

STATE OF MARYLAND

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Healthy Soils Competitive Fund

Program Description

GENERAL INFORMATION: Producers in Maryland have long been national leaders in on-farm conservation. With the early adoption of conservation practices like cover crops and reduced tillage they have long shown their commitment to environmental stewardship. The Healthy Soils Competitive Fund seeks to strengthen that leadership. Producers will be able to propose new and innovative management of eligible conservation practices that will work for their farms, amplifying their proven stewardship of soil and water resources. Beyond climate benefits, healthy soils have water quality benefits, can improve farm profitability, and improve resilience in the face of uncertainty.

In addition to the funding already secured for this pilot year, Maryland's legislature has authorized \$500,000 per year to be awarded to the Healthy Soils Program starting in the summer of 2023. This ensures that the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund will continue to support producers beyond this pilot year.

ELIGIBILITY: The following are eligible to apply - Individual farmers operating in Maryland, groups of farmers operating in Maryland, and individuals or organizations conducting research with farmers in Maryland. Participating farmers will need to be identified by the applicant and included in the project narrative. The eligible conservation practices are described on pages 4-5. Applicants may select one or more conservation practices. Please note, while example scenarios of the eligible conservation practices are provided, applications are NOT limited to the listed examples.

There are no minimum or maximum acreage requirements for application and enrollment in the program, nor is farm size a criteria for project selection. Funds may be used to support the implementation of conservation practices, to cover staff and administrative time for organizations providing technical support to producers, and to cover research costs. No overhead or indirect funds will be eligible. Any proposed budget item must be clearly explained and justified in the narrative portion of the application. For each awardee, 20% of the funds will be distributed upfront, with the remainder distributed annually upon verification of progress.

MAXIMUM AWARD: The Healthy Soils Competitive Fund has a competitive application process with a maximum award of \$50,000 and each award will support 3 years of new and innovative conservation practice management. The Healthy Soils Competitive Fund is designed to provide financial resources for the management of conservation practices in new and innovative ways. The Maryland Department of Agriculture invites applications from interested producers and organizations wishing to take the next

step in improving soil health. **Instructions for submitting an application, ranking criteria for proposal selection, and an application checklist detailing the necessary materials are included in this document.**

ADDITIONAL DETAILS: Applicants must be willing to allow MDA representatives or their designees to collect soil health assessment data, such as soil respiration, active carbon, and the Maryland Soil Health Card. These expenses will be covered by MDA. Depending on the applicant's goals, the project proposal may include other sampling and analysis activities, at the applicant's expense. The applicant should expect an annual site visit from MDA (at a time convenient for the applicant) or their designee to verify practice implementation and discuss successes and challenges.

Any producer wishing to extend their project and receive additional funding must reapply during the annual application period and demonstrate project success to date or potential for future success.

DEADLINE: Application package requirements are outlined on page 3. The Healthy Soils Competitive Fund will accept applications from **January 3rd, 2023 until March 3rd, 2023**. Grant awards will be announced after the application period closes and before April 30th, 2023.

If you have any questions about the application process or the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund please contact your soil conservation district or Kevin Antoszewski, MDA's Healthy Soils Program Specialist, at kevin.antoszewski@maryland.gov

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Application Materials Required Checklist

- Application information is provided, with signature (page 6-7)
- Farm map showing fields where practice implementation is planned is attached
- Prescribed grazing plan is in progress (if applying for funds to support prescribed grazing)
- Project narrative is complete (page 9)
- Project budget is complete (page 13)
- Nutrient Management Plan certification is attached, if farm produces more than \$2500 gross annual income or manages more than 8 animal units (page 15)
- Application is signed and returned to MDA by March 3rd, 2023 to kevin.antoszewski@maryland.gov or mailed (postmarked by March 3rd) to:

Maryland Department of Agriculture,
attn: Kevin Antoszewski
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

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APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: ELIGIBLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Healthy Soils Competitive Fund

**** NOTE:** Applications are **NOT** limited to the listed examples but practices should align to NRCS practice specifications**

Cover Crops: Plants generally grown to recover unused plant nutrients from the root zone, control soil erosion, suppress weeds, and improve the soil

Examples: Cover crops that are not eligible for existing state funds because of specie mix or planting rates, or summer cover crop

Conservation Tillage: Limiting soil disturbance activity to manage the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and plant residue on the soil surface

Examples: Transition to no-till adaptive management, strip till

Prescribed Grazing: Managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals. Implementation of this practice requires the development of a grazing plan.

