

Howard Soil
Conservation District
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CONSERVATION MATTERS



DECEMBER 2024

CALENDAR

HSCD Office Closures:
Dec 25: Christmas Day

Jan 1: New Years Day

Jan 20: MLK Day

Feb 17: President's Day

April 18: Good Friday

**March 1: MDA Nutrient
Management Annual
Implementation Report
(AIR) Due (see page 6)**

**March 18: Howard County
Mid-Winter Ag Meeting**

**March 20: HoCo Environ-
ment Training Day**

How to Tame Your Mud Farm

As winter approaches, a familiar quip starts to circulate amongst equestrian farm owners, usually late November after a couple rainy weeks. We no longer operate horse farms, we operate *mud farms*. And in no area of the farm is this more obvious than the heavily trafficked gateways into and out of our fields.

Last winter, one of my clients had the boot pulled off her foot while attempting to retrieve her horse from turnout. And if there's anything horse folks hate more than losing one of their own boots, it's a pulled horse shoe, which

is another common complaint anytime horses trek through mud. I'd already put down several inches of gravel at the gate, which disappeared after a couple of short weeks of wet weather and horse traffic, and this wasn't the first time. Not only was it getting expensive and time consuming to keep resurfacing the passage, it was also dangerous to clients, staff and horses to keep trudging through treacherous footing. I knew I had to look for a different solution before another winter rolled around.

So Kristen Parris, county Equine Specialist, paid a visit and we brainstormed

ideas, eventually deciding that a concrete pad was the best option to more permanently withstand heavy traffic and wet weather. Since horses typically wait at the gates around turn-in time, the pad would need to span both outside and inside the fence, where hoof traffic is heavy. And it would need to be grooved to provide traction, since smooth concrete can be slippery, especially when wet.

This summer, while the ground was seasonally firm, armed with engineering plans from the conservation district and cost-share assistance that Kristen helped me secure through the Maryland Department of Agriculture, I installed gate pads in the entryways to our fields. Immediately, both clients and staff were thrilled, but the true test came in only the last couple of weeks, when we finally got enough rain to

produce dreaded winter mud. Walking back through the gates with the same number of boots — and horse shoes — accounted for as when you left the barn? Horse folks may not be a particularly tidy bunch to begin with, but we sure appreciate not having to worry about lost shoes, or our safety, in the mud!



The untamed mud at a gate location.



The concrete pad provides a stabilized gate area..

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Producers Encouraged to Apply for Conservation Programs

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging Maryland's agricultural producers and forest landowners to sign up for voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices this year. NRCS is accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, which help a wide variety of producers, including urban and organic producers.

"Whether you measure your farm in square feet or acres, or you farm in the country or in the middle of the city, NRCS has conservation assistance for you," said Maryland State Conservationist Suzy Daubert. "Right now, we are offering a historic amount of funding through both the Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act, so you should apply today. We encourage all who have natural resource concerns, including producers who haven't worked with us before, to consider applying. A conservation plan and program may be right for your ag operation." □

Through EQIP, CSP, AMA, RCPP, and the Inflation Reduction Act, financial assistance is available to Maryland producers for conservation practices and initiatives, including:

- Expanded climate-smart mitigation activities that deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions or increases in carbon sequestration.
- New cover crop initiative
- Bog turtle habitat restoration
- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
- Air quality

- Urban and small scale farm practices and enhancements
- Additional priorities like organic agriculture, soil health, water quality and quantity and wildlife habitat development.

EQIP provides financial assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. These include improved water and air quality, improved irrigation efficiency, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, forest restoration, and creating or enhancing wildlife habitat.

CSP provides an opportunity for producers to earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities integrated within their agricultural operations. CSP enhancements like cover crops, ecologically-based pest management, and buffer strips help producers improve soil health while protecting water quality. Other CSP activities help sustain and increase pollinator and beneficial insect habitat in harmony with agriculture production on their land.

AMA helps agricultural producers manage financial risk through diversification, marketing or natural resource conservation practices. In Maryland, producers may construct new irrigation systems to reduce risk and protect natural resources on their operations.

RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Maryland currently offers RCPP in selected areas across the state through 10 projects that range in focus from nutrient management, to soil health, to water quality.

Real Christmas Tree Facts

According to the 2022 USDA NASS Census, Maryland had 1,889 acres of cultivated Christmas trees on 196 farms.

It can take as many as 15 years to grow a tree of typical height (6 – 7 feet) or as little as 4 years, but the average growing time is 7 years.

