



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of Resource Conservation
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Pulling Together FOR A CLEANER CHESAPEAKE BAY



A Legacy of Stewardship



Streamside buffers safeguard waterways from nutrients and sediment coming off the land.



Waste storage structures protect stored manure from rainwater runoff.



Livestock crossings protect streams from animal traffic.



Cover crops recycle unused plant nutrients in the soil and prevent erosion.



During the last decade alone, Maryland farmers have installed thousands of best management practices on their farms to protect natural resources and safeguard water quality in local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. This legacy of environmental stewardship dates back to the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s when Maryland farmers first began working with newly created soil conservation districts to protect the soil from the devastating effects of wind and water erosion.

Today, the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Office of Resource Conservation—in partnership with soil conservation districts and a host of local, state, and federal agencies—is pulling together with Maryland farmers to place even more best management practices on farmland—practices that balance crop and livestock production with the need to protect natural resources and the Chesapeake Bay.



The Maryland Department of Agriculture and Maryland Farmers



Leading the way to a healthier Bay.



Agricultural Nutrient Management Program

Reducing the amount of nutrients entering the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries is a top priority for Maryland and other Bay states. Nutrients—primarily nitrogen and phosphorus—are key ingredients in fertilizer and animal manure. Maryland farmers are required by state law to take soil tests and follow nutrient management plans when applying fertilizer, manure, or other nutrient sources to their crop fields. The Nutrient Management Program conducts on-farm audits and inspections to verify that these plans are working to protect waterways from nutrient runoff.

To ensure the effectiveness of nutrient management plans, the department oversees a certification and licensing program for consultants who develop these plans for farmers. A specialized training and certification program is offered to farmers who want to become certified to develop their own plans. Continuing education workshops

update consultants and farmers on the latest developments and technology in nutrient management.

Conservation Grants

Protecting natural resources on farms can be costly. The Maryland Agricultural Water Quality (MACS) Cost-Share Program provides farmers with grants that cover up to 87.5 percent of the costs to install best management practices on farms to prevent soil erosion, manage nutrients, and safeguard water quality. Cover crops planted after the summer harvest to recycle unused plant nutrients, streamside buffers of grasses and trees planted to protect waterways from sedimentation and farm runoff, and animal waste management systems constructed to help farmers safely handle and store manure resources are among more than 30 best management practices eligible for cost-share grants.

Field Staff

Farmers rely on the technical expertise of conservation planners and technicians working in Maryland's 24 local soil conservation districts to select the right best management practices for their operations, supervise their installation or construction, and develop maintenance plans to keep them in good working order. Field personnel are specially trained to help farmers enroll in conservation programs and comply with federal, state, and local environmental laws.

Enforcement

The department's technical experts and local soil conservation districts work jointly with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to investigate complaints involving agricultural pollution. Typically, these complaints involve concerns about odors, sediment runoff, manure management, and livestock issues. This interagency team works with farmers to address resource concerns and establish a timeline to correct problems. If complaints are not addressed voluntarily, MDE has authority to take legal action against polluters.

Research and Technology

The Office of Resource Conservation seeks grants from federal, state, and private organizations to develop and field test promising new farm management technologies that sustain and improve agricultural production and advance water quality and conservation of natural resources. Many of these projects are watershed-based and designed to demonstrate new management strategies to reduce nutrient and sediment loads to Maryland waterways.

Education

Educating farmers, citizens, and young people about the importance of conserving natural resources is a priority. Field days, farm tours, pasture walks, and workshops are held regularly to keep farmers abreast of the latest research findings, environmental

regulations and technologies. Field staff also make classroom presentations, organize soil judging contests, and serve as mentors to students participating in the Envirothon program, an outdoor natural resources competition for high school students who are interested in Maryland's environment.

Chesapeake Bay Partner

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency established limits on the amount of nutrients and sediments entering the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. These pollution limits, called the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), represent the maximum amount of pollution that the Bay can withstand and still meet water quality standards. The six Bay states and the District of Columbia are required to follow approved Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) outlining specific actions and strategies they will take to achieve these pollution limits by 2025. The Maryland Department of Agriculture and the state's 24 local soil conservation districts are working with farmers to install conservation practices on farms that meet the clean water goals for the Bay and its tributaries.