Examples: Intensifying animal rotation, increasing paddock rest period

Pasture and Hay Planting: Establishing adapted and compatible species, varieties, or cultivars of herbaceous plantings suitable for pasture or hay production

Examples: Overseeding, native perennial grasses

Conservation Cover: Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

Examples: pollinator habitat, orchard or vineyard alleyways, native species establishment

Critical Area Planting: Establishing permanent vegetation on sites with, or expected to have, high erosion rates, and on sites that have conditions that prevent the establishment of vegetation with normal practices

Examples: Native vegetation, small scale permanent cover

Conservation Crop Rotation: Growing different crops in a planned sequence on the same field to increase biodiversity

Examples: adding perennial crop to rotation, adding high residue crop to rotation

Nutrient Management: Managing the amount, source, placement, and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments while reducing environmental impacts

Examples: Grid soil sampling, variable rate nutrient application, precision application, replacing synthetic nutrient applications with organic ones

Integrated Pest Management: A site specific combination of pest prevention, pest avoidance, pest monitoring, and pest suppression strategies

Examples: Pest and disease monitoring, precision pest management

Agroforestry: Implementation of any of the following practices

- **Alley Cropping:** Plantings consisting of trees or shrubs in rows or corridors with alleys of agronomic crops or forage between
- **Hedgerow Planting:** Establishment of dense vegetation in a linear design to achieve a natural resource conservation purpose
- **Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment:** Plantings of single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs that are established for environmental purposes
- **Silvopasture:** Production of trees, forages, and livestock on the same acreage at the same time
- **Tree and Shrub Establishment:** Planting seedlings or cuttings, seeding, or creating conditions that promote natural regeneration



Maryland Department of Agriculture Healthy Soils Competitive Fund Application

For MDA use
Agreement #:

Section I: Applicant Information

Name of Applicant:	<input type="text"/>		
Name of Farm or Organization:	<input type="text"/>		
Mailing Address:	<input type="text"/>		
City:	<input type="text"/>	State:	<input type="text"/>
		Zipcode:	<input type="text"/>
This project is to be installed on the land in <input type="text"/> County, described as:			
Parcel#	<input type="text"/>		
SDAT can be looked up at https://sdat.dat.maryland.gov/RealProperty/Pages/default.aspx			
Acreages for Practice Implementation:	<input type="text"/>		
Applicants must submit map(s) of the locations described above with application materials.			

Section II: Self Identification

Information provided in this section will not influence applicant ranking and is collected for recordkeeping purposes only.

Do you Identify as:

Black, Indeigenous, or as a Person of Color? Yes No

A Woman? Yes No

Are you:
A veteran? Yes No

A new or beginning farmer (<10 yrs of exp)? Yes No

Section III: Participant Expectations

The participant shall:

1. Commit 3 years of practice implementation on the same field(s) as identified on the application form;
2. Allow for the collection of soil assessment data on the participating field(s) with MDA representatives or their designees; and
3. Allow MDA representative(s), upon reasonable notice, to visit the project at any time during the project life.

Public Information Notice

The principle purpose of this application is to identify whom MDA intends to give State funds. If you fail to provide the requested information, MDA may not provide you with funds. You have the right to inspect, amend, or correct personal information collected by MDA. Much of the personal information collected by MDA is available for public inspection. This information is not routinely shared with state, federal, or local government.

Certification

I understand that I am not guaranteed grant funds until I have received a letter of approval and a copy of my signed and dated agreement from MDA. In order to receive payment for implementation of this practice, I acknowledge that I must be in compliance with the State's nutrient management requirements (Md. Agric. Code Ann., §§8-801—8-806 and COMAR 15.20.06-08).²

Signature

This document may be executed in multiple counterparts, each of which shall be deemed original, and all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument. Signatures provided by electronic means including, by way of example and not of limitation, facsimile, Adobe, PDF, and sent by electronic mail, or via an electronic signature program, shall be deemed original.

