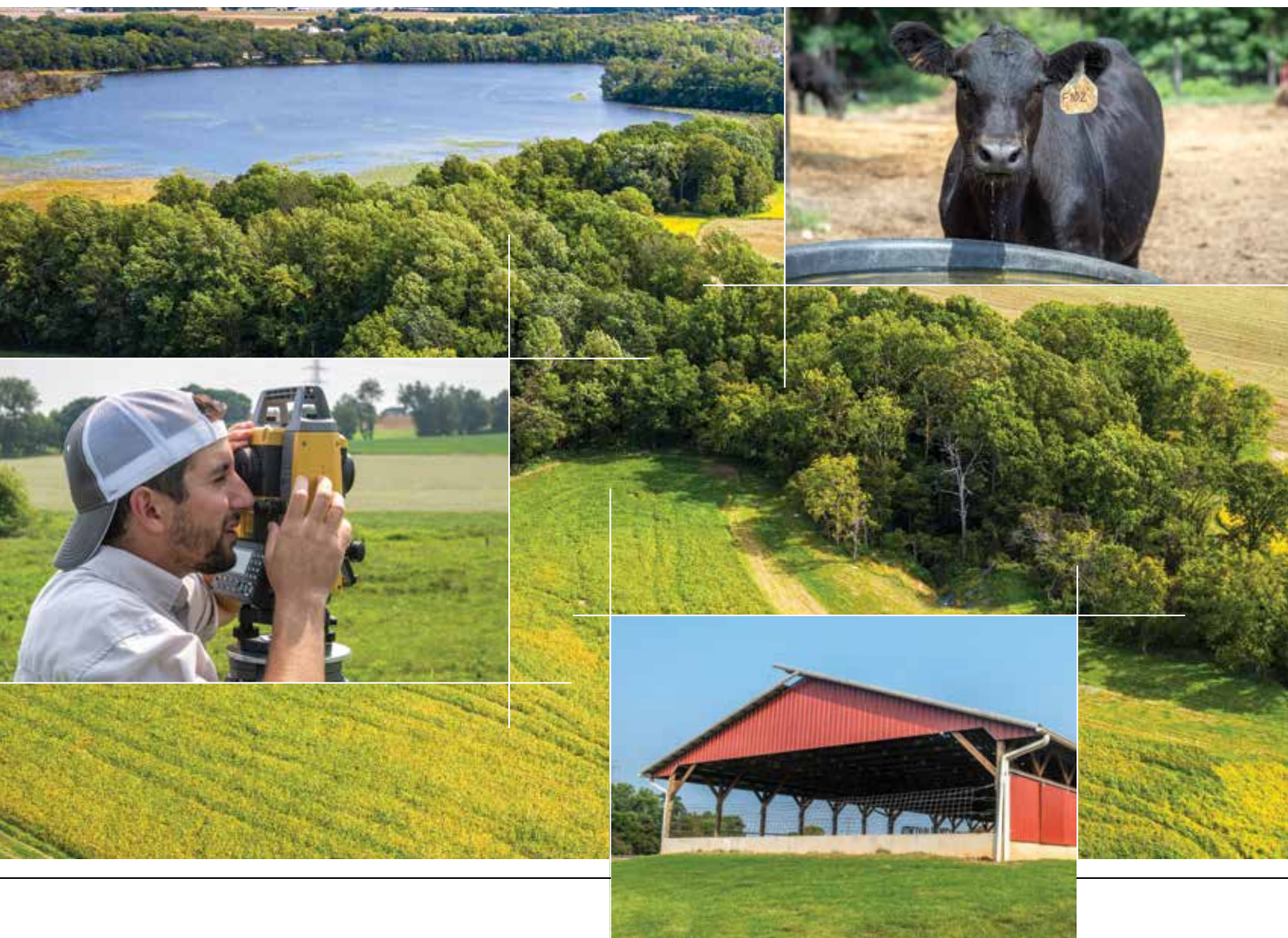




It's a **Good Time** to get your farm's

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan



**Good for your farm's natural resources.
Good for your bottom line.
Good for you!**

What is a SOIL CONSERVATION AND WATER QUALITY PLAN?

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan—or conservation plan for short—is a tool that can help you protect and enhance the natural resources that support your farming operation.

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan can help you...

- Manage your operation more efficiently
- Save on energy and labor costs
- Improve soil health
- Build resilience to climate change
- Enhance wildlife habitat
- Care for forest resources

Technical staff working in your local soil conservation district develop conservation plans for farmers free of charge. These plans identify a farm's critical natural resources, pinpoint problem areas, and set realistic goals and timelines for making improvements. Each plan is unique and addresses natural resource concerns for the entire farming operation.

