

Conservation Matters



Montgomery Soil Conservation District
18410 Muncaster Rd
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301-590-2855

March 2016

Calendar

Envirothon Training
March 16

Equine Grazing Seminar
April 6

Envirothon Competition
April 28

Offices closed for Memorial Day
May 30

Cover Crop Spring Reporting Deadline
June 2

Maryland Farmers Top Cover Crop Record

Maryland farmers planted a record-setting 492,244 acres of cover crops on their fields last fall as part of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's (MDA) 2015-2016 Cover Crop Program, breaking the previous record of 475,560 acres planted last year.

Cover crops are widely recognized as one of the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable ways for farmers to meet nutrient and sediment reduction targets outlined in Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay by 2025.

"Maryland farmers believe in the environmental and agronomic benefits of planting cover crops on their fields to improve the soil, recycle unused plant nutrients, control erosion, and protect local waterways," said MDA Secretary Joe Bartenfelder. "This is the sixth consecutive year that farmers have planted more than 400,000 acres of cover crops on their fields."

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency established nutrient and sediment limits for the Chesapeake Bay known as the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). Maryland and the other Bay jurisdictions are working to meet these pollution thresholds by implementing their Watershed

Implementation Plans.

To date, Maryland farmers have exceeded all three sets of Bay milestone commitments for cover crops outlined in the State's Watershed Implementation Plan. The MDA's Cover Crop Program provides grants to farm-



ers who plant small grains such as wheat, rye or barley, or brassicas (plants in the radish and cabbage families) on their fields following the fall harvest. Grants help offset seed, labor and equipment costs associated with planting cover crops.

In 2015, cover crop mixes containing legumes were introduced to help create diversity and give farmers more planting options. As they grow, cover crops protect water quality by recycling unused plant nutrients remaining in the soil from the preceding summer crop.

Once established, cold-hardy cover crops work all winter to shield fields against erosion caused by wind, rain, snow and ice. Collectively, the 492,244 acres of cover crops planted will prevent an estimated 2.95 million pounds of nitrogen, and 98,500 pounds of phosphorus from reaching Maryland waterways. Maryland's Cover Crop Program is administered by the Maryland Department of Agri-

culture and the state's 24 soil conservation districts through the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program. It is funded by the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. Applicants must be in good standing with the cost-share program to participate and in compliance with Maryland's nutrient management regulations.

The sign up period for the 2016-2017 Cover Crop Program will take place in June 2016. Farmers should check the department's website for updates at mda.maryland.gov.



2016 Envirothon Training at Ag History Park

Can't tell a meadowlark from a maple?

We can help.

Each year, Montgomery County High School students who would like to learn more about their natural environment are invited to take part in the Envirothon training scheduled for March 16, 2016 at the Agricultural History Farm Park.

The Envirothon program is an effective educational tool, capable of supplementing environmental education both inside and outside the classroom. It is a competitive program, administered through local soil conservation districts. The competition is geared toward environmental education and development for high school age students throughout North America.

The initial training offers students the opportunity to



gain firsthand knowledge from natural resource professionals while working closely with biologists, foresters, and soil scientists.

The majority of the training is conducted outdoors in natural settings allowing for practical hands on experiences. The program develops students' critical thinking, problem solving, communication, team-building and decision making skills using real current local environmental issues.

Students are trained and tested in five natural resource fields: soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics, and a current environmental issue that changes annually.

This year the focus will be on invasive species, which can have a significant impact on native landscapes. Controlling the spread of invasive species will be one of the biggest challenges faced by the resource professionals of the future.

The Envirothon team receives support from the University of Maryland Extension, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental protection.

For more information call J. Harne at 301-590-2855. James.Harne@md.nacdnet.net

2017 North American Envirothon in our backyard!

The annual final competition is scheduled to be held at:

Mount St. Mary's University
Emmitsburg, MD

July 23 - 29, 2017



“Duck Fizzers” Third in 2015 State Competition

The “Duck Fizzers” a team of five juniors from Montgomery County's Blair High School finished third in the Maryland State Envirothon held June 17th and 18th, 2015 at St. Mary's College in St. Mary's City, Maryland. The competition between the 18 participating counties was close. The top three teams were within twelve points of the winning team from Carroll County.

