HOW
Horse Outreach Workgroup

FACT SHEET

BIG DREAMS FOR YOUR HORSE FARM? DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST!

GET AN APPROVED SOIL CONSERVATION AND WATER QUALITY PLAN (SCWQP)

What is a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP)? It is a tool that helps you protect and enhance the natural resources on your farm and improve your operational efficiency. SCWQPs help manage your operation by selecting Best Management Practices (BMPs) that will help solve resource concerns, promote productive soils, and enhance the natural resources on your farm.

Am I required to have a SCWQP? Conservation plans are voluntary; however, if a landowner participates in State or Federally sponsored programs, an approved conservation plan may be required. SCWQPs differ from nutrient management plans, which are required if an operation manages 8,000 pounds of animals or has a gross income of $2,500 per year. Having a SCWQP for your farm can help answer questions properly before issues arise.

Why do I need a SCWQP? A properly structured and implemented SCWQP on your farm can reduce cost/labor, increase production, and improve the aesthetics of your property. A plan will also streamline the development of a nutrient management plan and will help protect and conserve the natural resources on your farm.

What is contained in a SCWQP?

- Aerial photograph of the farm showing:
  - Property boundaries
  - Fields with land use and acres
  - Other resources such as rivers, streams, wetlands, etc.
  - Landmarks including highways, railroads, power lines, etc.
- Written plan narrative specifying:
  - Planned (BMPs) that address resource concerns
  - Implementation schedule of planned BMPs.
- Soil maps showing the classifications of soils located on the farm.
  - User-friendly descriptions of each soil classification.
- Other technical information specifically tailored for your operation.

Who makes the decisions? A conservation plan is based on your needs and objectives as a farm operator. Proposed BMP implementation is a combined effort between you and your conservation planner. Final decisions are made by you and the plan can be updated as needs and objectives change.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Before purchasing land or beginning improvements to an existing property, plan a visit to your local soil conservation district (SCD) office. The professional staff at the local SCD office can help you understand the limitations of your property before you spend a lot of time and money. They can develop a SCWQP that will help you achieve your goals and work with the natural resources on your property.

KNOW YOUR SOILS

Soil surveys provide soil data and information to land owners on soil characteristics that are vital to the development and usage of the land. By reviewing the soil survey with soil conservation staff, critical topics such as soil texture, soil types, suitability for crop production, water table depth, permeability of the soil, and limitations for grading the soil can be easily understood and implemented. This information can assist you in choosing the best location for riding arenas, barns, manure storage areas, as well as pastures and hay fields. In addition, it will help you identify potential wet areas that may harbor mosquitoes and increase the risk of spreading West Nile Virus.

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PASTURE

Many factors impact grass growth, and not all species are adapted for all climates or soil types. Your local soil SCD can help you choose the best grass species and specific varieties that will adapt to your farm.

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Pastures require specific management techniques to remain productive. Soils considered "heavy" with a lot of clay may require mechanical treatment to aerate and loosen them for improved water infiltration and drainage. Sandy soils that are loose and low in organic matter dry out quickly during hot, dry summer months and may benefit from the adding soil ammendments to improve moisture holding capability and overall soil fertility.

MANURE STORAGE & MANAGEMENT

Prospective horse farm operators should consider how manure will be stored and managed. A 1000-pound horse will generate approximately 50 pounds of waste per day. If the horse is kept in a stall, bedding material (shavings, straw, etc.) will also be removed with the manure, adding to the total waste volume. This manure will accumulate quickly, and if the operation meets the requirements for a nutrient management plan, it will need to be properly stored. Is a waste storage facility needed to store the volume to be generated? If stockpiled outside a storage structure, is the pile adequately stored away from wells or water sources? Will the manure be spread onto pastures or hauled away? A conversation with your local SCD before purchasing the property can help provide answers.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE BUYING A PROPERTY FOR HORSES

Consideration should be given to property features that may require setbacks, either for local ordinances or State nutrient management regulations. The following questions should be discussed with your local soil conservation district when purchasing a property:

- Where are the property boundaries?
- Does the property have a water well?
- Are water sources like streams, springs, ponds, or wetlands present?
- Are any sensitive species mapped to the property?
- Does the property have historical significance?

Prospective farm owners should be aware that manure stockpiles and storage facilities need to be located at least 100 feet from water sources and at least 100 feet from property lines and public roads; at least 200 feet from any residence; and at least 100 feet from wells or 300 feet from a well when the well is down slope. Locate manure stockpiles above the floodplain of the 100-year, 24-hour storm event. If constructed on a slope (for slopes greater than 3 percent), no farther than 150 feet from the top of a slope, unless a diversion is installed.

Sometimes the shape of the property will prohibit the ability to store any manure safely onsite, and, in that case, the farm operator will not be able to store any manure onsite. A property could be 10 acres, but if it is long and skinny property outline, 200 feet or less width, then that would leave no room for manure storage.

UNDERSTANDING AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENTS, ZONING, AND PERMITS

In each county, every piece of land is subject to zoning laws that determine how the land can be used and what public facilities and amenities are needed to provide service to the community. Depending on the zoning of the property, some agricultural practices may require permits. Contact your local SCD office for advice and a copy of A Farmer's Guide to Environmental Permits. This guide explains most Federal and State permits. It does not contain information on individual county permits that may be required. Your county planning and zoning offices can provide this information. The zoning ordinance, part of the county code, determines the height and size of buildings, parking, and the number of units per acre that can be constructed. It also determines whether the use is agricultural, residential, industrial, or commercial. The zoning ordinance affects the landowner by determining how the property can be developed and used. The county government also approves changes in zoning ordinances.

For more information on horse manure management and other soil conservation and water quality practices, contact your local Soil Conservation District or visit mda.maryland.gov/HOW.

The Horse Outreach Workgroup (HOW) provides information to horse owners on pasture and manure management. HOW consists of representatives from local Soil Conservation Districts, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maryland Extension, Maryland Horse Council, and the Maryland Horse Industry Board.

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