For every real Christmas tree harvested, 1 to 3 seedlings are planted the following spring.

Howard SCD Cooperator's Dinner & Education Event

The Howard Soil Conservation District hosted the 2024 Cooperators Dinner at Fine Idea Farm in Mt Airy on September 12, 2024. Fine Idea Farm provided a perfect venue for celebrating the conservation efforts of farmers in Howard County, and a wonderful opportunity to educate the general public and elected officials about the importance of natural resources stewardship. County Executive Calvin Ball was in attendance to celebrate conservation in Howard County.

Fine Idea Farm, owned and operated by Abby Gibbon, is an equestrian eventing and dressage facility in western Howard County. Participants were able to watch a dressage demonstration in the outdoor arena, and talk with Abby about the conservation practices she has implemented on the farm. Howard SCD staff were also available to discuss specific conservation practices and their applicability on farms in the County. There were also educational displays about the conservation efforts of local farmers and how the practices they implement help improve our local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

One of the focal points of the Cooperators Dinner is to present conservation awards to individuals that have made significant commitments to protecting natural resources and promoting conservation. The Howard SCD Chairman Justin Brendel presented a conservation award to this year's Cooperator of the Year. This year's Cooperator of the Year award went to Clover Luck Stables, located in Ellicott City, MD. The owners, Stephanie Williams and Matthew Carroll, operate an equestrian training facility that was founded in 2022. As new farm owners,



Stephanie Williams (left) and Matthew Carroll (center), Clover Luck Stables, receive their award from Justin Brendel (right), HSCD Chairman.



Suzy Daubert (left), NRCS State Conservationist presents an award to Stephanie Williams (center) and Matthew Carroll (right), Clover Luck Stables.

Stephanie and Matthew worked with Howard SCD staff from the very beginning to establish a variety of conservation practices and make improvements to their operation. Some of the practices they have implemented include fencing off streams and wetlands, installing watering troughs and heavy use areas, constructing trails and walk-

ways, and establishing a rotational grazing system. The landowners used a variety of cost-share programs offered through Howard SCD to help defray the expenses associated with all of this conservation work.

The District also presented an Outstanding Contribution Award to County Executive Calvin Ball, in recognition of his tireless efforts to assist the agricultural community. Dr. Ball was first recognized for his Outstanding Contribution at the statewide meeting of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts annual meeting over the summer. Howard SCD wanted to make sure that local farmers knew about this recognition and wanted to thank Dr. Ball publicly for everything he has done for agriculture and conservation in Howard County!



David Plummer (left) presents the Outstanding Contribution Award to Howard County Executive, Dr. Calvin Ball (right).

Fall Farm & Conservation Tour

The Fall Farm and Conservation Tour provides an opportunity for elected officials to visit working farms in Howard County, expanding their understanding about the challenges and opportunities farmers experience. The Farm Tour is organized by Howard Soil Conservation District, Howard County Economic Development Authority, and Howard County Farm Bureau. The goal of the Farm Tour is to give policy makers a chance to meet with farmers and discuss important facets of their operations in a hands-on environment. Elected officials that attend the event are often amazed by the complexity and diversity of the agricultural operations in Howard County. They also get a chance to see many conservation practices that farmers implement to protect local water quality and the Chesapeake Bay.

This year's Farm and Conservation Tour took place October 17th, and started at Three Dozen Daisies Farm in the western part of the county near Woodbine. Three Dozen Daisies Farm is owned and operated by Mary and John Wilde, and is a relatively new operation focusing on vegetables and fresh cut flowers.

The Wildes started their dream farm in 2022, with a goal of providing fresh, local, organic food for their community. Attendees got a tour of the farm including the vegetable garden, flower beds, and the historic 1800s bank barn that serves as a centerpiece for the property. The Wildes have grown their business considerably since 2022, and although they both work off the farm now, they are very close to making the farm a full time operation. Most of their veggies, flowers, eggs, and baked goods are sold at the roadside stand that Mary operates on weekends during the growing



Above: Mary and John Wilde share with attendees the story of how their farm came about and where they are going. They also shared the challenges they've faced.

season. The Wildes have worked with Howard SCD to establish some windbreak tree plantings and are currently constructing a high tunnel to increase their growing season and protect sensitive plants. Elected officials were thrilled to learn about this new start-up farming operation and encouraged to discover that there were programs that provide financial assistance for operations of this type.

