

State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC)

Minutes

September 19, 2024

Van Funk, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

The minutes of August 2024 were approved. (Freeman/Swaine)

The following appointments were made upon proper motion, second, and vote:

Washington County SCD (FB) – Ariel Herrod (Freeman/Swaine)

Wicomico SCD (FB) – James Adkins (Swaine/Freeman)

Worcester SCD (UME) – Anthony DiPaolo (Feldt/ Freeman)

MACS Flat Rates Updates and Western MD Pilot

Guest Speaker: Jason Keppler*

Jason discussed the evolving process with MACS flat rates, followed by general MACS updates. The process for flat rates has been consolidated into five regions, rather than county-by-county. This has reduced the administrative burden for districts. MDA also piloted a new process in Western MD consolidating individual material costs into a component-based system similar to how NRCS manages the EQIP program. Feedback received from the pilot has been positive. Other regions of MD have indicated that a component-based system could be problematic for the types of practices they install. Currently MDA is working on identifying practices in each region that could benefit from a component-based system, rather than applying a new process to all practices. It will likely be a few years until the new process is appropriately applied throughout the state. In the interim, each region is responsible for updating their flat rates schedules. Each December the flat rates need to be updated.

**Presentation distributed to SSCC listserv post-meeting.*

Select Post-Presentation Discussion and Q & A:

Q: When would a new flat-rate schedule go into effect? A: The regions are working on updating their schedules now. MACS will review these and the intent is that by January 1 the new flat rate schedule will go into effect.

Q: Farmers with old CREP fields that are out of CREP but have buffers--- are they eligible? A: They are eligible for grass buffers, but not forest buffers. But if they want to enhance their forest buffers, we can pay for the enhancement (e.g., extending them out).

Q: Regarding the expansion of the program down to 1 AU as it relates to horses: Is it still limited only to licensed operations (e.g. boarding, breeding)? A: MDA is considering at least one AU to be an animal operation. If there is a resource concern, these operations would be able to get assistance with that concern (e.g., pasture management, fencing, troughs, etc.). It is on a pro-rated basis, however, limited to \$50 per AU per year for non ag-waste practices. There are some boundaries in place to contain costs.

Q: Will the ag waste structures have to meet the zero runoff requirements? In other words, is an RI [Resource Improvement] type structure eligible? A: All the standard MACS policies apply. Any project that comes through our program has to meet NRCS standard and spec. That said, MDA planners have been working on some equine designs that will accommodate up to 2, 4, or 8 AUs (3 designs) and are running them by NRCS in southern MD.

General Comments:

A big issue is what to do with horse manure beyond storage. It needs to be removed from the operation or composted on-site. One of the largest companies utilized for removal recently went out of business. Could regional facilities for manure disposal be a possibility in the future? [MDA Response] Those operations are eligible through the manure transport program, although it may not be as cost-effective as the other avenues that have been available.

[In reference to NFWF Chesapeake WILD grant] Early succession planting and training for staff would be helpful so that we know what kind of habitat to push for with what species and then promote those species to farmers.

Case Studies in Coordinating with SCDs

Canaan Valley Institute and Washington County SCD

Guest Speaker: Dee Price, Washington County SCD District Manager

Dee described the two-year process of creating a watershed plan with the Canaan Valley Institute. The goal was to incorporate phase mitigation strategies to eliminate sediment and fecal bacteria impairments associated with non-point sources and monitor water quality benefits of mitigation efforts and document effects on biological communities. The partnership began with the Washington County Department of Environmental Health and Cannan Valley Institutes to administer funding through the MD Bay Restoration Fund for failing septic. Later, the SCD was asked to participate. For the SCD the plan provides a working framework and template that helped set priorities and obtain 319(h) grant funding needed for stream restoration projects and other projects that provide water quality benefits.

