

Montgomery Conservation Connection



Montgomery Soil
Conservation
District
18410 Muncaster Rd
Derwood, MD 20855
301-590-2855

February 2020

A New Year Brings Changes to Staff at the AG History Farm Park

Calendar

Envirothon

Training Day.....April 1st
Competition Day....April 29th

Cover Crop

March 1st kill down and spring
fertilization may begin
June 3rd last day for spring
certification

Winter Agronomy Update

February 20th-Urbana Fire Dept.
Call 301-600-3576 for more details

Pasture Walk

February 28th-Blue Moon Farm
Call 301-590-2855 for more details

Annual Implementation Report

Return to MDA by March 1st

Southern MD Horse Summit

March 8th 8:30—3 pm
Call 301-274-1922 ext. 1
for more details

Welcome!

University of Maryland Extension Hires Livestock Specialist/4-H Agent Associate

In early December, Santana Mays joined the Montgomery County Extension team as the County's new livestock specialist and 4-H Agent Associate. Santana comes to us from the Baltimore County Service Center, where she served as a 4-H program assistant in 2019 and intern from 2016 through 2018. Santana brings a rich agricultural background to her office, having been born into a family with deep ties to Baltimore County, where she along with her family manage a dairy and grain operation. Off the farm, Santana formerly served as a dairy princess and ambassador for Maryland agriculture and is the Chairperson for the Baltimore County Young Farmers Association. She received her degree in Educational Studies from Juniata College in 2019 and works part-time as a caretaker with the USDA Dairy Research Farm. Santana began her tenure on December 8, 2019, replacing David Gordon as our 4-H livestock specialist. She looks forward to becoming a part of the large and diverse 4-H community in Montgomery County. Santana's office is located at the Agricultural History Farm Park in Derwood. We are very excited to have Santana on board and she is anxious to get rolling in her new position. If you haven't met Santana yet, please make sure to stop by her office or give her a call at 301-590-2813.



Happy Retirement!

University of Maryland Bids farewell to long-tenured Extension Agent

It is with a heavy heart that we must say goodbye and wish a happy retirement to Chuck Schuster, Commercial Horticulture Extension Educator with the University of Maryland Extension. Chuck served as an Extension educator for the past 18 years, but more importantly invested over 37 years with educational outreach. Chuck made a tremendous impact on the lives of the people he taught, especially the farmers he mentored and those of us that were lucky to work alongside him and to learn from his experiences. Chuck was always one to pitch in and to help no matter what the task at hand. He helped pioneer the training program for the County's New Farmer Project which taught farming techniques as well as advanced sustainable farm practices for these new farmers. Chuck was instrumental in providing training for and ongoing maintenance of the conservation and production equipment within the District's Equipment Share Program. Most importantly, Chuck coordinated training opportunities for Nutrient Management and Pesticide Applicator certifications and continuing education credits as well as numerous other agricultural production trainings. Chuck has been a tremendous asset to the agricultural community here in Montgomery County as well as throughout the State of Maryland and his services will be truly missed.



Doctor Charles Mess, Soil Health Champion



Charles Mess, Sr. became a resident of Montgomery County after completing his Medical Degree from the Mayo Clinic in 1971. An avid trail rider, he soon began looking for a home in the Sandy Spring-Olney area where he could keep his horse and have access to local trails. Although not possessing any experience in farming, he nonetheless enthusiastically purchased a 200-acre farm along with sixty head of cattle. "My colleagues at the hospital asked if I had any idea what I got myself into", Doctor Mess explained. Even so, he was ready to embrace the challenges associated with this new lifestyle and made a commitment to environmental conservation and sustainability with his farming enterprise.

This commitment began with his new family home. An early adopter of sustainable housing, he invested in a geothermal heat pump system using a nearby pond. He angled and positioned his home to maximize "passive solar" heat-

ing and cooling and had water tubes installed in his attic which heat the water up to a toasty 80 degrees even in winter. He also made use of nearly 90 acres of forest, using a wood stove to keep his home warm in winter.

Doctor Mess also made the conservation of the farm a priority. From the first days, he utilized rotational mob grazing to maximize grazing efficiency in his fields. Soon after, he began getting Nutrient Management Plans written for his farm, enhancing the productivity of his fields with fertilizer and lime applications. The plan also made use of the manure from his loafing lots, allowing him to reduce the need for chemical fertilizer.