The next stop on the tour was right around the corner at Maple Dell Farm, which is owned and operated by the Patrick Family. The Patricks operate the last dairy operation in the County, and participants were surprised to hear there used to be over 100 dairies in Howard County. Derek Patrick provided a tour of the operation and discussed how things have changed through the many generations of his family farm. Unpredictable milk prices, regulations, input costs, and a variety of other factors have all been responsible for the dramatic decline in dairy farming in Howard County and throughout the state of Maryland. One of the Patrick Family's saving graces has been their breeding operation and the high quality of their Ayrshire cattle herd. The Maple Dell dairy herd is recognized throughout the nation as one of the top herds of Ayrshire cattle in the dairy industry. Derek also discussed the large, complex stream restoration project that was completed on their property along Cattail Creek. This project was a joint public/private partnership to help improve water quality in



Top left: Derek Patrick, 5th generation, explains the details of Maple Dell's operation, the continued challenges they face.

Top right: Attendees walk towards the milking parlor for a tour.

local streams and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

For lunch the group was hosted at Daisy Lane Farm, an equine training and boarding facility



in Woodbine. Owners Allison and Jonathan Dickey discussed

Top left: Jonathan Dickey talks about working with the District on conservation projects on the farm.

how the operation got

Top center: Attendees enjoy the sunshine while learning about best management practices on the farm.

started and some of their experiences in creating a new equestrian farm. Following lunch, the Dickeys provided a tour of their operation, highlighting some of the extensive conservation work they have undertaken in cooperation with the Howard SCD. A roof runoff system was installed to prevent rainwater from washing manure and sediment off the barnyard area, and a large, steep grassed waterway was installed to address some gully erosion issues the farm was experiencing. Tour participants also got to meet a few of the horses that call the farm home.

The final stop of the day was to Sharp's at Waterford Farm, an agritourism destination in Brookeville, Maryland. The owners of Waterford Farm, Chuck and Alan Sharp, provided an overview of their 565-acre farm operation, and discussed the thousands of school kids they host at the farm every year. Waterford is a working farm, growing traditional grain crops such as corn, wheat, and soybeans. But they also have a large farm stand and offer a variety of educational programs designed to teach the next generation about a variety of farming activities as well as helping them explore the natural environment. Alan Sharp treated participants to a demonstration of his new agricultural drone that he uses for seeding cover crop and other activities on the farm. The

drone was purchased using an Agricultural Innovation Grant from the Howard County Economic Development Authority. Drones are becoming more and more popular in the agricultural industry, and participants were impressed with the precision of the drone and the variety of features that created functionality for agricultural applications. Following the drone demonstration, Alan and Chuck treated everyone to a hay wagon ride around the farm to look at a variety of conservation practices that have been installed in cooperation with Howard SCD over the years. These included a shallow water impoundment for wading birds and a number of riparian forest buffer plantings.



Top left: Alan Sharp talks to attendees about the drone.

Top right: Chuck Sharp and son Alan tell attendees about multiple facets of their operation.

Left: Attendees enjoy the view of the pond as they hear about the farm.



It was clear that our Howard County elected officials care about the agricultural community and are interested in learning about the challenges that farmers face. Four out of the five Councilmembers attended the Fall Farm and Conservation Tour. Also in attendance were members of the Howard County Delegation to the General Assembly, and their staff.

The Fall Farm and Conservation Tour was a great opportunity to connect elected officials with their local farmers and to help our representatives understand how the policies they legislate can have a profound impact on family farms. The tour highlighted the diversity and innovation that is integral to all farming operations, and provided participants with a chance to experience a broad spectrum of agriculture in Howard County.

Howard County Mid-Winter Ag Meeting: Save the Date

The Howard Soil Conservation District, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), University of Maryland Extension, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service will sponsor the annual Howard County Mid-Winter Ag Meeting on Tuesday, March 18th, 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM, at the Howard County Fairgrounds Dining Hall. Registration and a light meal will be at 6:00 PM, with the meeting beginning at 6:30 PM. Topics include deer management, slug damage / management (including research data of their effect on soybeans), the right-to-farm and eminent domain, and a Nutrient Management update. *Attendees are eligible to receive two (2) Nutrient Management CEUs.*

There is no cost to attend but pre-registration is requested, by Friday, 3/14/25. To pre-register, please call the Howard SCD, 410.313.0680, or email kmccormick@howardcountymd.gov

MDA Nutrient Management Annual Implementation Report

Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) documenting nutrient applications for Calendar Year 2024 are due to the Nutrient Management Program by March 1, 2025. Farmers have two reporting options:

1. Farmers who want to submit their 2024 AIRs electronically should visit the Maryland OneStop Portal.
2. Farmers who want to submit paper reports may download either the standard AIR or the CAFO reporting form to their devices before completing.