Members of the top three teams in the 2015 Maryland State Competition received scholarships valued at \$200-\$500 from the Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board, t-shirts, wildlife prints and other prizes.



2015 Envirothon Top Teams at St. Mary's College, St. Mary's City, Maryland

Montgomery County Couple Named Statewide Winners

Rock Hill Orchard and Woodbourne Creamery located in Mt. Airy, MD and owned by Mary and John Fendrick, were named as the 2015 Outstanding Cooperator of the Year by the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD).

Each year soil conservation districts from across the state nominate members of the agricultural community for the statewide award given to farmers for their stewardship ethic and their contributions to conservation of our natural resources.

The Fendricks have made conservation and stewardship of the land an integral part of their operation. They invested a great deal of time and money in designing and installing conservation practices that enhance the natural resources on their farm and the surrounding landscape.

Located at the headwaters of the Patuxent River, Rock Hill Orchard has become a model of agricultural



John and Mary Fendrick receive the 2015 Cooperator of the Year Award

innovation and stewardship. One of the Fendricks major endeavors was the 288,000 gallon manure storage pit, which is designed to handle all the manure and milk waste from the voluntary milking facility. They have also used technical and financial assistance from the Montgomery Soil Conservation District to install a series of watering troughs, heavy use areas, travel lanes, and fencing to establish an extremely well-coordinated rotational grazing system.

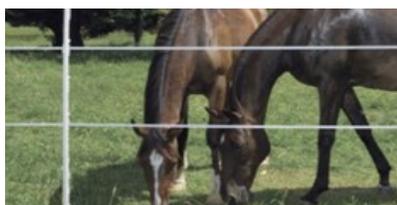
This system not only benefits the environment by maintaining vigorous pasture year round, but it also plays an integral role in their unique pure pasture Guernsey milk production. In addition, the Fendricks have also implemented Nutrient Management, Integrated Pest Management, and Cover Crops to protect the natural resources on their farm.

The Fendricks worked closely with the Montgomery Soil Conservation District to implement conservation practices that were part of their Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan. They have a goal of producing high quality fruits and vegetables, and their pasture based dairy utilizes new technology and pasture management techniques to sustainably produce milk. They will soon produce cheese and ice cream for sale at their farm market.

For more information visit <http://www.rockhillorchard.com/>.

Funding available for alternative stream fencing program

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) is pleased to announce new water quality cost share assistance available to you. We are excited to be able to offer local funding assistance for livestock fencing along streams and surface waters through the Montgomery County Water Quality Protection Program. The goal is to help cooperators who are either ineligible for or choose not to participate in State and Federal Cost Share Programs. This includes farmers who lease land, farms with fewer than 8 animals, and operations that prefer fencing options that aren't covered under traditional Federal/State programs.



There are many fencing types available for this program that may be more economical and fit your operation better than traditional cost share fencing options. The cost share rate will be capped at \$1.50 per linear foot of fencing installed with a maximum of \$10,000 per project. A fencing standard must be followed to receive project certification and reimbursement. However, this standard is much less

stringent than those required by many Federal and State cost share programs. A current Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan for the farm is also a prerequisite.

Our staff can visit your property to discuss fencing options and program requirements. Funding for this program was made available through the Montgomery County Water Quality Protection Charge, with a goal of improving water quality in the Agricultural Reserve. Funding is limited and will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

For more information please contact the MSCD at 301-590-2855.

2015 Annual Cooperators Dinner

The 2015 Cooperators Dinner was held on September 3, 2015 at Butler's Orchard in Germantown, Maryland.

Approximately 120 people attended the dinner, including several local and state policy makers. The focus of the evening was to showcase the agricultural industry and conservation in Montgomery County and for people to learn about the on-farm market industry in Maryland.

Butler's Orchard provided an excellent opportunity for guests to learn about agritourism, conservation, and the innovative marketing being used by Montgomery County farmers.

The Butler Family have long been a part of the agricultural scene in Montgomery County and have been promoting agritourism for more than 65 years.

In the 1950s, George and Shirley Butler purchased a 37 acre farm with a log house. Initially they grew 25 acres of peaches and sold them to a local grocery store and at their own small farm market under a solitary apple tree in the backyard.

