Maryland's Local Conservation Delivery System

Trusted by Farmers

Respected by Builders

Recognized by Environmental Groups

Kim Coble | Maryland Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

"Soil conservation district field staff are a tremendous asset for farmers and for Maryland's water quality. They are out in the field making a difference every day."

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, generations of farmers have trusted and depended on local soil conservation districts (SCDs) to help them protect natural resources on farms. Soil conservation professionals working in district offices provide farmers with needed technical assistance to identify natural resource management needs. Our field staff also provide farmers with engineering designs to build and install an array of best management practices (BMPs) such as animal waste storage structures and livestock watering systems to manage farm resources and safeguard water quality.

With more than 60 years of experience under our belts, districts provide these services to farmers in a no-nonsense, cost effective and efficient manner. According to surveys performed by the Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore, farmers consistently give soil conservation districts high marks for their performance as technical service providers and conservation information specialists. In fact, the majority of the farmers surveyed identified districts as their primary source of conservation information.

Although economic prospects at all levels of government are uncertain at best in the foreseeable future, BMPs remain one of the most cost effective ways to improve local waterways and meet Chesapeake Bay protection goals. Soil conservation districts continue to serve as the primary delivery system for state-of-the-art environmental protection technologies as well as tried and true BMPs that have been used on farms for more than half of a century to control soil erosion and protect water quality.

In addition to our historic role in delivering conservation programs to the agricultural community, soil conservation districts have become the "go to" place for many state agencies seeking to improve program delivery and economize. In recent years, a number of soil conservation districts have assumed environmental oversight for urban construction projects in their counties from the Maryland Department of the Environment. Builders and contractors served by participating districts report fewer problems, faster turnaround, and improved environmental research. District input is also essential to many local jurisdictions as they navigate their way through various natural resource management issues and state mandates. Statewide, the federal government utilizes district expertise in a wide range of management programs to protect natural resources on federal lands.

Yet, districts reach beyond farmers, builders and government agencies. We work cooperatively with a variety of environmental organizations including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ducks Unlimited and local watershed groups to address local water quality concerns and improve environmental management of natural resources. Our continued and ongoing relationship with these organizations is a testament to the quality and expertise of our staff.

As Maryland redoubles its efforts to improve water quality and address nutrient reduction, it is important to emphasize that soil conservation districts have experienced conservation professionals on board who know how to get the job done right. After all, soil conservation districts have a 60 year track record of accomplishments. This report highlights our accomplishments in 2008.

Sincerely,

Lee D. McDaniel
President, Maryland Association of Soil Conservation districts

Lynne Hoot
Executive Director

DEVELOPING FARM PLANS TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans (SCWQPs), also known as farm plans, help farmers identify natural resource issues or problems on their farms and chart a course for environmental management and enhancement projects.

Developed by conservation planners working in the soil conservation districts (SCDs), farm plans are not a cookie cutter item. Each plan is as unique as the farm for which it is developed and may include dozens of best management practices (BMPs) that are implemented over several years to protect water quality and enhance farm management.

Because of their importance in protecting natural resources, SCWQPs are required by the Federal Food Security Act on all highly erodible lands. At the state level, active SCWQPs must be implemented on all farmland enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program as well as on farmland located in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area–the 1,000 foot strip of land along these shorelines. In addition, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) requires certain livestock and poultry farmers to implement SCWQPs as a condition for obtaining its new Maryland Animal Feeding Operation (MAFO) permit.

In 2008, soil conservation planners throughout the state collectively developed 922 new SCWQPs for 72,300 acres of Maryland farmland. Another 1,034 plans affecting 112,900 acres of farmland were updated to ensure their continued effectiveness in protecting natural resources. Together, these plans included more than 7,590 BMPs.

PROVIDING ONE-STOP SHOPPING FOR CONSERVATION GRANTS

Now more than ever, farmers are relying on conservation grants and loans to help offset the cost of installing best management practices (BMPs) on their farms to protect natural resources. Although many of these practices have been voluntary in the past, new regulations proposed by MDE will require certain poultry and livestock operations to install mandatory BMPs such as buffers, livestock fencing and animal waste storage structures, with the latter costing upwards of $100,000 to construct and install. In 2008, SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain more than $26 million in grants from local, state and federal sources to install protective BMPs on their farms.

Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program (MACS)

SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain $11.3 million in state grants to install 2,000 projects on their farms to control soil erosion, manage nutrients and protect water quality in streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Farmers receiving these grants invested more than $1.6 million of their own money into projects that will prevent an estimated 15,284 tons of soil annually from impacting local streams and provide improved daily management of 1,569 tons of manure.

USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

SCDs helped Maryland farmers secure $8.9 million in federal cost-share grants to protect natural resources on 48,540 acres of land. Grants were used to protect soil and water resources on cropland, forested lands and grazing lands, construct animal waste storage facilities and obtain nutrient management services.