Visit https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/air.aspx for forms and portal link.

MDA's Conservation Buffer Initiative

Maryland's Conservation Buffer Initiative offers attractive incentive payments to plant trees next to streams, easy sign-up, and a full range of management options for farmers who want to improve the health of local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

Maryland's 2024-2025 Conservation Buffer Initiative

PRACTICE NAME	RI PRACTICE CODE	ADJACENT LAND USE	PAYMENT (NEW OR IMPROVED)	PAYMENT (EXISTING)	AGREEMENT TERM IN YEARS
Watercourse Access Control with LIVESTOCK EXCLUSION FENCING: Narrow Grass 10 to 34 ft. width	RI-4a	Pasture	\$1,500/acre	None	5
Watercourse Access Control with LIVESTOCK EXCLUSION FENCING: Grass 35 ft. + width (100 ft. maximum)	RI-5	Pasture	\$2,500/acre	None	5
Watercourse Access Control with LIVESTOCK EXCLUSION FENCING: Trees 35 ft. + width (100 ft. maximum)	RI-6	Pasture	\$4,500/acre + \$1,000/acre bonus	None	10
Grass Buffer on Watercourse Narrow 10-34 ft. width	RI-7	Cropland, Highly Erodible Land, or Hydric Soils	\$1,000/acre	\$500/acre	5
Grass Buffer on Watercourse 35 ft. + width (100 ft. maximum)	RI-8	Cropland, Highly Erodible Land, or Hydric Soils	\$2,000/acre	\$500/acre	5
Forest Buffer on Watercourse (Trees) 35 ft. + width (100 ft. maximum)	RI-10	Cropland, Highly Erodible Land, or Hydric Soils	\$4,000/acre + \$1,000/acre bonus	None	10

Attractive incentive payments to plant riparian forest buffers are available again this year. These payments are on top of the \$4,000 or \$4,500 per acre that you will receive to install the buffer. These incentives include:

*A one-time \$1,000 per acre signing bonus to plant a streamside forest buffer.

*Up to \$300 per acre, per year to help cover maintenance costs for forest buffer health during the first 5 years of the contract.

Maryland's Healthy Soils Competitive Fund



The Maryland Department of Agriculture will accept applications for their Healthy Soils Competitive Fund through March 7, 2025. If you have an innovative conservation idea for your farm, this program is for

you! They provide financial assistance to qualifying farmers who want to adopt a range of soil health or agroforestry practices. The aim is to support farmers and organizations that are ineligible for other programs.

What types of Projects Are Funded?

Financial assistance is available to manage conservation practices in new and innovative ways that improve soil health, yield, and profitability and capture carbon. Eligible practices include:

- *Cover Crops
- *Conservation Tillage
- *Pasture and Hay Planting
- *Conservation Cover
- *Critical Area Planting

- *Conservation Crop Rotation
- *Nutrient Management
- *Integrated Pest Management
- *Prescribed Grazing
- *Soil Carbon Amendment

Eligible Agroforestry practices include:

- *Alley Cropping
- *Hedgerow Planting
- *Silvopasture
- *Tree and Shrub Establishment
- *Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment

More Information

*There are no minimum or maximum acreage requirements.

*Farm size is not a consideration for project selection.

*Funds may not be used to cover overhead or indirect costs.

*Funds may be used to:

- Support implementation of conservation practices
- Purchase or rent equipment that supports the adoption of soil health practices

LAWN FERTILIZER BLACKOUT DATES IN EFFECT

Lawn fertilizer blackout dates authorized by Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law took effect November 16 and will end March 1, 2025. The blackout dates protect local streams and the Chesapeake Bay from nutrient runoff during late fall and winter, when grass typically goes dormant and cannot benefit from additional nutrients.



SMART SALTING

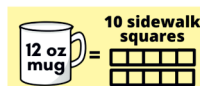
THE 3 PRO TIPS FOR USING ROAD SALT EFFECTIVELY

1. Shovel first



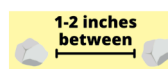
Clear pavement and driveways before snow has the chance to turn to ice.

2. Use just the right amount



A little salt goes a long way! Extra salt does not mean more melting. Just one 12 oz coffee mug holds the perfect amount for 10 sidewalk squares or a 20ft driveway.

3. Spread evenly



Make sure the salt granules are 1-2 inches away from each other and clean up spills.



Learn more pro tips and winter safety advice at mde.maryland.gov or scan the QR code



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