Pioneers in the pick your own fruit market, the family gradually increased the variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables they grew and sold. The first

field of strawberries was planted in 1953 on the site of the present market. Pick your own fruit was a new concept in the area, but soon became very popular. Thornless black-



berries and black raspberries were planted in the 1970's, followed by blueberries, peas, cherries, red raspberries, and apples.

Pick your own pumpkins joined the mix as a result of a high school class project. This led into the creation of Pumpkinland, a display of fairy tale characters built out of pumpkins, with more added every year. It is one of

the farms biggest attractions and draws families from all over the Washington metropolitan area every October to enjoy the hayrides, giant slides, pony rides, pumpkins, straw maze, delicious country food, and of course, Pumpkinland!



In the 1970's, cut your own Christmas Trees, Holiday ornaments, fresh roping and wreaths, as well as preserves, local honey, gourmet condiments, and other seasonal decorative items were added to those sold. And don't forget the cider!

Today the Butler family farms approximately 300 acres producing more than 25 varieties of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and trees. In 1993, the current facility was built to accommodate an ever growing clientele. (information from the Butler Orchard website <http://www.butlersorchard.com>)

The event was held at the Butler's festival area. Guests were given the opportunity to take wagon rides, tour the facilities, and fire the pumpkin cannon.



Potomac Horse Center Manager, Rick Terselli, and MSCD Conservation Technician Mike Weyand operated the Pumpkin Cannon

The Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation (MAEF) mobile classroom and lab was also on site and available to tour.



PLEASANT VALLEY FARM
2015
COOPERATOR OF THE
YEAR



Mike Scheffel, MDA Area Coordinator presents Robert Stabler, with an MDA Secretary's Citation

Each year The Montgomery Soil Conservation District honors those who have made an outstanding contribution to local agriculture and conservation. This year the evening was capped off when Pleasant Valley Farm, Brookeville, MD, was named as the Cooperator of the Year for 2015. In addition to the MCSD recognition Pleasant Valley Farm also received corresponding awards from the Maryland Department of Agriculture and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. Pleasant Valley Farm has applied a variety of best management practices to improve the water quality and other natural resources on their land.



They have made conservation of their natural resources and protecting soil health and water quality an integral component of their operation. The farm produces high quality beef, corn, soybeans, wheat, hay, straw, and produce on their acreage in northern Montgomery County.

The farm's partners are dedicated to producing fine agricultural products; making their Pleasant Valley Brand synonymous with quality. *(information from the PVF website)*

<http://pleasantvalleyfarmmd.com/>

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Mid Atlantic Farm Credit
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Phoenix Farm
And our hosts Butler's Orchard !



Cover Crop Incentive Program Continues

In 2015 the Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) was able to provide an additional incentive to our farmers who planted cover crops.

The County's Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) provided funding to allow MSCD to establish a conservation incentive program to promote water quality in the County. This funding enabled MSCD to provide a \$5 per acre incentive for cover

crop plantings on farms that had current Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans. (SCWQP)

A total of 8,950 cover crop acres were planted on farms with current SCWQP, providing an additional \$44,698 for Montgomery County farmers.

This funding was designed to encourage farmers to work with MSCD to develop SCWQP on their land.

It also served as a reminder of the important role conservation planning plays in protecting our natural resources. The incentives helped to reimburse producers for the high cost of Best Management Practice installation and reward their efforts to reduce nutrient inputs and sediment loss into the Chesapeake Bay.



FAQs about WQPC

What is the Water Quality Protection Charge?

The Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) is a part of Montgomery County property tax bills. The WQPC raises funds to improve the water quality of our streams and reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff.

Why is a WQPC necessary?

Stormwater is rain that runs off hard surfaces carrying pollution to our streams. It is one of the biggest water quality problems in Montgomery County and throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. When left unmanaged, stormwater flows through storm drains to nearby creeks and streams at high speeds and in large volumes. This polluted, unhealthy water damages property, erodes creek banks, harms wildlife, and eventually ends up in the Chesapeake Bay. Restoration projects funded by the WQPC help to reduce and prevent the impact of stormwater, and improve natural conditions.

Who Pays the WQPC?

All property owners in Montgomery County pay the WQPC, including residents, businesses, HOAs and non-profit organizations. Fees are calculated on the potential for a property to contribute to stormwater runoff. A larger, more developed property produces more runoff, and therefore, receives a higher charge.