Oyster Recovery Partnership and Calvert SCD

Guest Speaker: Jason Leavitt, Calvert SCD District Manager*

Jason provided an overview of why oysters are so important in waterways, specifically the benefits of oyster reefs, research from the district, and published findings on challenges to maintaining healthy waterways. He also discussed the past, present, and potential future partners. The specific partners depend largely on location and scope of the projects. One new shore stabilization project is under review and funding had not yet been awarded at the time of the SSCC meeting, so specifics could not be provided. The partnerships have generally been driven by the SCD. Benefits of these partnerships to the SCD include income through services, furthering the SCD mission, media exposure to raise awareness of programs, and furthering the public good through generation of additional programs that serve local communities.

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Select Post-Presentation Discussion and Q & A:

Q [to group]: What are other SCD experiences in these types of partnerships? MOUs? Other documentation? How do you move forward? A [summary]: MOUs indicating everyone's roles and responsibilities, how the project will end, etc.; Announcements/ads put out to see who would be interested resulted in general agreements with four engineering companies that could be used in the future. Demonstrated the SCD was distributing work in fair and equitable manner that was not favoring a specific contractor; Master Services Agreements with an engineering firm.

General Comment:

Moving forward Chesapeake Bay initiatives will focus more on living resources. Restorative practices through oyster and wildlife partnerships will have more emphasis for funding support.

Delmarva Land to Litter Collaborative:

Guest Speaker: Jen Nelson, MASCD Executive Director & DLLC Steering Committee Member*

Jen discussed the organization of the DLLC, which is a blend of industry partners and environmental partners. The group aims for common understanding. Jen represents SCDs in MD and DE and the Sussex SCD in DE has a seat on the steering committee. The accomplishments of the DLLC include white papers, a litter matching app, story boards for the public, and advocacy aimed towards decision makers. The committee has to have 100% consensus on any statements that they release, which can be difficult with the varying interests represented. The group promotes process and relationship over specific products. The benefit of the group is having conversations outside of one's normal silos, thus enhancing understanding amongst folks from different perspectives. The DLLC is actively seeking to understand what is working for partnerships in other places, such as WI and PA. The DLLC is also working through a process called "sandboxing" to help get through administrative barriers and seek areas of flexibility with relevant partners.

**Presentation distributed to SSCC listserv post-meeting.*

REPORTS

MD. Department of Agriculture – Byron Petrauskas w/ Alisha Mulkey:

- Oct 10th: Secretary Atticks sent an invitation yesterday to district managers and others regarding an event to seek feedback on a proposed recognition program for conservation practices and other actions beyond BMPs that improve our communities. The recognition program is envisioned as a gold, silver, bronze type of tiered framework. There will be more opportunities for feedback. Contact Alisha Mulkey (alisha.mulkey@maryland.gov) with questions.

- District Operations: Hiring 10 planner positions, 6 technicians. Recruitment will be open and continuous. Please pass the announcements along.
- October is Equine Month:
 - Continuing targeted outreach. A lot of new cooperators are coming on, especially now that more funding is available.
 - Maryland 5 Star in Fair Hill (Oct 17-20). MDA will be there.
 - Washington International Horse Show in PG County (Oct 21-27). MDA will be there.
 - Equiery Magazine: MDA regularly publishing articles on conservation
- AgriSolar Summit at MDA in Annapolis (Sept 26): free to attend, but must register
- 2024 Maryland Young Farmers Survey: The survey aims to gather important insights into the operations and future prospects of Maryland farmers, ranchers, and agricultural professionals. Click [here](#).

Q: Any update on training coordination position? A: Will hopefully go up in the next month as a separate recruitment.

Q: How do I give my board a timeline on when the SCD positions will be filled if it is set up as continuous recruitment? A: It's a new process, but our goal is that when we have enough minimally qualified applicants for a region, we will schedule a day of interviews. Each region as a distinct interview panel. I don't know what the date would be, but we will have a better idea as applications start rolling in.

