



## **USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference**

### **Was This in My Job Description? - Experiences of a Watershed Coordinator in East Tennessee**

With changes in the agricultural economy, funding sources and state and federal priorities, more Extension personnel are becoming involved with environmental issues, including water quality. In some states, Extension personnel have taken on the role of coordinating education and implementation programs within single watersheds. This paper is based on experiences of an Extension watershed coordinator working in Pond Creek, a small, agricultural watershed in the ridge and valley geographic region of East Tennessee. Accurately identifying the watershed boundaries was one of the first challenges of the watershed coordinator. Many watersheds cover part of one or more counties, and are usually not marked on county topographical maps. For watersheds that cover parts of more than one county, the watershed coordinator has to interact with local government and state and federal agency personnel from more than one county. Getting to know the stakeholders is a vital step in understanding the watershed. It is important to appreciate and understand the roles played by different family members in the decision making process in the different farming operations within a watershed. A successful coordinator needs to have a good understanding of local politics and loyalties among stakeholders. Stakeholders' decisions are often based on informal information exchanges with agency personnel and peers at local agri-businesses, restaurants and other gathering places. Even with the best available information the individual's personal or economic situation can prevent them from initiating change. Extension personnel are well-suited to work as watershed coordinators. They understand and are trusted by the farming community. The job of a watershed coordinator can be both challenging and satisfying, but at times frustrating. Improvements in water quality at a watershed scale do not happen quickly. Changes can be slow to be implemented or have an effect.

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