USDA Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain $4.6 million in federal funds to restore wetlands on 2,000 acres of private land.

USDA Wildlife Habitats Incentive Program (WHIP)

SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain $927,000 to develop and improve wildlife habitat on 429 acres of private land.

USDA Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)

SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain $506,000 in AMA assistance on 1,530 acres. Grants were used primarily to fund grazing practices and install windbreaks around poultry farms in targeted watersheds.

USDA Conservation Security Program (CSP)

SCDs helped 63 Maryland farmers obtain $462,000 in stewardship incentives to protect 21,730 acres of land through this highly competitive program that rewards the nation's top conservation performers.

URBAN PROGRAMS

Sediment pollution poses a major threat to water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. When it rains, unprotected soil from construction sites, road building projects and other development activities can easily wash into waterways where it fills in stream channels, damages fisheries, blocks sunlight and increases the potential for flooding.

Since 1972, Maryland's soil conservation districts have been authorized by state law to review and approve erosion and sediment control plans for construction projects in their counties. Our urban planners work with builders, architects and zoning officials to make certain that environmental safeguards, such as silt fences, buffers and sediment ponds, are properly designed and included in the construction project in order to minimize soil erosion and nutrient runoff. In 2008, soil conservation districts reviewed more than 14,000 erosion and sediment control plans for construction projects. Approximately 5,600 of these plans affecting 54,800 acres of land were approved.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is charged with enforcing Maryland's Sediment Control Law to ensure that erosion and sediment control plans are implemented as written. Although enforcement authority may be delegated to local jurisdictions, in recent years, district offices in Allegany, Calvert, Frederick, St. Mary's and Washington counties have assumed some enforcement responsibility for their counties due to staffing shortages at MDE. These districts have dedicated staff that are trained and certified by MDE to perform required pre-construction meetings, construction site walk-throughs, and final site stabilization field reviews as required by Maryland law. Response from the construction industry has been positive. Many developers prefer the advantages that local oversight allows, including an in-depth knowledge of local natural resources, improved accessibility and better turnaround.

As MDE amends the stormwater management regulations to require environmental site design (ESD) as required by the Stormwater Management Act of 2007, SCDs will be playing an expanded role working with local governments and developers to ensure that erosion and sediment control plans and future stormwater management activities are synchronized.

Tommy Wettengel | Compass Pointe Real Estate Development, LLC
Pictured with Bruce Young (right) of the St. Mary's Soil Conservation District

"The pre-construction meetings with the District have been extremely beneficial in helping us to understand the intent of the erosion and sediment control plan."

John Draper | Maryland Farmer

"I trust the soil conservation district to keep me up to date on new farm programs and environmental requirements. They understand that farm profitability and environmental responsibility go hand in hand. It all comes from experience. They've been doing this for a long time."

EDUCATING YOUTH ON CONSERVATION

In recent years, many school systems across the state have integrated conservation and environmental education programs into their K-12 science and social studies curriculums. These efforts received a boost earlier this year when Governor Martin O'Malley established the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature to increase outdoor education experiences and environmental literacy for students at all grade levels. As a result, many educators are seeking the assistance of soil conservation districts in providing meaningful environmental learning experiences for their students.

Every year, soil conservation districts answer dozens of requests from elementary school teachers for classroom visits and demonstrations. Several districts—including Cecil, Kent, Montgomery, Talbot and Washington—are active in county-wide outdoor education programs that focus on food production, soil and water conservation and other natural resource issues.

For middle school students, districts sponsor soil judging contests and participate in career days to help generate interest in soil science, natural resources and conservation. In Dorchester County, the district sponsors a week long Chesapeake Bay education camp for middle school students and teachers. An environmental problem solving competition is sponsored for middle school students by the Howard Soil Conservation District.

At the high school level, districts in 19 counties sponsor the Maryland Envirothon, an environmental education competition for teenagers interested in the outdoors. Now in its 18th year, the Envirothon gets teenagers out of the classroom, away from the computer screen and into the countryside to experience nature in ways that cannot be learned from a book. Students involved in the program are asked to identify and categorize living resources, perform soil surveys and solve other complex natural resource issues unique to Maryland and North America. Teams compete at the county, state and international levels. A five-member team of students from Harford Christian School in Harford County won the 2008 Maryland Envirothon and later placed 20th out of 54 teams at the Canon International Envirothon held in Arizona.

WEB SOIL SURVEY ASSISTS FARMERS AND LAND USE PLANNERS

Twenty years ago, if a farmer or builder needed information on the soils in a particular area, he or she would drive to the local soil conservation district and ask to look through the county soil survey catalog. Today, this information is just a mouse click away.

