



MARYLAND'S 24 SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757
Baltimore County	410-527-5920, ext. 3
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3
Charles	301-638-3028
Dorchester	410-228-3733, ext. 3
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Garrett	301-334-6950, ext. 3
Harford	410-838-6181, ext. 3
Howard	410-313-0680
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3
Montgomery	301-590-2855
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3
Somerset	410-621-9310
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 3
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3



THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO GET A Soil Conservation & Water Quality Plan



Good for natural resources.
Good for your bottom line.
Good for your farm.
Good for you!



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What is a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan?

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP)—also called a conservation plan—is a tool that helps farmers protect and enhance the natural resources that support productive and profitable farming operations. Unlike nutrient management plans that deal specifically with fertilizer and manure applications, conservation plans address a range of natural resource concerns for the entire farming operation. Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans help farmers manage their operations more efficiently, save on energy and labor costs, improve soil health, enhance wildlife habitat, and care for forest resources.



Farmers with active Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans are exempt from state fines if a sediment runoff problem occurs.

All of the information developed in a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan belongs to the farmer or property owner who is ultimately responsible for making management decisions and implementing the plan. Conservation plans may be modified over time as a farm's business focus changes. These plans do not provide public access to the property—the farmer or landowner controls right of entry and use.



Benefits of a Conservation Plan

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan can help farmers improve productivity by making the best possible use of a farm's soil and water resources. It is no secret that crops grow best in deep, fertile topsoil. Soil that washes or blows away takes valuable minerals, nutrients, and organic matter with it. Crops growing in shallow, eroded soils develop poor root systems, are more prone to drought, and require more fertilizer to achieve acceptable yields.

If erosion problems (rills, gullies, etc.) are visible, chances are the farm is already losing about 15 tons of soil per acre annually. That is four to five times the tolerable rate, or the rate at which new soil is formed. Even if problems are not visible, there are benefits to having an evaluation of natural resources on the farm.

Protecting soil also benefits water quality. Well-managed farms protected by conservation plans do an excellent job of keeping sediment and nutrients out of waterways and are included in Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan to restore clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and the region's streams, creeks, 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.

How Does it Work?

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans include a menu of best management practices that can be installed to manage farm resources, control soil erosion, and protect water quality. Ultimately, the farmer decides which practices to implement as time, need, and money allow, much like a homeowner plans for home improvements over the course of several years such as replacement windows or a new energy efficient furnace.



Streambed and streambank erosion caused by animal traffic.

Livestock use the crossing instead of the streambed to navigate the stream.

Because each farm is unique with its own set of environmental challenges, no two conservation plans are alike. A beef operation may benefit from a watering facility or fencing to keep animals away from streams. Heavy use areas and manure storage structures benefit livestock and poultry operations, while cover crops and grassed waterways help prevent soil and nutrients from washing off crop fields.

How Much Does a Conservation Plan Cost?

There are no costs or strings attached to getting a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan. Conservation planners working in the local soil conservation district develop these plans for farmers free of charge. Although the plan itself costs nothing, some of the best management practices outlined in the plan may require an additional construction investment while others, such as varying the crop rotation or farming on the contour may only require a change in the way the farm is operated.

Is Financial Help Available to Install Best Management Practices?

The Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program provides grants that cover up to 87.5 percent of the cost of installing eligible best management practices. Other federal incentive programs may be available and typically assist with 50 to 75 percent of the cost to install a qualifying practice. Programs may be used together to maximize cost-share assistance. The local soil conservation district will help determine all available financial resources and walk farmers through the application process.

Environmental Requirements

Well managed farms protected by Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans do an excellent job of safeguarding natural resources. Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Program has established a goal of managing 1.14 million acres of farmland across the state using conservation plans. The Federal Food Security Act requires these 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.



Grassed waterways constructed in natural drainageways help prevent gullies from forming and control soil erosion.

In addition, 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.

Farmers 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 farmers get the most from their land while protecting and conserving natural resources for future generations. Farmers have the final say on the best management practices that they want to install, how to improve their operations, and the best way to protect water quality. Call or visit your local soil conservation district today to get started.

GETTING STARTED: QUESTIONS TO ASK

- 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 best management practice interfere with or cancel out another practice?
- Can I improve my management of forest resources?

WHAT DOES A CONSERVATION PLAN INCLUDE?

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

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans address a range of natural resource concerns for the entire farming operation.