All of the information contained in the conservation plan belongs to you. Farmers have the final say on which practices to install and how and when to proceed. A conservation plan should be updated if major changes are made to your operation, or at a minimum, every ten years. These plans do not provide public access to your property. As the farmer or landowner, you control right of entry and use.



Benefits of a Conservation Plan

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan can help you improve productivity by making the best possible use of your farm's soil and water resources.

It is no secret that crops grow best in deep, fertile topsoil. Soil that washes or blows away removes valuable minerals, nutrients, and organic matter. Crops growing in shallow, eroded soils develop poor root systems, are more vulnerable to extreme weather, and require more fertilizer to achieve acceptable yields.

If erosion problems like rills and gullies are visible, chances are your farm is already losing about 15 tons of soil per acre, per year. That translates to reduced yields and lost revenue.

An evaluation of your farm's natural resources is beneficial even if problems are not visible. Well-managed farms protected by conservation plans help keep sediment and nutrients out of waterways. These plans are a valuable tool in Maryland's efforts to restore clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and the region's streams and rivers. In addition, farmers with active conservation plans are in a better position to comply with environmental requirements and may be eligible for state and federal farm programs.



Getting Started

It all starts with a farm visit. A conservation planner will set up a time to meet with you, walk your farm, and listen to your natural resource concerns. Based on your input, the planner will develop a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan for your farm. This plan will include a menu of best management practices that can be installed to manage manure resources, control soil erosion, and protect water quality. You decide which practices to implement as time, need, and money allow.

Because each farm is unique, no two farm plans are alike. A livestock crossing or fencing may be recommended to help a beef cattle operation keep animals away from streams. Cover crops and streamside buffers are often recommended to prevent nutrient runoff from crop fields. Other practices, such as heavy use areas or waste storage facilities, help poultry and livestock operations protect water quality and comply with environmental regulations.

What Does a Conservation Plan Include?

- An aerial photograph, map, or diagram of the farm
- An inventory and analysis of natural resources on the property
- A soil map showing the type and location of soils on the property
- A list of management decisions, agreed upon best management practices, and an install schedule
- An operation and maintenance plan for installed best management practices
- Additional information on soil loss, seeding, tillage, and fertilization may be included

Conservation planners working in your local soil conservation district will develop your farm's conservation plan free of charge.



How Much Does a Conservation Plan Cost?

There are no costs or strings attached to getting a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan. It is a completely voluntary process. Conservation planners working in your local soil conservation district will develop your farm's conservation plan free of charge.

Although the plan itself costs nothing, some of the recommended best management practices may require a construction investment.

Financial Help for You

Your soil conservation district will help you sort through the maze of local, state, and federal conservation assistance programs.

The Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program provides grants that cover up to 100 percent of the cost to install eligible best management practices including grassed waterways, grade stabilization structures, stream exclusion fencing, and forest buffers among others.