MD. Department of Natural Resources – Rob Feldt:

- Over 400K seedlings planted in FY 2024 by DNR staff across MD. Approx. 10% in underserved areas.
- Have taken on more staff for 5 Million Trees Initiative.
- The state tree nursery planted 3 million seedlings this past year.
 - Tree orders will begin on October.
- MD State Fair: A lot of discussion of spotted lantern fly with passersby.
- Long-eared Bat: waiting for updated guidance from Fish and Wildlife Service this fall. Interior forest dwelling bat impacting forestry operations.

Q: Any nursery stock issues related to spotted lantern fly? UME is reporting flies in the plants and there is concern about egg masses before plants go out. A: [DNR] Not yet.

Q: Do you have a breakdown of public vs. private planting?. A: [DNR] No, can look into that.

MD. Department of Environment – Jim George:

Resource Management Program (RMP) will be conducting 4 listening sessions to receive input on the next AFO general discharge permit. Dates and venues will be:

- Sept. 23 – University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Henson Center Ballroom
- 30690 University Blvd S, Princess Anne, MD 21853
- Oct. 9 – Talbot Community Center, Wye Oak Room 10028 Ocean Gateway, Easton, MD 21601

- Oct. 21 – Frederick County Government, Winchester Hall 12 E. Church St, Frederick, MD 2170
- Oct. 24 –Virtual

For more info contact Bradley Baker MDE, Land Management Administration (LMA) → bradley.baker1@maryland.gov

University of Maryland Extension – Darren Jarboe:

Farmers are testing corn for mycotoxins and Extension agents reported high levels for some fields. The Maryland Department of Agriculture and University of Maryland Extension are collaborating to support farmers with free testing and strategies for utilization of infected corn.

Dr. Brittany Fletcher is the new ruminant livestock specialist. She will reside at the Western Maryland Research and Education Center (REC). Brittany received a B.S. in animal science, M.S. in ruminant nutrition, and Ph.D. in small ruminant nutrition from Oklahoma State University. She is originally from Maryland.

Dr. Veronica Yurchak is the new AgFS vegetable production specialist. She will be located at the Wye REC. Veronica received a B.S. in biology, and M.S. and Ph.D. in entomology from the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD). She is currently a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Entomology at the UMD.

Kayla Griffith has been named acting program director for the Agricultural Nutrient Management Program. Kayla has been an ANMP faculty specialist since last November and was previously a nutrient management advisor for Anne Arundel County where she farms with her family.

The AgFS Program has nine open positions. The Caroline County AgFS educator position has reopened for recruitment of candidates and is posted on eTerp. A new faculty specialist for local foods and entrepreneurship position is open on the UMD job website and has a best consideration date of October 2. The Rural Maryland Council funded the initial year for the position.

The ANMP program director position will be revised and reopened. The ANMP faculty specialist position will be reopened for recruitment of candidates. Nutrient management advisor positions in Anne Arundel, Carroll, and Charles County have reached the best consideration date and applicants are being reviewed. The Nutrient management advisor, Washington County and ANMP administrative assistant positions will be posted on eTerp soon.

Grant

Townsend, M.E., Hirsh, S.M., Sater, H., Dill, S., Rhodes, J., Grev, A., Semler, J., Sasscer C., Beale, B., Joseph, D., Kness, A., Nichols, K., Jarboe, D. (2024). Improving Soil Health and Water Quality through Purposeful, Site-Specific Cover Crop Planning and Management. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Innovative Sediment and Nutrient Reduction (INSR). \$595,623.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Suzy Daubert

- Jackie Byers, acting field officer went back to WV. Heather Bevin will be taking her place. Kendrick Flowers remains acting Chesapeake Bay Coordinator.

- Wrapping up the fiscal year, \$29.7 million obligated going out to producers in MD. This is a record year with 536 contracts and 42,000 acres. This is triple of a normal year.
- 2025 sign-up starts Oct 25
- [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry \(CSAF\) Mitigation List for 2025](#)
- SCD Board communication: District Conservationists are going to get a monthly template with national and state office information and a monthly question we are posing for the Boards to respond to and send back up to field operations. This is an effort to improve communication between Boards and the state office.
- CSP minimum payments have increased from \$1,500 to \$4,000 per year. For all FY23 contracts, there are instructions to bring them up to the increased payment.

