2024 Annual Report

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Delivering Results

MARYLAND NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY ATTICKS

Making Nutrient Management Work for Maryland Farmers

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Nutrient Management Program focused on making sure farmers have easy and convenient access to nutrient management planning services. Throughout the year, options were discussed during a series of regional listening sessions held across the state. These sessions allowed farmers and agribusiness providers to discuss the program's overall mission and identify areas for improvement.

Following these listening sessions, in July 2023, the department hosted a Nutrient Management Summit to announce that the University of Maryland's Agricultural Nutrient Management Program would be transitioning to the University of Maryland Extension. This transition has been a positive one for Maryland farmers with improvements in training, data management, and analysis. Importantly, the redesigned program has been working hard to fill vacancies in its plan writing team which continues to provide free nutrient management plan writing services to farmers.

Additionally, the Nutrient Management Oversight Committee met to set goals for improving the Nutrient Management Program, while the Farmer Task Force issued its recommendations for modernizing the program to increase compliance and protect local water quality. You can find the Task Force report in the Nutrient Management section of the website.

We've opened the conversation, listened to farmer concerns, and continue our work to move the program forward with a goal of helping farmers improve farm efficiency and production while reducing nutrient inputs to local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

In other news, during the 2024 legislative session HB 991/SB 1074 - Agriculture - Food Processing Residuals Utilization Permit - Establishment was passed by the Maryland General Assembly. This bill requires the department to establish a permit program for farmers who plan to transport, store, or spread food processing residuals (FPRs) on agricultural land in Maryland. Following the passage of the new legislation—which took effect July 1, 2024—Nutrient Management staff developed emergency regulations to establish a permit program for FPRs.

Overall, it's been a busy and productive year for the Nutrient Management Program. Please read on to learn more about our accomplishments and growth in Fiscal Year 2024.

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

HOW MARYLAND'S NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM PROTECTS LOCAL WATER QUALITY AND THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

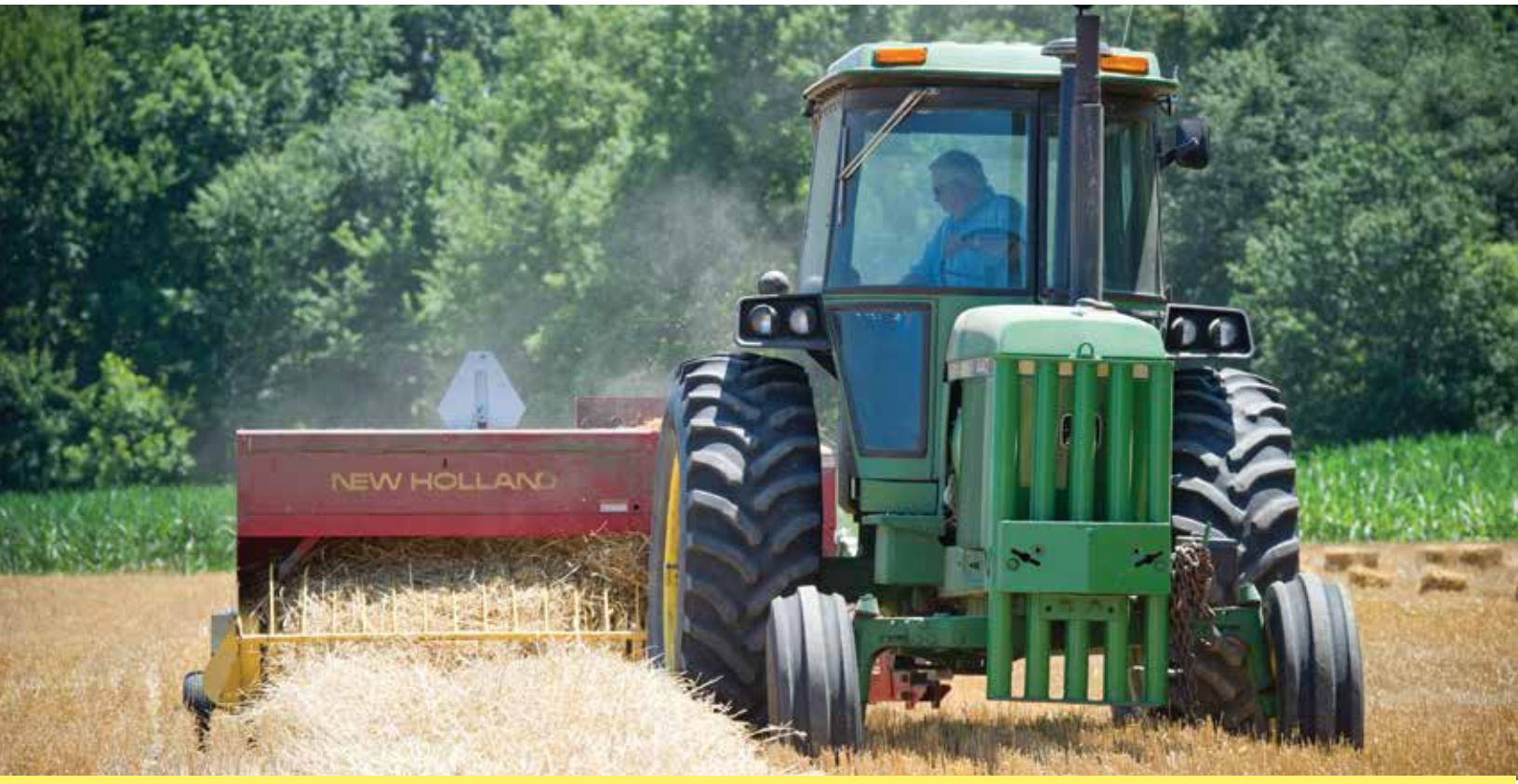
The Nutrient Management Program protects water quality in local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay by ensuring that farmers and lawn care professionals apply fertilizers, animal manure and other nutrient sources in an environmentally sound manner. Guidance is provided by the Nutrient Management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

