are very conservative, and the men tend to "lead" in decision making. We are working on a new outreach to have more direct contact with the wives, and help to encourage decision making become a more family oriented decision
- Typically work with exclusively with the man of the family but also watch the dynamic of the household to see how much clout the wife has in the relationship. Sometimes the husband values his wife's opinion and ideas and this is where you may be able to take advantage of this opportunity.
- It can be challenging at times being a woman in this field working with farmers/landowners but I think its very important to listen to their concerns, feelings and just be there as a support. Sometimes visiting the site with another coworker can be good. It has been helpful to talk about people I know in the county and I think that has helped open doors for me. It has been helpful working with both the husband and wife on the farm, it helps me when I have to go do site visits or buffer checks.
- Most relationships on the plain sect farm begin with the male. I find the wife is usually present but in the background. This does not mean they are not part of the decision making. Staff- as long as they are competent and comfortable working with the farmer, they seem to be able to work with either gender

## Topic #3: Plain Sect Money Issues

Question #5: How helpful are the following techniques for providing financial support to Plain Sect landowners for BMPs:



Question #6: In your own words, how do you address Plain Sect landowners' financial needs and concerns when encouraging BMPs?

Here are their verbatim answers to this question:

- We try to leverage as many sources of funding as possible
- Business like. A strong financial case, using whatever tools, is your best presentation.
- Again, more from the no-till perspective I have suggested sharing no-till equipment to gain some economy of scale.
- We listen and work with the farmer to find the funds to achieve the installation of the BMP's
- find where they are at financially and what they are or are not willing to "risk" on the BMP I am trying to sell
- most programs eligibility requirements to do take into account personal finances. One does. they ask for their last 3 years tax returns, specially the schedule F and a personal financial statement on bank letterhead-to show financial need.
- Understanding their financial stress due to extremely low milk prices now. Work on ways that they will accept cost sharing to assist with the costs of installing BMP's. Reviewing different programs, and include cost sharing from Non profit sources.

- We promote EQIP program, CREP. But we also have Buffer Bonus or similar programs in the county that will help to offset out of pocket costs for BMP establishment on the farm when they install a forested buffer.
- DO NOT take into account