

# MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS FARM STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

## AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION STANDARD

In order to meet the certification standard for the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP), the landowner needs to meet the requirements below which have been established as the Agricultural Conservation Stewardship Certification Standard (ACSCS) having two main components: nutrient management and conservation best management practices (BMPs).

### NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT COMPONENT

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** The certification standard for nutrient management of the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP) requires a current implemented nutrient management plan in full compliance with state regulations. The nutrient management plan will accurately state the analysis of soil and manure testing, the nutrient needs for specific crops on designated fields, the adjustment of nutrient applications to account for existing levels in the fields and crop yield goals and to provide an annual implementation report to reflect any changes. Components of a nutrient management plan and supporting documentation include:

- Description of operation;
- Duration of plan;
- Soil sampling and testing results;
- Manure sampling and testing results;
- Basis of recommendations, either nitrogen or phosphorus-based;
- Calculation of the Phosphorus Site Index if necessary;
- Yield goals, history and source;
- Nutrient application equipment calibration;
- Existing best management practices;
- Record keeping of fertilizer and manure use; and,
- Annual implementation reports.

The Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP) assessors will be trained and certified through the formal courses conducted by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Maryland Cooperative Extension (MCE). Their assessment will equal the process employed by MDA nutrient management specialists. MDA will accept an approved evaluation by a FSCAP assessor and remove the farm from their list of farms to be inspected for three years.

### CONSERVATION COMPONENT

**General Description:** The certification standard for the conservation component of the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP) require the farmer to have installed sufficient conservation practices to ensure that no significant amount of pollution conveyed by runoff leaves the farm or enters a water body or ground water. In general, a FSCAP assessor will be evaluating conservation best management practices that will provide natural resource protection by:

- Reducing erosion caused by surface water runoff from agricultural fields and buildings;
- Maximizing the use of conservation tillage methods;
- Installing vegetative stabilization practices to maintain a minimum ten foot buffer along streams and ditches;
- Providing adequate fencing to keep livestock out of streams and ditches;
- Managing animal waste by providing storage facilities with adequate storage to prevent field application on frozen soil and protection from runoff and groundwater pollution;
- Providing an acceptable way to handle dead animals.

The primary resource concerns are soil erosion and water quality. Erosion control best management practices will significantly reduce sheet and rill erosion and prevent formation of small and large gullies. Water quality best management practices will significantly reduce harmful levels of pesticides, excessive nutrients, organics and sediment from entering surface water and groundwater.

The conservation component will be assessed by first reviewing existing soil conservation and water quality plans (SCWQP) for the farm and then walking the farm to evaluate existing conditions to ensure that there are no significant sources of pollution. Using the Planning Guide for Resource Management Systems, developed by USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), assessors will look for the presence of essential best management practices for erosion control and water quality that will vary by agricultural land use. The essential practices are formally defined according to federal standards and specifications and pertain to land use as shown below. These are practices that are typically needed on these land uses. There may also be a need for supporting practices depending on the specific resource issue.

Primary guidance for a FSCAP assessment will be provided by existing soil conservation and water quality plans prepared by the local soil conservation district. When these SCWQPs were developed, working with the producers, the conservation planners will have determined the practices needed to achieve an appropriate level of resource protection for the specific farming operation and established an implementation schedule. This information will provide guidance to the assessor when evaluating the farm. Where conservation measures that do not meet NRCS standards and specifications have been used to address resource concerns the opinion of a conservation planner may be used to determine if the practices used are adequate to address the site conditions.

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Essential Practices</b>	<b>NRCS Field Office Technical Guide Practice Number</b>
Cropland	Conservation Crop Rotation	328
	Residue and Tillage Management (one of the following):	
	Mulch Till	345
	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed	329
	Seasonal	344
	Nutrient Management	590
Hayland	Forage Harvest Management	511
	Nutrient Management	590
Pasture	Prescribed Grazing	528
	Nutrient Management	590
	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390
	Stream Fencing	
Headquarters/ Production Area	(where appropriate, depending on farming operation)	
	Critical Area Planting	342
	Diversion	362
	Filter Strip	393
	Heavy Use Area Protection	561
	Roof Runoff Structure	558
	Waste Storage Facility	313
Waste Utilization	633	