Two programs are managed by the Nutrient Management Program:

- **Agricultural Nutrient Management Program**
- **Turfgrass Nutrient Management Program.**

Agricultural Nutrient Management Program

Authorized by the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1998, the Agricultural Nutrient Management Program requires farmers that generate $2,500 or more in gross income or have 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight to follow state-approved nutrient management plans when fertilizing crops and managing manure. These plans help farmers manage fertilizers, animal manure, and other nutrient sources more efficiently to meet crop needs while protecting water quality in streams, rivers, and Chesapeake Bay. Because of their complexity, nutrient management plans must be prepared by a qualified University of Maryland Extension advisor, certified private consultant, or farmer that has been trained and certified to prepare his or her own plan. The program ensures that plans are developed, updated, and implemented according to state regulations.



MARYLAND NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Plans that address both nitrogen and phosphorus inputs are required for all agricultural operations that produce plants, food, feed, fiber, animals or other agricultural products.

Farmers are required to keep their nutrient management plans current, take new soil samples a minimum of once every three years, and file Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) with MDA describing how they implemented their nutrient management plans during the previous year.

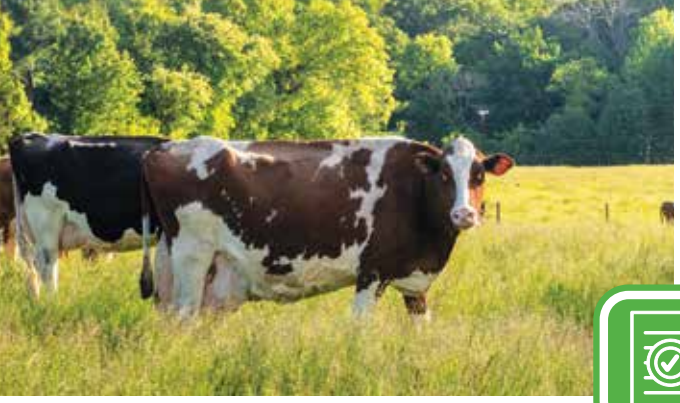
Setbacks and livestock exclusion measures must be in place to protect local streams.

Farmers who till their soil are required to incorporate manure and other organic nutrient sources into fields within 48 hours of application and follow timing requirements for fall nutrient applications.

Regulated operations are banned from spreading manure on fields in winter.

Farmers who own or manage 10 or more acres of agricultural land and apply their own nutrients are required to attend a two-hour MDA-sponsored education program on nutrient application once every three years.

Professionals and farmers certified to prepare nutrient management plans are required to take continuing education courses in order to keep abreast of the latest nutrient management technologies and regulations.



HIGHLIGHTS 2024 Agricultural Program

New Rules for Food Processing Residuals

In March 2024, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation requiring permits for the transport, storage, and land application of food processing residuals (FPRs) on farms. This program aims to ensure FPRs are managed safely to protect air and water quality. Following the law's passage, Nutrient Management staff created emergency regulations to implement the new permit program.

Phosphorus Research Funding

- Work continued on a five-year University of Maryland study of phosphorus loss risk assessment tools. The study involves 15 selected sites for edge-of-field runoff and phosphorus loss monitoring. Site instrumentation includes autosamplers, pressure transducers, suction cup lysimeters, and rain gauges, all used to measure phosphorus loss from fields during rain events. More than 3,200 runoff samples were collected to analyze dissolved and total phosphorus.
- Research was finalized on an MDA-funded study to help determine the value of soil additives in preventing soil phosphorus losses. The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science conducted this study.