In 1990, his operation transitioned from cattle to focus more on his horse boarding business. With this change in his operation he found that horses were much harder on his pastures than the beef cattle he had raised. To address this resource concern, he further divided his pastures and began incorporating dry lots and composting into his operation. Combined with harrowing and regular mowing, using compost instead of manure allowed him to scale back his herbicide use while continuing to produce quality hay from his fields. His passion for conservation, however, did not stop at the forest edge. Taking an initiative to protect water resources, Doctor Mess began fencing in his streams in the late 2000s, largely at his own expense. After obtaining a Forest Management Plan in the 2010s, he took a selective harvest of his forest to open the canopy and promote new growth. After the harvest was finished, he seeded the logging paths and expanded the network of trails on his property. Today, Brooke Grove Farm connects to roughly five miles of trails in surrounding parks and greenways.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) established the Soil Health Champions Network (SHCN) to recognize ranchers, farmers and woodland owners from across the nation who practice good soil health management on their operations and promote the use of soil health management systems in their communities. Currently, the SHCN is made up of more than 240 farmers. We are very proud to have Doctor Mess recognized as Montgomery County's 1st Soil Health Champion. His induction into this exclusive network will help ensure that his legacy continues to encourage others to explore conservation options for their farm. If you would like to begin your own conservation journey, the Soil Conservation District can help you get started. Our technical staff is always ready to help and possesses over 100 years combined experience in the conservation field. Who knows, you may even become our next National Soil Health Champion! You can learn more about the Soil Health Champions Network at www.nacdnet.org/get-involved/soil-health-champions-network/.



Leap into Conservation! 2020 Equine Winter Session

2020 is a leap year which is great news for Maryland horse owners. Why, do you ask? Because it gives us an extra day to prepare for spring pasture management and with all this wet weather, we need all the time we can get!

In preparation for the upcoming season, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District is hosting an Equine Winter Session at the Blue Moon Farm in Damascus on Friday, February 28th. Introductions will begin at 10:30am with the program beginning at 11:00 am and concluding by 2:30pm. This Winter Session is made possible through the District's cooperative partnerships with the University of Maryland Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and our gracious hosts, Dave and Ellen Quirk of Blue Moon Farm in Damascus, Maryland.

As recipients of Equine Conservation Grants provided by the District and as participants in our Equipment Share Program, the Quirks are excited to make use of the District's newest piece of rental equipment, a Dewdrop® Native Seed Drill that will be demonstrated as part of this workshop!

This nifty little planter can be pulled behind the back of an ATV or small lawn tractor and will fit through most fence gates. This new piece of equipment is ideal for re-seeding and over-seeding smaller horse pastures. Stop by the farm to learn how to use it* and see it in action!

Worried about buttercups and other weeds popping up in your pasture? When should you start treating for them? The answer is... Late Winter! Learn how prevention is the best medicine for weed problems in your pasture and how to spot them before it's too late.

We will also be discussing temporary fencing and how it can be used to divide pastures and improve grazing efficiency as well as learn how easily this fencing can be installed! If costs of implementing have you concerned, the workshop will provide information on how you can benefit from Montgomery Soil Conservation District's Conservation Grants, which can reimburse farmers for installing rotational grazing fencing. To help sustain you during the workshop/pasture walk the District will be providing a hot lunch at no cost to you for the event.

If you are interested in attending, please mark your calendars for Friday, February 28th and RSVP to the District by February 21, 2020 by contacting us at 301-590-2855 or email to travis.gorleski@montgomerycountymd.gov so that we can get a head count for reserving lunches. The event will run from 10:30am-2:30pm and will be hosted at Blue Moon Farm which is located at 4430 Damascus Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20882. We hope to see you there. *Training is a requirement to participate in the District's Equipment Share Program.



Important Nutrient Management Dates and Reporting Requirement Reminders:

Winter Applications (December 16 - February 28 of the following year) EMERGENCY PROVISION

Liquid manure only (operations w/ 50 > animal units). Solid manure must be stacked and spread later.

Request for Emergency Waiver direct to NMP by calling 410-841-5959 or contact Kenny Favorite, Regional Nutrient Management Specialist 301-695-2803 x8605.

