

## FARM STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM RECOGNIZES 100TH STEWARD

The 100th Maryland farm certified for achieving the highest level of environmental stewardship was recognized May 6th at a ceremony outside Smithsburg, Md. Gardenhour Orchards, operated by Bill Gardenhour and his family, received the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP) certificate and sign from the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, which established FSCAP in cooperation with core agricultural and environmental partners, to recognize farmers who are good stewards of their natural resources and to encourage farmers to put additional best management practices (BMPs) on their land.

The Gardenhours are the fourth generation to operate the orchard, which encompasses 105 acres within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. In their market and pick-your-own orchards and fields, they offer apples, peaches, corn, strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries.

Secretary of Agriculture, Joe Bartenfelder, expressed how honored he is to be the Secretary of Agriculture in a state that values conservation. "The Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program is not only a way to recognize those who are already doing a great job but also encourage other farmers to install more best management practices so they can become certified." Bartenfelder stated. "Maryland agriculture is making great progress towards our 2025 Bay clean-up goals and programs like this one will continue to help accelerate that progress," he continued.

Dr. Terron Hillsman, the new state conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service spoke about his excitement to work with farmers in Maryland to continue the nearly 80 years of partnership. He noted that all FSCAP-certified farmers use a suite of NRCS designed BMPs on their farms to reduce or eliminate erosion and nutrient loss."

Elmer Weibley, district manager, Washington County Soil Conservation District, noted that the first FSCAP farm and the 100th FSCAP farm share something in common. "I'm proud to see that Washington County is home to not just the first and 100th farm, but also 25 other farms in between," he said. "The FSCAP program has provided an opportunity to showcase the commitment of Washington County farmers to conservation."

Lynne Hoot, Executive Director of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, welcomed and thanked all those in attendance. Hoot recognized the certified stewards present and stated, "We are proud to have recognized one hundred farms in Maryland that have a high level of commitment to conservation on their farms. These stewards here with us today exemplify the strong stewardship ethic seen on farms across the state."



Photo credit Maryland Soybean Board

Left to right: Secretary Joe Bartenfelder, Julie, Zane, and Bill Gardenhour, State Conservationist Terron Hillsman, Washington County SCD District Manager, Elmer Weibley.

"The Chesapeake Bay Foundation is proud to be a core partner in this program that has honored 100 farmers for being good stewards of their land and water," said Alison Prost, Maryland executive director of CBF. "Our mantra has always been that a well-managed farm is the best use of land and this program helps demonstrate that there are well managed farms with farmers working hard to protect the Chesapeake Bay. These FSCAP certified farmers, who have gone above and beyond what is required of them, deserve to be recognized," she added.

Valerie Connelly, speaking on behalf of the 30,000 farm and rural family members as executive director of the Maryland Farm Bureau, expressed her excitement over reaching 100 certified farms. "Farmers have been working diligently to minimize the environmental impacts of producing food, fuel and fiber for Marylanders, Americans and the world," Connelly stated. "FSCAP recognizes these farmers and I hope that more farmers will sign up for FSCAP assessments because I know there are more who qualify for certification."

Tom Leigh, Director of Programs and Partnerships for the Chesapeake Bay Trust, talked about how it is necessary to recognize the conservation efforts already occurring within the agricultural community while encouraging a higher level of environmental stewardship. "Each year the Chesapeake Bay Trust funds hundreds of projects through the region that engage local citizens in efforts to improve water quality and advance community involvement. We continue to partner with the agricultural community to advance both the science and the implementation of best management practices and applaud the work of Gardenhour Orchards for their efforts to become certified."

Linda Burrier, a farmer from Union Bridge, MD, and a director on both the Maryland Soybean Board and United Soybean Board, congratulated the Gardenhours. "Conserving our air, land and water resources is important to all farmers," she said. "Since 1980, U.S. farmers have increased the adoption of conservation tillage methods by 143 million acres. More than 70 percent of soybean farmers practice some form of conservation tillage every production cycle. Irrigated water use per bushel of soybeans has dropped by over 40 percent since 1980. Continuous improvement is a way of life for family farmers, whether we're growing row crops or fruit trees. It's an ethic that we share."

Steve Ernst, the very first FSCAP steward, noted that voluntary conservation and stewardship programs have been a backbone in Maryland agriculture for generations. The water and soil resources that have been entrusted to our families and the provision these resources have supplied are fundamental to our current and future successes as producers of food.

Bill Gardenhour told the group about the conservation practices on his farm including nutrient management planning, conservation crop rotation, micro irrigation, proper irrigation management, and integrated pest management. Bill pays close attention to the land that he rents to other area farmers to ensure they use proper crop rotations, no-till farming and compliance with nutrient management guidelines.



Julie, Bill, and Zane Gardenhour

Photo credit Maryland Soybean Board