



2010 ANNUAL REPORT

Maryland's Go-To Team

*Helping farmers, developers
and local governments
meet tough new
environmental requirements*



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS





MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2010, Maryland's soil conservation districts (SCDs) firmly established themselves as the "go-to team" in helping farmers, developers and local governments meet tough new environmental requirements.

Beginning this year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency required the Bay states and the District of Columbia to draft plans outlining how they plan to reduce the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay from farms, construction sites, urban areas and wastewater treatment plants by 2025.

In December, following a public comment period, EPA approved Maryland's Phase I Watershed Implementation Plan, or WIP, which outlines measures to achieve the state's nutrient reduction goals five years ahead of EPA's deadline.

Executing Maryland's WIP requires the help of the "go-to team" —Maryland's soil conservation districts.

While the Phase I plan outlines broad nutrient and sediment reduction goals for the Maryland portion of the Bay Watershed, the second stage of the plan will allocate specific reduction goals geographically and include greater detail about pollution controls to be implemented by prescribed deadlines. Districts are the natural choice to provide input and guidance to local governments on ways to reduce pollution within their jurisdictions.

On the farm, districts have nearly 75 years of conservation experience under their belts and are uniquely qualified to help landowners install additional best management practices (BMPs) on their farms. This summer, SCDs signed up a

record number of farmers to plant cover crops over the winter months using funds provided by the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program. With more than 506,000 acres enrolled, the program is on track to exceed Maryland's cover crop goals.

Better accounting for BMPs already installed on farms is vital to the success of Maryland's restoration plan. In 2009, the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) unveiled its new Conservation Tracker database system in soil conservation district offices statewide. Using data provided by SCDs, the new program provides detailed information on BMPs installed on Maryland farms with federal and state grants and calculates nutrient reduction credits Maryland farmers achieve by their efforts.

Districts are currently gathering information necessary to expand Conservation Tracker to include additional BMPs that the farmers have installed without government assistance. This will help ensure that Maryland farmers are getting the credit they deserve for all the BMPs they have installed.

Not surprisingly, Maryland's WIP includes a substantial urban element. In recent years, the role of SCDs in carrying out the state's erosion and sediment control and stormwater management programs has expanded. In 2010, districts worked closely with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to produce the draft *2010 Maryland Standards and Specifications for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control* that was published in the *Maryland Register* in August.

In October, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released

a draft report on the health of the Chesapeake Bay which found that 96 percent of the cropland in the six-state Bay Watershed had some conservation measures applied, 87 percent of acres met the NRCS sediment loss standard, and 80 to 90 percent of the watershed's farmers adopted conservation tillage methods on some or all of their cropland.

The report also showed that the installation of conservation practices and nutrient management efficiencies in the Upper Chesapeake—which encompasses approximately 75 percent of Maryland's cropland—are significantly improved over the rest of the Bay Watershed.

Speaking of USDA, this important conservation partner celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2010. NRCS provides districts with the technical expertise and guidance needed to design and implement conservation practices that meet sound technical standards.

Please read on to learn about the many ways soil conservation districts have become the "go-to team" in meeting tough new environmental requirements.

Sincerely,

R. Calvert Stuart **Lynne Hoot**



President

Executive Director

Maryland Association of
Soil Conservation Districts, Inc.



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Long before the term environmentalist was coined, Maryland's soil conservation districts (SCDs) were working with landowners to protect natural resources on their farms. Established nearly 75 years ago following the ecological disaster brought on by the Dust Bowl, SCDs perform a range of conservation activities aimed at keeping the soil productive and our waterways clean and healthy.

Early conservation efforts were aimed chiefly at farmers—the principal stewards of the land. Beginning in the 1970s, soil conservation districts' duties expanded to address urban issues as well. SCDs work closely with a number of federal, state and local agencies, including the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency, the Maryland Departments of Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, University of Maryland Extension and county planning and environmental officials.