Application shall be made to existing vegetative cover maintained until March 1. Application prohibited within 100' of surface waters, on slopes > 7 %, soil is saturated, ground is covered with > 1" snow or ground hard frozen > 2".

Spring / Summer Applications (March 1-September 9)

Inject or incorporate within 48 hours, except those operations managed to obtain the benefits of no-till farming. Application prohibited when soil is saturated, ground is covered with snow > 1", or ground hard frozen > 2". MDA reserves the right to require incorporation of organic nutrients on a case by case basis

Nutrient Management Annual Implementation Reports (AIR)

Due to MDA by March 1st. If you have any questions concerning your AIR, please direct your questions to Natalia Salazar, Nutrient Management Advisor at 301-590-2840 or via email at nsalaza1@umd.edu

2nd Annual Montgomery County Legislative Luncheon a Success!

Although Montgomery County is the most populated County in the State of Maryland, it boasts a robust and diverse Agricultural Industry that employs over 10,000 people and contributes over \$287 million to the economy. Our thriving agricultural sector is due primarily to our award-winning Agricultural Reserve, a 93,000-acre agricultural zone created in 1980 by the Montgomery County Council to preserve farmland and rural space in the northwestern part of the County. The Agricultural Reserve comprises a third of the County's land mass and is ranked 3rd in the Nation for total easement acres protected. While we are blessed to have such a wonderful agricultural resource, there are many challenges that face our farmers.



This Year's Luncheon was well attended by Farmers and Legislators



Del. Eric Luedtke, Colby Ferguson, Maryland Farm Bureau and Tom Hartsock Discussing Important Agricultural Legislation

Following lunch, there were short presentations given by farmers who serve on the various Agricultural Committees, Boards and agricultural support organizations. These presentations focused on how farmers provide guidance and leadership in advising our elected officials on all matters relating to agriculture, as well as the roles they perform in helping farmers keep agriculture viable in the County. The farmers took the opportunity to explain to the legislators the kinds of challenges farmers continue to face in Montgomery County. They encouraged the elected officials to use them as a resource when they are developing new legislation or are deliberating on legislation that may impact agriculture. "This is an incredibly valuable event as witnessed by the turnout of our legislators and farm community" explained John Zawitoski, District Manager. "I also want to extend my sincerest thank you to the Linthicum Family for their gracious hospitality by hosting us at their beautiful farm".

"This event helps the farm community to strengthen their relationships with legislators and we are very encouraged by the level of interest our legislators have with agricultural issues" commented Robert Butz, MSCD Chairman. "Having this open dialog with our legislators will be critically important as the 2020 Legislative Session gets underway.

One of these challenges are the unintended consequences created by new laws that threaten agricultural viability and sustainability. In recognition of the challenges that continue to face our Agricultural Community, Montgomery County Farmers in partnership with the Montgomery Soil Conservation District, the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, University of Maryland Extension and the Montgomery County Farm Bureau, hosted a Legislative Luncheon that was hosted by the Linthicum Family at their Seneca Ayr Farm in Laytonsville.

The event was well attended by legislators or their representatives at the Federal/State/Local level who interacted with our agricultural leaders as well as the representatives of the agencies that provide assistance to our farmers.



The Legislative Luncheon provided a great opportunity for 1 on 1 discussions with legislators. Linda Lewis speaking with Councilman Andrew Friedson

Cover Crop Update – Spring 2020



Montgomery County Farmers reported 18,148 acres as part of the State Cover Crop program in the fall of 2019. This number is a 5,256 acre increase from the fall of 2018. The increase in acres is most likely due to favorable weather. The dry fall weather was perfect for harvesting and planting cover crops. However, most of September passed without receiving more than a light drizzle and many of the early planted seeds were slow to germinate or did not germinate at all due to lack of moisture in the soil. Statewide acreage totals were not available at the time of printing.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) added a Delayed Termination incentive to the program in 2019. Those interested were asked to enroll up to 500 acres on their application form last summer. The incentive payment is \$15 per acre and requires that farmers seeking the incentive delay kill down of their cover crop until after May 1st in 2020. One of the guidelines is that farmers must report the fields intended for delayed kill down to the local Soil Conservation District by April 15th. This is needed in order to allow time for field spot checks in the spring which verify compliance with program requirements.