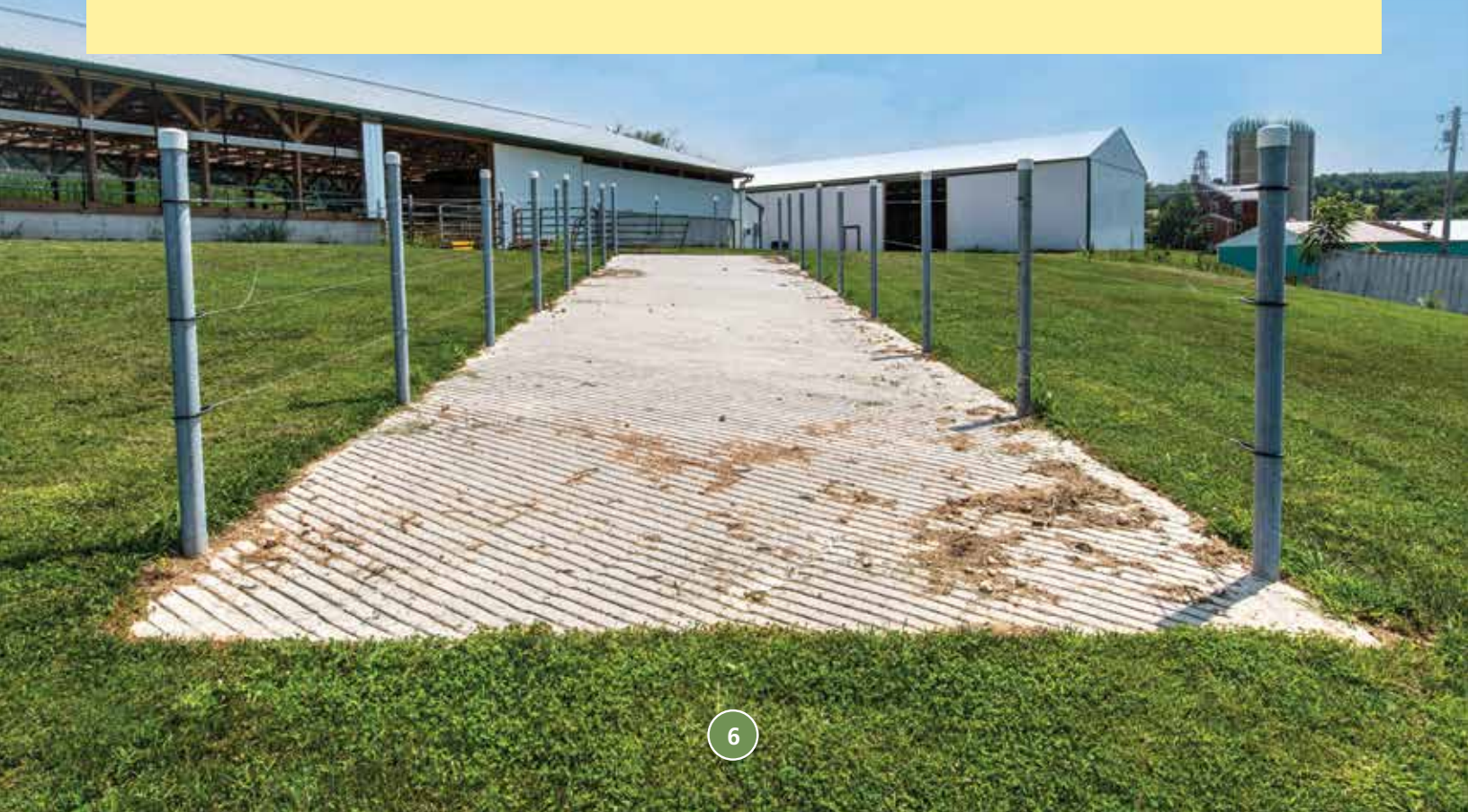
District staff will help you calculate costs to install BMPs, apply for state and federal financial assistance, and leverage funding for maximum support.

Well managed farms protected by Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans do an excellent job of safeguarding natural resources.

Environmental Benefits

Due to their many environmental benefits, Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans are required by federal, state, and local conservation programs and are included in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Restoration Plan.

- The Federal Food Security Act requires conservation plans for all highly erodible lands.
- At the state level, active plans must be implemented on all farmland enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program and on farmland located in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area—the 1,000 ft. strip of land along these shorelines.
- The Maryland Department of the Environment requires certain livestock and poultry farmers to implement conservation plans as part of its permitting process.
- Farmers with active conservation plans are exempt from state fines if a sediment runoff problem occurs.



You Have the Final Say

There is nothing mysterious about a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan. It is simply a set of options designed to help you get the most from your land while protecting and conserving the natural resources that support your operation. Remember:

- You have the final say on the best management practices that will be installed.
- You decide the best option to improve your operation and protect local water quality.
- Call or visit your local soil conservation district today to get started.



Questions to Ask Your Conservation Planner

- What are the natural resources on my farm?
- What crops do I plan to grow?
- Am I rotating crops to reduce disease and pest problems?
- Am I using commercial fertilizer and other nutrient sources based on my farm's nutrient management plan?
- Have I minimized runoff?
- Could I use wetlands or streamside buffers to reduce the amount of nutrients leaving my farm?
- What types of wildlife do I want to encourage?
- Will a new conservation practice interfere with or cancel out another practice?
- Can I improve how I manage forest resources?



Maryland's Soil Conservation Districts

Contact us today to get your Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan in the works!

DISTRICT	PHONE	WEBSITE
Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3	alleganyscd.com
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757	aascd.org
Baltimore County	410-527-5920, ext. 3	bcscd.org
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3	calvertsoil.org
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3	
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3	carrollsoil.com
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3	catocinfrederickscd.com
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3	cecilscd.com
Charles	301-638-3028	charlesscd.com
Dorchester	410-228-5640, ext. 3	
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3	catocinfrederickscd.com
Garrett	301-501-5886	garrettscd.org
Harford	410-638-4828	harfordscd.org
Howard	410-313-0680	howardscd.org
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3	kentsoilandwaterconservationdistrict.org
Montgomery	301-590-2855	montgomeryscd.org
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3	pgscd.org
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3	
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3	stmarysscd.com
Somerset	410-621-9310	
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 5	talbotscd.com
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3	conservationplace.com
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3	wicomicoscd.org
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3	



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of Resource Conservation

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MARYLAND'S CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

Soil conservation districts are members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership, a coalition of federal, state, and local agriculture agencies dedicated to protecting and conserving natural resources and promoting Maryland agriculture.

- Maryland Department of Agriculture
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts
- State Soil Conservation Committee
- University of Maryland Extension