Office of Agriculture New Name - Consistent Service



On June 30, 2015 the Montgomery County

Council approved County Executive Ike Leggett's initiative to privatize county economic development efforts in order to boost business attraction and retention and further strengthen the growth of good jobs in the County.

"Montgomery County is competitive – but we need to be more competitive in order to meet the dynamic challenges that face the Washington DC metropolitan region. To continue moving forward, I believe it is necessary to eliminate even more barriers to remain competitive regionally, nationally and globally," Leggett said.

"While our Department of Economic Development is doing a good job given the

worst economic conditions in decades, we can do better. We must do better. We must be more attuned to business trends and needs. We must be more flexible in our approach," he said.

Montgomery County Government is transitioning the Department of Economic Development (DED) to a private, non-profit organization. This is being done to more easily attract businesses to the county.

"We must be more attuned to business trends and needs."

However, one of the casualties of this move is that Montgomery County will be losing all divisions within DED. This includes all the Agricultural Services currently available.

But rising from the ashes of this transition is a new entity—the Office of Agriculture.

Due to these changes the Council voted to approve the creation of the Office of Agriculture to be positioned under the supervision of the Executive Office.

The new Office will remain a valuable resource to Montgomery County farmers. The location of the Office will remain at the Agricultural History Farm Park in Derwood. Many county residents and farmers testified before the County Council recently promoting the need for an Agricultural presence within the county government.

The MSCD looks forward to partnering with the new Office of Agriculture to continue serving the agricultural community.

New Face at the District Office



We at the MSCD would like to welcome our new Equine Resource Conservationist, Shelly Ingram, to our staff.

Shelly is a third generation horsewoman who was born and raised in California. She grew up on a horse ranch and operated her own show training stables for more than two decades.

In 2005 she graduated Summa Cum Laude from Eastern Oregon University with minors in English and Natural Resources.

She has worked as a news reporter in Oregon, Montana and California and as part of the chemical weapons oversight team for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality .

Most recently she worked in the federal grants division of the Marin County Planning Department.

For the past ten years she has worked in some form of land use planning specializing in vineyard and ranch properties as well as stormwater design.

Shelly can be reached at 301-590-2853 or by email at Shelly.Ingram@montgomerycountymd.gov

New Look for District Website



The New Year saw a *new look* for the MSCD website. The new design is more user friendly and has a variety of conservation information. The website provides descriptions of common conservation practices used by Montgomery County farmers, gives program updates and forms and has links to other agricultural and conservation organizations. It also provides contact information for MSCD staff and a relevant calendar.

Stop by the site and take a look.
<http://www.montgomeryscd.org/>

PSI to PMT - Phosphorous Management Tool Takes First Step

Maryland's Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) regulations took effect on June 8th of 2015. The regulation provides a multi-year process for farmers to transition from the Phosphorus Site Index (PSI) to the new PMT.

The PMT utilizes the most up to date science to identify the potential for phosphorus loss from a farm field and helps to prevent the build-up of additional phosphorus in fields that are already saturated with it.

As of June 8, 2015, all new or updated nutrient management plans must utilize both the PSI and

the new PMT tool for farm fields with a Fertility Index Value of 150 or greater.

The Fertility Index Value (FIV) is a measurement of phosphorus in the soil, which is determined by a soil test.

- An FIV of 51 to 100 is considered "optimum" for crop production.
- FIV levels above 100 indicate that there is more phosphorus in the soil than the plants can utilize.

If your soil tests show an FIV above 150, then your farm field will be subject to the PMT. Fields with an FIV

less than 150 may receive phosphorus following current University of Maryland recommendations.

If your crop field shows an FIV of 500 or greater, you can no longer apply any phosphorus to that field.

The ban on application to fields with high phosphorus levels will remain in effect until the PMT is fully implemented in 2022. At that time, the potential use of phosphorus on that field will be determined by the PMT.

For more information regarding these regulations you may contact the Nutrient Management Regional Office in Frederick at 301-694-9290, ext. 137.



To access the 16 page

**University of
Maryland
Phosphorus**

**Management Tool:
Technical Users
Guide**

*Extension Bulletin
EB-405 2013*

go to:

<https://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/docs/articles/EB-405%20UMD%20Phosphorus%20Management%20Tool-Technical%20Users%20Guide.pdf>

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