Each of Maryland's 24 soil conservation districts functions independently under a five-member Board of Supervisors. This ensures that local issues are addressed. Although districts typically occupy the same boundaries as counties, they are not part of county government. Their staff and operating budgets are funded through a combination of federal, state and local assistance. In recent years these traditional funding sources have decreased dramatically, while new responsibilities and mandates have expanded.

A typical SCD is staffed by a district manager, district conservationist, engineers, agricultural planners, technicians, soil scientist, urban reviewers and administrative staff. These professionals work with landowners to enhance farming operations, prevent flooding, safeguard streams and reservoirs, foster wildlife habitat, manage forest resources and address natural resource impacts from urban growth.



In recent years, SCDs have taken on many additional responsibilities amid mounting public concern over the impact of farming and development activities on the Chesapeake Bay. Most recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed the Bay on a pollution diet and required the Bay states to develop aggressive pollution reduction plans. SCDs figure prominently in Maryland's pollution reduction plan, which was approved by EPA in December 2010.



DEVELOPING SOIL CONSERVATION AND WATER QUALITY PLANS FOR FARMERS

Developed by SCD technical staff, Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans (SCWQPs) help farmers protect and enhance natural resources on their farms. Unlike nutrient management plans, which require farmers to manage crop nutrients, SCWQPs identify a range of natural resource concerns and include dozens of best management practices (BMPs) aimed at protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat. Farmers select and stage the installation of those that work best for their operations.

Because of their importance in identifying opportunities to install BMPs that protect and manage natural resources, SCWQPs are a key feature of Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan. In addition, the Federal Food Security Act requires SCWQPs on all highly erodible lands. SCWQPs are also required on farmland enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation Program as well as farmland located in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical

Area—the 1,000 foot wide strip of land along these shorelines. MDE requires certain livestock and poultry farmers to implement SCWQPs as a condition for obtaining its Maryland Animal Feeding Operation (MAFO) Permit.

In 2010, Maryland's 24 SCDs developed 1,300 new SCWQPs to protect 128,000 acres of farmland. Another 880 plans affecting 93,900 acres of farmland were updated. Together, these plans included 5,400 BMPs.

SECURING CONSERVATION GRANTS FOR FARMERS

Many farmers rely on conservation grants and loans to help finance BMPs installed on their farms to protect natural resources. Conservation grants and loans are available to farmers through a variety of local, state and federal programs. In 2010, SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain approximately \$40 million in grants to install conservation practices on their farms using the following programs:

Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program (MACS)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$17.7 million in grants to install 1,800 conservation projects on their farms that will collectively prevent an estimated 1.3 million pounds of nitrogen and 89,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering Maryland waterways each year.

USDA Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$7.5 million in federal assistance to address soil erosion, nutrient management and other related natural resource concerns such as air quality, wetlands, wildlife habitat and forestry.

USDA Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$7 million in federal assistance to restore wetlands on 1,900 acres of land.

USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)—SCDs helped farmers secure \$6.5 million in financial assistance to protect natural resources on more than 28,000 acres of land.

USDA Conservation Security Program (CSP)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$741,000 in financial assistance to protect 24,000 acres statewide through this highly competitive program that rewards the nation's top conservation performers.

USDA Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$408,000 in financial assistance to test the conservation benefits of seasonal high tunnels.

USDA Wildlife Habitats Incentive Program (WHIP)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$134,000 in financial assistance to develop and improve wildlife habitat on 156 acres of private land.

► *The Prince George's SCD provides erosion and sediment control training for county staff.*



TACKLING URBAN ISSUES

Erosion and Sediment Control Plan Reviews

Soil erosion is not exclusive to farmland. Clearing the land, improving roads or building new homes increases the risk of sediment and nutrient pollution entering our waterways. Since 1972, soil conservation districts have been authorized to review and approve erosion and sediment control plans for construction projects in their counties. Their work ensures that environmental safeguards are in place to minimize soil erosion and nutrient runoff. In 2010, soil conservation districts reviewed 13,200 erosion and sediment control plans for construction projects on 42,500 acres. Approximately 5,000 of these plans were approved.