As a reminder, spring application of nutrients must not occur prior to March 1st for acres enrolled in the Maryland Department of Agriculture Cover Crop Program. Spring certification of cover crop kill-down or harvest must be submitted to your local Soil Conservation District by June 3rd. Options for end of winter suppression include green chopping (for on farm use only), plowing under, or use of a burn-down herbicide. Grazing of cover crops after they are well established is allowed however grazing is not an acceptable spring termination method.

Thank you to all who participate in the Cover Crop Program. The nutrient reduction credits gained from this best management practice are a critical component for the agricultural sector to reach the 2025 Chesapeake Bay reduction goals.

University of Maryland to Hold Winter Agronomy Meeting

The Montgomery, Howard & Frederick County 2020 Agronomy Update will be held on Thursday, February 20, 2020 at the Urbana Volunteer Fire Department - Banquet Hall located at 3602 Urbana Pike in Frederick.

This year's meeting will offer a variety of interesting and important topics that include: Andy Kness, Agricultural Agent in Harford County providing an agronomic disease update, Amanda Grev, Forage & Pasture Specialist discussing maintaining forage stand persistence, Kurt Vollmer, Weed Specialist, University of Maryland Extension will present on herbicide resistance and Integrated Pest Management. Paul Goeringer, Legal Specialist, University of Maryland Extension will be discussing the legal aspects of hemp, solar issues, as well as providing a Farm Bill Update.

The Keynote Speaker for this year's update is Dr. Donna Farmer a toxicologist with Bayer. She will shed light on the science supporting the long, safe, usage history of Roundup herbicide. Speakers will also provide the latest information on a variety of production issues, including a nutrient management update, spotted lanternfly update and soybean planting population research. Those attending the Agronomy Meeting will receive pesticide recertification credits and nutrient management voucher credits. Please call Lisa Strong at 301-600-3576 to check on space availability to register for this event. The cost is \$15.00 per person which includes refreshments and lunch.



BMP Verification: What is it, why is it important to the Chesapeake Bay, and more importantly, why is it important to you?

Verification Background

The implementation, tracking, and reporting agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) has been critical to the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort for almost three decades. When properly installed and managed, BMPs help to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment entering local waters and the tidal Chesapeake Bay. Over the decades, thousands of BMPs have been installed on agricultural land by Maryland farmers. Sometimes, with the assistance of a local Soil Conservation District and sometimes without. The BMP verification process was developed to assist farmers with documenting all practices, treatments, and technologies that result in reductions of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment pollutant loads. BMP verification is a method of monitoring, evaluating, and tracking BMP performance over the originally designed practice lifespan and beyond. Many agricultural BMPs installed 30 years ago are providing environmental benefits to this day.

Chesapeake Bay Impacts

In the past several issues of the newsletter, we have reported on numerous aspects of the Watershed Implementation Plan process or WIP that include proposed goals for nutrient and sediment reductions assigned to the agricultural sector. New or updated Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans (Conservation Plans) and the implementation and maintenance of new agricultural BMPs are critical to receiving credits for nutrient and sediment reductions in the bay watershed. However, BMPs installed years ago or practices installed by farmers on their own that meet certain standards can continue to receive credits provided these practices are still functioning as designed and have been "verified" by a Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) employee. These practices include but are not limited to: grassed waterways, waste storage structures, riparian forest and grassed buffers to name a few. These installed and functioning practices have numeric values "credit" assigned to them based on the lifespan of the practice and the associated reduction in nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay. While MDA and the District do not require farmers to maintain conservation practices beyond the planned lifespan, farmers often see the value of these practices and elect to continue to maintain these practices for many years. As a result, these conservation practices continue to provide a water quality benefit and are eligible to continue to receive nutrient and sediment reduction credits.

Best Management Practices or BMPs are cost-effective actions that agricultural landowners can take to conserve water and reduce the amount of nutrients and other pollutants from entering water resources.

Local Importance

You may have seen many of these practices as you drive through the County's agricultural areas. Long, beautiful grassed waterways snaking their way through dried fields of wheat, beans and corn. You may remember them being there when you were a child and perhaps they are still there today. Some of these practices can be 30, 40, even 50 years old, still being maintained and functioning as designed. The BMP verification process captures these decades-old practices to ensure Maryland's agriculture community is receiving nutrient and sediment reducing credit for keeping them going. Through this BMP verification process not only are you helping to quantify what is being done to help restore the Bay, but you are also being an active participant in demonstrating what agriculture has and continues to accomplish in a voluntary arena.