Q: Related to Oct sign-up, we want to take applications but can't do eligibility while waiting on new AGI [adjusted gross income] forms. A: Information forthcoming on this.

Farm Services Agency – Laura Pleasanton:

- Sept 30 may be the last day that FSA has authority for CRP. If the Farm Bill lapses, they will be waiting on an extension for CRP or a new Farm Bill.
 - Will be able to maintain existing but won't be able to approve new contracts. If someone is near finalizing of contract- get it done by Sept 30, or be transparent about what might happen. There could be long delays after the 30th.
 - Re-enrollments are the always priority and they must be done by Sept 30th.
 - Please relay that we don't want to turn people away, but be honest about the pause in the program. NRCS will keep working on existing contracts and will be able to work on new contract potential to a limited extent. Continued work within current limitations will alleviate potential backlogs later.
- 2024 Organic Certification Cost-Share program sign-up runs until Oct 31. It covers expenses for obtaining or maintaining organic certification under the national program.
- *The Livestock Forage Disaster Program* is still an option in Garrett, Allegany, Washington and Frederick Counties due to their status on the US drought monitor. So far, they have made 139 payments for just above \$450,000 and those numbers will increase. There is also a low-interest loan available in nine of Western Shore counties based on the national disaster designations due to drought.
- Farm Loans: The recently finalized *Enhancing Access and Delivery for Farms Loan Rule* will result in a lot of changes for the farm loan team and their borrowers. Training for staff is on-going.
- FSA has state training next week for three days, so staffing will be limited to public.

MASCD – John Swaine:

Highlights

- **NFWF awards MASCD with a grant to support Maryland BFF-** MASCD has received a \$318,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to support the Maryland Bay Friendly Farming Program for the next two years. One new component of this project is a incentive payment for landowners and tenants to

develop a written lease with conservation provisions. Landowners that rent to BFF-certified farmers can receive \$50 per acre (up to \$2,500 per farm) for a 5-year written lease.

- **Three MASCD Meetings to put on the calendar:**
 - **October 22- MASCD's Quarterly Board Meeting** will be held at the Baltimore County Agriculture Center Conference Room. A virtual option will be available also.
 - **February 3-4- MASCD's Winter Meeting** at the Westin in Annapolis
 - **August 4-6, 2025 (tentative, finalizing a contract)- 2025 MASCD Annual Meeting**, Rocky Gap Casino, Report and Golf in Flintstone

Grants & Funding

- **NRCS Agreement Update-** MASCD is working with NRCS to develop a new agreement for FY25 to fund administrative support in Caroline, Talbot and Kent counties, and a program support specialist in Queen Anne's County. MASCD has completed the agreement paperwork, which is being reviewed at the Grants & Agreements Division.

Separately, the NRCS Grants and Agreements Division has invited Jen to participate in a collaboration effort to improving GAD's support to recipients. The tasks would involve reviewing ezFedGrants external portal instructional guidance, reviewing their current draft guidance to provide feedback in areas not clear or needing additional instruction and "additional opportunities may be available later".

- **Keith Campbell Foundation Proposals-** MASCD is submitting two proposals to the Keith Campbell Foundation. The first would continue our Leadership Development Initiative to support the development of governance documents for districts. The second grant would support the Maryland BFF Program and may focus on the development of a media plan to promote the program.
- **NFWF's Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grant Request for Proposals is open through November 5 for projects in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Projects can range in cost from \$500K to \$2M.** The program has evolved some in the last few years, and there are a few funding priorities that might be of interest:
 - **Accelerating the Availability and Delivery of Agricultural Technical Assistance.** There's a lot in this section, including "Organizational capacity building for conservation districts, state conservation agency staff, certified crop advisors and other key technical assistance providers to strengthen their impact in the delivery of agricultural technical assistance"
 - **Cultivating Partnership Growth and Enhancement:** Consistent with program goals for accelerating near-term water quality improvements, the INSR program will focus primarily on efforts to enhance and expand the capacity and impact of existing partnerships for water quality restoration and protection. (This one isn't new this year, but I'm thinking this might be an opportunity to expand or link up some of our efforts.)

