



Harvesting Success

Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report



MARYLAND NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM





Message from Secretary Atticks



Farmers:

Did you know Maryland became the first state to establish a Nutrient Management Program in 1989? What began as a voluntary effort has grown into one of the state's most important tools for protecting the Chesapeake Bay while supporting a productive agricultural industry. Following a series of fish kills on the Lower Eastern Shore and with increasing concerns around the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1998, establishing the Nutrient Management Program that is in place today.

As a leader in the field, Maryland's Nutrient Management Program embraces the latest science and technology to help farmers manage nutrients more efficiently to protect both local water quality and their bottom lines amid rising fertilizer costs. By working together and adapting to new innovations, we can ensure a sustainable future for both Maryland agriculture and the Chesapeake Bay.

In recent years, as fertilizer prices have reached record levels, some

farmers have begun using food processing residuals as an affordable alternative to commercial fertilizer. To support this practice, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation in 2024 to establish a permit program for food processing residuals, otherwise known as FPRs. During its first full year of operation, the program was successfully implemented, issuing 88 permits. You can learn more about this program and its impact in this report.

Established in 2013, our Turfgrass Program trains, certifies and licenses individuals and companies hired to apply lawn fertilizer to nonagricultural land. The compliance section ensures fertilizer applications follow University of Maryland recommendations. As one of only a handful of similar programs nationwide, Maryland's Turfgrass Program continues to make a meaningful difference for local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

I invite you to read on to learn more about our Fiscal Year 2025 accomplishments.

Kevin Atticks, D.C.D.
Maryland Agriculture Secretary

Maryland's Nutrient Management Program...and the Chesapeake Bay

The Nutrient Management Program protects water quality in local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay by ensuring that farmers and lawn care professionals apply fertilizers, animal manure, food processing residuals, and other nutrient sources in an environmentally sound manner. Guidance is provided by the Nutrient Management Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from agricultural interests, environmental groups, the turfgrass industry, University of Maryland, and government agencies. Two areas are managed by the Nutrient Management Program:

- Agricultural Nutrient Management Program
- Turfgrass Nutrient Management Program





AGRICULTURAL NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

In Maryland, farmers who earn \$2,500 or more in gross income or have 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight are required to follow state-approved nutrient management plans when fertilizing crops and handling manure. These science-based plans help farmers apply the right amount of manure or fertilizer in

the right place and at the right time in the growing season to meet crop needs and protect local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay from nutrient runoff.

Due to their complexity, these plans must be prepared by a qualified University of Maryland Extension advisor, a certified private consultant, or farmers

who have been trained and certified to prepare their own plans. This system ensures that plans are developed, updated, and followed according to Maryland regulations. The Agricultural Nutrient Management Program is authorized by the *Water Quality Improvement Act* of 1998.

Maryland's Nutrient Management Requirements



Farmers are required to follow state-approved nutrient management plans for fertilizing crops and handling manure.



Plans need regular updates based on soil and manure samples; Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) are due to the department by March 1.



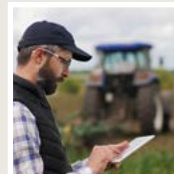
Setbacks and livestock exclusion measures are required to protect local streams.



Manure and other organic nutrient sources must be incorporated into tilled fields within 48 hours of application.



Spreading manure and other organic nutrient sources in winter is prohibited.



Training is required for consultants, certified farmers, and farmers who apply nutrients to 10 or more acres.



A permit is required to transport, apply, or store food processing residuals (FPRs) on farms.

Food Processing Residuals Permit Launch

Food processing residuals (FPRs) are generated during the production and processing of food products such as milk and poultry. MDA began accepting applications for transport, storage and land application of FPRs in January 2025. By the end of the fiscal year, MDA had received 6 applications for storage and issued 5 permits. One application was denied because Caroline County had enacted an ordinance that imposed specific restrictions on the storage of FPRs, and the structure in question did not meet those requirements. MDA received 27 applications for FPR transport and issued 24 permits. Additionally, there were 92 applications for land application, of which 59 permits were granted. MDA did not reject any requests for transport and storage permits. Some applicants chose to defer their permit requests due to scheduling conflicts or management challenges.

The program's launch was considered a tremendous success by both MDA and the industry, as there were no complaints registered with the department. This marked the first time in at least 25 years that this had occurred.

Highlights 2025

Agricultural Program

Compliance and Enforcement

- 98%** of regulated farmers submitted required annual implementation reports (AIRs) for nearly 1.3 million acres of land
- \$93k** in fines were levied against 93 operators for late or missing AIRs
- \$54k** in fines were issued to farmers for implementation violations
- 1,008** on-farm implementation reviews were conducted, and 76% of audited farms passed their initial inspection
- 80%** of farms were in compliance after follow-up inspections confirmed that infractions were fixed within the required time frame

Certification and Licensing

- 23** University of Maryland Extension Advisors and technical staff positions were funded
- 35** New nutrient management consultants were certified by the program, bringing the total number of certified consultants to **1,639**
- 14** Additional farmers were trained and certified to prepare their own nutrient management plans, bringing the total number of certified farmers to **835**

Education

- 4,057** Farmers and consultants attended **189** continuing education events, either in person or remotely
- 726** Required nutrient management vouchers were issued or renewed to farmers who apply nutrients to **10** or more acres of cropland



Phosphorus and Nitrogen Research Funding

- Fifteen sites were selected for edge-of-field runoff sampling. These included 5 sites representing overland flow (Western/Central Maryland); 6 sites representing tile drainage (Eastern Shore); and 4 sites representing open ditches (Eastern Shore).
- A total of 662 storm events were sampled, resulting in 7,426 individual samples.
- One of the preliminary insights is that average phosphorus loss is greater from surface runoff, followed by ditches, and tile drainage.
- The University plans to submit its final report by December 2026.



TURFGRASS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Established by the Fertilizer Use Act of 2011, Maryland's lawn fertilizer Law helps protect local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay from excess nutrients originating from urban sources—including golf courses, parks, recreation areas, businesses, and thousands of residential lawns. The Turfgrass Nutrient Management Program trains, certifies, and licenses individuals and companies hired to apply lawn fertilizer to non-agricultural land. A compliance program ensures that fertilizer applications are made following the University of Maryland's guidelines on timing and application. Additionally, homeowner education and outreach is conducted in partnership with the University of Maryland Extension.

Highlights 2025

Turfgrass Program



Focus on Training

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Nutrient Management Program received funding to bring back our training coordinator position. The training coordinator will work closely with the University of Maryland Extension (UME) to create more educational training programs for farmers throughout Maryland. They will also work to expand the Farmer Certification Program that allows farmers to write their own nutrient management plans. This option is very popular with urban and small farm operations. To meet demand, MDA will work with UME to offer more training sessions in urban areas, where operators have requested it.

Licenses and Certifications

- 791** Business licenses issued
- 1,389** Professional Fertilizer Applicator Certificates issued
- 1,526** Lawn care employees trained and registered to apply fertilizer under the supervision of a certified professional

Enforcement

- 785** Annual Activity Reports were mailed to regulated businesses; **769** reports were completed and submitted, representing a **98%** compliance rate
- 266** Record reviews were conducted with a **72%** compliance rate

Training and Certification

- 156** Lawn care professionals attended 6 Professional Fertilizer Applicator Exams during the year
- 258** Professional fertilizer applicators attended 4 recertification classes offered by MDA throughout the year
- 823** Professional fertilizer applicators attended 26 recertification classes offered by private industry with MDA assistance



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Office of Resource Conservation

Nutrient Management Program

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