Signature:

Date:

Print Name:

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Application Ranking:

Submitted applications will be ranked based on the following four criteria.

1. The proposed project ensures continued and enhanced soil health. Soil health is defined as the continuing and expanded capacity of the soil to: function as a biological system; increase soil organic matter; improve soil structure and nutrient and water holding capacity; and sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. **(20 points)**
2. Budget detail is attached showing that needs are thoroughly outlined and accounted for appropriately. This budget detail aligns closely with, and is justified by, the project narrative. **(10 points)**
3. Potential greenhouse gas reduction associated with practice adoption or relevance of the project to other producers. Project outcomes can be used to advance conservation across the state. **(10 points)**
4. The applicant shows that they have a willingness to work with MDA to share project successes and lessons learned. They have addressed follow up, evaluation, and outreach describing how they intend to use project outcomes. **(10 points)**

Project Narrative:

Applications to the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund will be assessed based on the submitted project narrative and project budget. Possible points awarded are listed above in the section titled “Application Ranking.” In order to score highly you must address each question listed below in the project narrative with as much detail as possible. Attach additional pages if necessary.

1. What challenges are you facing on your farm that you wish to address by adopting the eligible conservation practices?

2. What practices are you proposing to adopt to address these challenges?

3. How do you plan to manage the proposed conservation practice(s)? (For example, you may intend to adopt Integrated Pest Management and begin to monitor fields for pest and disease pressure, selectively manage issues instead of broadly spraying at predetermined times)

4. How will managing the proposed conservation practice(s) in this way address the challenges you are facing? What are you hoping the outcomes will be? (For example, you may be hoping to increase soil biological activity, organic matter, soil structure, and/or water holding capacity, among other metrics)

5. Have you thought about how the proposed management can sequester carbon and/or reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Describe why, or why not.

6. Are you willing to work with MDA over the course of the grant term to share success stories and lessons learned? How would you be willing to share that information (e.g., data sharing, hosting a field day, or being a part of another information sharing event)?

7. How will you or other farmers potentially benefit from the outcomes of the proposed project? Do you plan on expanding implementation to other fields or sharing information with other farmers in the future?

8. If you are proposing a research project, what farms are you working with? Please be sure to identify specific partners and submit maps of implementation areas.

Project Budget:

Please complete the project budget table below and outline expected costs of implementation over the next three years. Costs described should be specific to the proposed practice and associated management. No overhead or indirect costs are eligible. Only complete rows as necessary, as not every item listed will be relevant to every application. Be sure that the submitted project narrative and budget justify one another.

Please provide best available information to-date on the Project.

Item	MDA Grant Request	Other funding sources
Labor Cost \$ (include estimated labor hours)		
Fringe/Benefits \$		
Materials \$		

Direct Expenses \$		
Subcontractor \$ (include sub-contractor name and value of service)		
Travel \$ (itemize by mileage, meals, lodging, etc.)		
Other Expenses \$		
TOTAL		



Maryland Department of Agriculture

CURRENT NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN CERTIFICATION

Participants of MDA financial assistance programs must certify that the agricultural operation associated with the cost share practice(s) is following a *current* Nutrient Management Plan (NMP), to the extent required by COMAR 15.20.07. This form must be submitted to MDA at time of application.

Section I. To be filled out by the Certified Nutrient Management Plan Preparer

Farm Operator Name(s)				
	Farm Name (if applicable)			
	Address			
	Number	Street		
	City	State	ZIP	County
Plan Preparer Name				
	Certification No.			
		License No. (if applicable)		
Date the NMP was prepared or updated		Total Acres Under Plan		
Period the plan covers:	Begin Date		End Date	
I certify that the NMP information for the farm operation listed above is true and correct. I understand that if this information is determined to be false, my certification and/or license may be revoked.				
Signature				
Certified NM Consultant or Certified Farm Operator				Date

Section II. Farm Operator Certification

I certify that: (1) my farm is operating under a current nutrient management plan for the time period indicated above, and (2) my nutrient management plan was developed by the plan preparer named above.				
Signature				
Farm Operator				Date
Print Name				