Compliance and Enforcement

98% of regulated farmers submitted required annual implementation reports (AIRs) for 1.3 million acres of land

$56,000 in fines were levied against **56** operators for late or missing AIRs

76% of audited farms passed their initial farm audits

80% of farms were in compliance after follow up inspections

Certification and Licensing

20 University of Maryland Extension Advisors funded

35 New nutrient management consultants were certified by the program, bringing the total number of certified consultants to **1,604**

58 Additional farmers were trained and certified to prepare their own nutrient management plans, bringing the total number of certified farmers to **827**

Education

5,157 Farmers and consultants participated in 213 continuing education events, either in person or online

1,235 Nutrient management vouchers issued/ renewed to farmers who apply nutrients to 10 or more acres of cropland

HIGHLIGHTS 2024

Turfgrass Program

Turfgrass Nutrient Management Program

This program trains, certifies, and licenses individuals and companies hired to apply lawn fertilizer to non-agricultural land. The training and certification program—developed in partnership with the University of Maryland Extension—focuses on fertilizer application techniques, soil science, and best management practices for lawns. A compliance program ensures that fertilizer applications are made following the University of Maryland's application and timing recommendations. Homeowner education and outreach is conducted jointly with the University of Maryland Extension. This program is authorized by the *Fertilizer Use Act of 2011.*

Licenses and Certifications

814 Business licenses issued

1,383 Professional Fertilizer Applicator Certificates issued

1,581 Lawn care employees trained and registered to apply fertilizer under the supervision of a certified professional

Enforcement

792 Annual Activity Reports were filed representing a **97%** compliance rate

165 Record reviews were conducted with **73%** of firms in compliance

Training and Certification

7 Professional Fertilizer Exams were attended by **195** lawn care pros

36 Recertification classes were attended by 1,044 professional fertilizer applicators

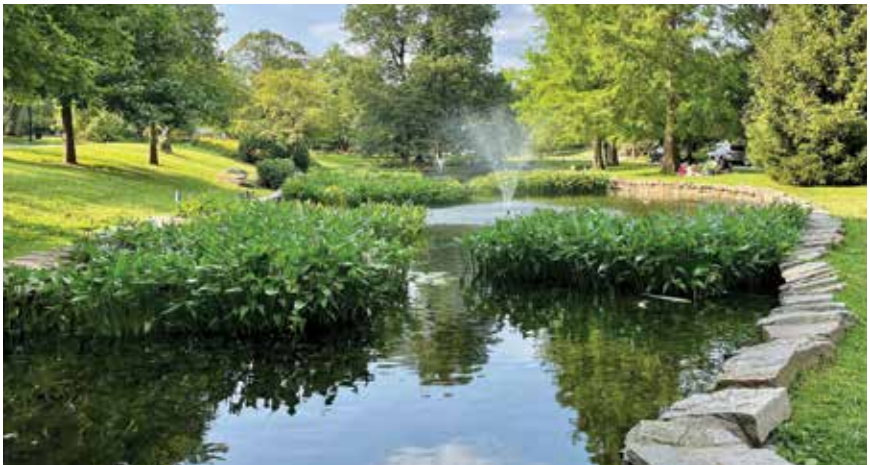
26 Training opportunities were offered by private industry and trade groups

Career Pathways for Urban Youth

The program continued its partnership with the Baltimore City Extension Office to offer free training and certification for high school students who want to pursue a career in turfgrass management.

Homeowner Outreach

The program continued to educate citizens about Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law through a partnership with the University of Maryland Master Gardeners and consumer outreach activities at public events.



Maryland Department of Agriculture Nutrient Management Offices

WESTERN MARYLAND
Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties
P.O. Box 459
Hancock, MD 21750
410-279-3506

Carroll and Frederick counties
92 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 110
Frederick, MD 21702
667-270-2529

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Anne Arundel, Howard, and Montgomery counties
92 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 110
Frederick, MD 21702
410-507-4811

Baltimore and Harford counties
P.O. Box 850
Bel Air, MD 21014
443-223-0403

Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's counties
P.O. Box 652
Leonardtown, MD 20650
410-980-9479

Turfgrass Nutrient Management Program
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-980-9084

EASTERN SHORE
Caroline, Queen Anne's, and Talbot counties
P.O. Box 340
Marydel, MD 21649
410-353-5660

Cecil and Kent counties
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-991-3114

Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties
27722 Nanticoke Road, Unit 2
Salisbury, MD 21801
667-270-1465

Statewide Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
27722 Nanticoke Road, Unit 2
Salisbury, MD 21801
410-507-4949

Maryland Department of Agriculture
Office of Resource Conservation

Nutrient Management Program
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-841-5959

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