How It's Done

Has your farm been verified yet? The answer is maybe. The BMP verification process has begun in Montgomery County with some farms having already been visited by MDA. This process will continue over the next several years until all farms in the County, with installed BMPs, have been verified.

When a conservation or Best Management Practice is verified, an MDA employee trained in conservation planning and technical design will visit your farm and check to see if the Practice is still functional. If the Practice is no longer in use, the verifier will simply remove it from the Conservation Tracker Database and inform the Soil Conservation District. If, however, the practice is still in good working order, the verifier will make a record of this and the environmental benefit of the BMP will be adjusted to account for its age.

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District will be notified by MDA when a BMP verifier is visiting Montgomery County. The District will make a personal phone contact with each farmer to schedule the visit for the BMP verifier. You are free to accompany the BMP verifier during the visit, but it is not mandatory that you be present. If you would like to be present, then the District will arrange a date and time that is convenient for you.

It is also important to understand that there are additional benefits to Montgomery County farmers that complete the BMP verification process on their farms. If while visiting a property the MDA verifier finds a Practice installed by the farmer that provides an environmental benefit but was not previously accounted for by the District, the verifier will make a record of the practice so that the farmer will receive the credit for the work they have done.

On August 7, 2020, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District will be celebrating 75 years of conservation assistance and service to Montgomery County's agricultural community. With this legacy of technical assistance in mind, the BMP verification process provides farmers an avenue to have their installed practices re-visited. This is to achieve a true representation of the efforts multiple generations of farming families have given to protecting the environment in the face of a changing landscape. The Montgomery SCD appreciates all the cooperation from our farmers in making Maryland a model for farm stewardship. If you have any further questions or comments about BMP verification, please contact the District at 301-590-2855.

In Everyone's Life a Little Rain Must Fall.....However

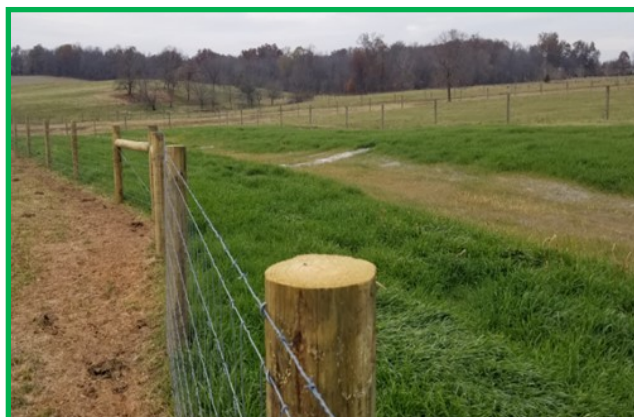
As we are sure you have noticed, during the last couple of years Montgomery County has gotten its fair share of rainfall. What first started as a very wet year where rainfall fell in amounts that was one for record books was then followed by a year, where we had many high-volume intense rain events.

These conditions, if you pardon the pun, created the "perfect storm". It was a one – two punch that resulted in the formation of erosive gullies in many areas of the County that normally would have been stable. We have found that soils that are typically not wet, but then become saturated for extended periods, in combination with a big rain event creates the classic setup that lead to the occurrence of excessive and unexpected erosive conditions. While many waterways have drain tile or a rock lining that help to keep the waterway stable during normal seasonal wetness, when the ground gets saturated way beyond what normally occurs, it comes as no surprise when we see gullies like these begin to appear on farms.

What is important to understand is that you are not alone when problems like these arise as the District can be a resource you can turn to for help. Our office receives many calls from landowners who are in need of assistance for repairing these erosion areas. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District can offer technical guidance as well as evaluate your site for potential cost share assistance. The State of Maryland and Federal Water Quality Cost Share Programs can provide cost share assistance for work and materials needed for the repair. It's very easy to request our assistance, simply give us a call at 301-590-2855 and we will be glad to get you started, and will work with you to solve erosion concerns on your farm.



Gully Erosion



Gully repaired by grassed waterway

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CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

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www.montgomeryscd.org](http://www.montgomeryscd.org)**

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