Other

- **Maryland Bay Friendly Farming Program-** Letters are going out to farmers formerly certified under the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP) to let them know about the rebranding to Maryland BFF and to offer the opportunity to be recertified through the new program.

MASCD is also planning with MDA and NRCS to conduct a field evaluation of a farm together on 9/20. The purpose of the group evaluation is to 1) see how the Maryland BFF evaluation compares to a CSP evaluation with NRCS and 2) to ensure that all members of the partnership have a clear and common understanding of the evaluation criteria and expectations.

- **MASCD 2025 Annual Meeting-** The votes are in and MASCD's 2025 Annual Meeting will be held at Rocky Gap in Flintstone, Maryland. MASCD is still working through the details to finalize our contract, but we anticipate that the meeting will be held August 4-6.
- **2025 Governor's Hall of Fame Award-** MDA is accepting applications through October 4. Contact Harrison Palmer for details.

Upcoming Events & Deadlines

<i>DATE</i>	<i>EVENT</i>
<i>October 22, 2024</i>	MASCD Board of Directors Meeting, Baltimore SCD
<i>February 3-4</i>	MASCD Winter Meeting at the Westin in Annapolis
<i>February 8-12, 2025</i>	NACD 2025 Annual Meeting, Salt Lake City, Utah

Area 1 (Western) - Ed Wurmb:

Washington County:

- Successful drone demonstration was held on Sept 17th
- Fall reporting of cover crops has begun
- Pollinator Palooza: Sept 28th

Area 1 SSCC Representation:

- Sept 27 is the deadline submission of names.

Area 2 (Southern) - Amy Posey:

Anne Arundel:

- Anne Arundel Cooperator of the Year Dinner will be held at Homestead Gardens on October 10th.

Calvert:

- No Report.

Charles:

- No Report.

Prince George's:

- Is sad to report that long-time Chairman Cal Stuert passed away Tuesday the 17th in the evening, the funeral arrangements will be shared as they become available.

St. Mary's:

- St. Mary's County Fair is going on now September, 19 - 22nd

- We held the pre-construction meeting for the Hog Point Shoreline Stabilization Project on NAS Patuxent River. Project is for the installation of over 4800 linear feet of revetment, gapped breakwaters, sills and marsh creation. Project is located along the Chesapeake Bay and the entrance to the Patuxent River. St. Mary's SCD will be doing construction inspection. Project will start within the next 3 weeks upon issuance of the Army Corps of Engineers permit.
- Representatives from the District, University of Maryland Extension and Farm Bureau will receive a proclamation from St. Mary's County Commissioners for participating in the 2024 Farm to School program.

District Wide:

- Calvert is hosting the Southern Area Dinner, itw will be held on Thursday, October 24, 2024, at the Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons

Area 3 (Upper Shore):

Tony Riggi (QASCD DM)

- QA & Kent: Yields for corn range from total loss to decent. – Tony Riggi,
- QA Cooperators dinner Sept 26

John Swaine (Talbot SCD Board Chair)

- Talbot/Mid-Shore: Corn yield bad for dryland corn. 50-75% reduction in yield, soybeans bad as well- some have been zeroed out. Recent rain will help with later beans and winter establishment.

Area 4 (Central) - Van Funk:

The Central Region is coordinating with MASCD staff on the 2025 Summer MASCD which will be held at Rocky Gap. We'd like to hear ideas for topics and/or speakers from other areas and Districts. Please reach out to any Central Area District Manager or MASCD with any suggestions.

Baltimore County SCD

- The BCSCD is coordinating with the County on budget and the possibility of raising fees.
- Two new MDA employees were hired in September – one a planner and the other is a technician.
- The new Baltimore County Ag Advisory Board had their second meeting on September 13th.