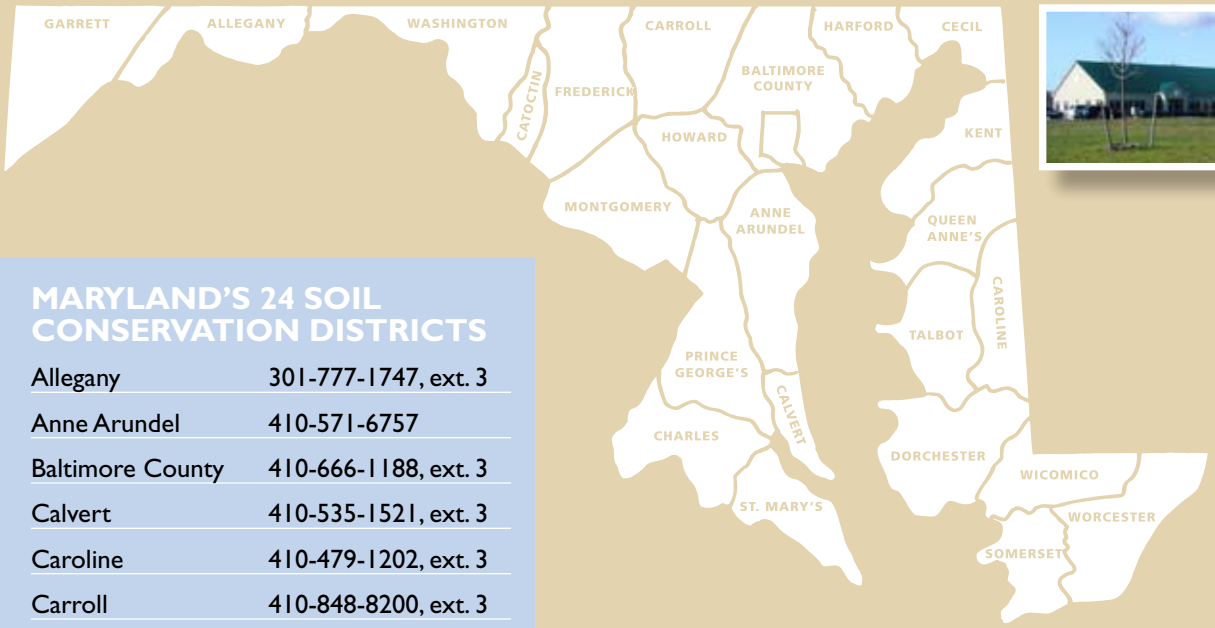
A soil survey is a catalog of all soil resources in a county. It usually consists of a soil map, detailed descriptions of individual soil types and interpretations concerning the soil's suitability for drainage and irrigation, engineering limitations and other important data for land use planning.

Soil survey information and maps first became available on the Internet in 2007 through a web site known as the Web Soil Survey (WSS). In 2008, a new version of the WSS was released which features a search engine, downloadable soils data, printable maps, a distance measuring tool, and other performance improvements. The WSS is available at websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov. Maryland's soil conservation districts have been working to update and modernize county soil surveys representing more than 300 different soil types in order to integrate this information with the web site. Users can now download and print up to date soil information for Baltimore City, Washington, D.C. and Anne Arundel, Calvert, Carroll, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Howard, Kent, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester counties. Updates for Allegany, Cecil, Prince George's and Talbot counties are scheduled for 2009.

ABOUT SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Across the United States, nearly 3,000 soil conservation districts–almost one in every county–are helping landowners conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and other natural resources on their properties. Here in Maryland, more than 120 volunteers serve in appointed positions on the governing boards of soil conservation districts.

They work directly with thousands of cooperating land managers across the state, and their efforts impact almost two million acres of private land. The staff of a typical soil conservation district office includes a district manager, district conservationist, engineers, agricultural planners, technicians, soil scientist, urban reviewers, and administrative staff. Staff and operating budgets are usually funded through a mix of federal, state and county funding sources as well as grants. In addition, SCDs serve as the agricultural representative on many local, regional and statewide environmental task forces and committees, including Maryland's Tributary Teams.



MARYLAND'S 24 SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757
Baltimore County	410-666-1188, ext. 3
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3
Charles	301-934-9588, ext. 3
Dorchester	410-228-5640, ext. 3
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Garrett	301-334-6951
Harford	410-838-6181, ext. 3
Howard	410-489-7987
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3
Montgomery	301-590-2855
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3
Somerset	410-651-1575, ext. 3
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 3
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3

MARYLAND'S CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

Soil conservation districts are members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership, a coalition of federal, state and local agriculture agencies dedicated to protecting and conserving natural resources and promoting Maryland agriculture by providing a range of educational, financial, technical assistance and regulatory programs.

- Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts
- Maryland Department of Agriculture
- State Soil Conservation Committee
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Maryland Cooperative Extension

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

53 Slama Road | Edgewater, MD 21037 | 410-956-5771
www.mascd.net | email: lynnehoot@aol.com