Cecil SCD

- Cecil SCD is now fully part of the Central Area across all programs including SSCC, MACS, MDA Areas, and NRCS Engineering.

Harford SCD

- Two (2) new staff members were hired in September. **Alyssa Jeffries**, Engineering Associate III, started on September 3, 2024. She replaced Eric Webberking, who retired at the end of June, 2024. Alyssa previously worked as a technician for NRCS in York County and served as the Agriculture Coordinator, for the Harford County Government, up to the end of August. In addition, **Denise Gross**, Administrative Assistant I, started on September 16, 2024. She replaced Taylor Date who left in May, 2024 to pursue a managerial position. Denise had been serving as a library technician within the Harford County School system.

- The Harford County Envirothon Steering Committee successfully acquired an instructor for the Envirothon's 5th topic, "Roots and Resiliency – Fostering Forest Stewardship in a Canopy of Change". A workshop is scheduled for October 11, 2024 to cover the first four topics.
- Invitations for the Annual Cooperators Dinner are being sent out. The Cooperators Dinner will be held on Thursday, October 24th at the Level Volunteer Fire Company; 3633 Level Village Road; Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078. The dinner event will run from 5:30 – 8:00 pm.

Howard SCD

- The District had a significant presence at the Howard County Fair last month, with a variety of displays and materials promoting conservation assistance to Howard County farmers.
- The Annual Cooperators Dinner was held at a horse farm in the western part of the county last week. A dressage demonstration was provided and a number of conservation practices were highlighted to help educate attendees about the BMP's farmers are implementing. The County Executive was also recognized for his commitment and support for agriculture and conservation.
- The Annual Fall Farm and Conservation Tour for elected officials will take place in October. Four farms in the County are normally visited to give the legislators a chance to talk with farmers about their operations.

Montgomery SCD

- District's Cooperators Dinner occurred last night with over 130 guests, which included many elected officials and partner agency representatives. Program consisted of highlights of accomplishments over the past year, a discussion of WIP and Elizabeth Hoffman as a guest speaker to discuss the importance of BMP verification. Dinner concluded with the presentation of District awards, including the Cooperator of the Year for 2024 which was Jamison Ag and Turf.

Area 5 (Lower Shore) – Terry Nuwer: no report

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m. (Posey/Swaine)

Respectfully Submitted,



Loretta Collins
Executive Secretary

SSCC Attendance: September 19, 2024

*In-person

Members:

Van Funk*

Amy Posey

Steve Freeman
Ed Wurmb
Byron Petrauskas* (proxy for Hans W. Schmidt)
Rob Feldt*
Jim George
Darren Jarboe*
John Swaine*
Suzy Daubert*
Laura Pleasanton (proxy for John Sullivan)

Absent:

Terry Nuwer
John Murphy

SCD Representation:

Allegany: None
Anne Arundel: None
Baltimore County: Jim Ensor
Calvert: Jason Leavitt
Caroline: None
Carroll: Matt McMahon
Cecil: Chris Brown, Dan Polite
Charles: Luis Dieguez, Tim Wells, Jessica Linn, Jerry Spence, Randy Sweeney
Dorchester: Karen Houtman
Frederick County: Diane Flickinger
Garrett: Jim (Smokey) Stanton
Harford: Ruth Cassilly, Quintin Cornwell, Andrew League, Clarence Cullum
Howard: None
Kent: Robert Baldwin
Montgomery: None
Prince George's: Steve Darcey, John Tarr
Queen Anne's: Anthony Riggi*
Somerset: Mark Carey
St. Mary's: Bruce Young, Haley Carter
Talbot: John Swaine*
Washington County: Dee Price, Mark Kendle, Owen Stanton, Lori Flook-Bishop
Wicomico: Rick Glasgow
Worcester: Chelsea Tyson

MDA Staff:

Alisha Mulkey*
Loretta Collins*
Jason Keppler*
Tom Filbert, OAG

USDA-NRCS Staff:

Eric Hines