Stormwater Management Responsibilities

In 2010, districts worked closely with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to produce the draft *2010 Maryland Standards and Specifications for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control* that was published in the *Maryland Register* in August. SCDs provided MDE with technical input on new standards that incorporate Environmental Site Design (ESD) to improve stormwater infiltration.

As part of the process, districts must provide a lengthy and detailed examination of plans submitted for proposed projects to ensure that water quality is being protected. They must also provide a public review process after the proposed plan has been submitted—all within a reasonable time frame. In 2010, SCDs initiated development of a stormwater design template to be used for new construction of poultry houses.

Compliance Activities

At the request of MDE, many districts have taken on inspection responsibilities in their counties to ensure that erosion and sediment control plans are implemented as written. This local oversight provides developers with improved accessibility and turnaround. In 2010, SCDs in Allegany, Calvert, Cecil, Frederick, Queen Anne's, St Mary's and Washington counties performed more than 250 pre-construction meetings and 700 inspections to ensure compliance with environmental requirements.



SPECIAL PROJECT GRANTS Special project grants secured by MASCD support environmental research, promote innovation and advance the Bay cleanup effort.

Project Name	Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP)
Funding Source	Maryland Soybean Board, Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Grant Amount	\$95,000
Description	This program certifies farmers who have successfully demonstrated that they are good stewards of their natural resources while encouraging them to place additional conservation practices on their land. FSCAP sponsors include the Maryland Farm Bureau, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Maryland Department of Agriculture and USDA-NRCS. To date, 11 farmers have been certified as agricultural conservation stewards.

Project Name	Establishment of Narrow Ditch Buffers on the Eastern Shore
Funding Source	Chesapeake Bay Funders Network
Grant Amount	\$285,000
Description	This pilot program provides grants to farmers on the Eastern Shore who install 10 to 30 foot wide vegetated buffers along drainage ditches to protect water quality. In 2010, farmers in Wicomico and Dorchester counties installed 23 miles of protective buffers along drainage ditches in their counties with assistance from the Dorchester and Wicomico soil conservation districts, University of Maryland Extension and Nanticoke Watershed Alliance.

Project Name	Eco-Trading
Funding Source	National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF)
Grant Amount	\$345,000
Description	In 2010, soil conservation districts worked to inform farmers about environmental trading and to determine whether they are eligible to participate in Maryland's Nutrient Trading Program. Eligible land-owners may receive private funding to install additional BMPs on their farms that can be traded with non-agricultural industries for nutrient, carbon or wildlife credits. The project will survey hundreds of farmers and record their interest and opinions on environmental credit trading.

Project Name	Foreign Language Workshops
Funding Source	USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant
Grant Amount	\$19,500
Description	In 2010, MASCD conducted two educational workshops for approximately 50 Vietnamese and Korean poultry farmers in their native tongues. The workshops focused on new environmental requirements for poultry growers and were so popular that Delmarva Poultry Industry requested two additional workshops. Project partners included University of Maryland Extension and MidAtlantic Farm Credit.

Project Name	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan Workshop for Conservation Planners
Funding Source	USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant and the Maryland Soybean Board
Grant Amount	\$55,750
Description	Soil conservation district personnel were trained to help poultry operations develop Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) required by MDE's Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Permit. Eighty CNMPs were developed free of charge for poultry growers through the program.

▼ Steve Ernst (left) and J.D. Rinehart (right) of Washington County were the first farmers to become certified by the new Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program.



EDUCATING FARMERS AND FUTURE CONSERVATIONISTS

In addition to sponsoring workshops, field days and demonstration projects to educate farmers on the latest conservation techniques, SCDs sponsor a number of programs for young people. Through soil judging contests, poster competitions, farm visits and career workshops, SCDs help instill a sense of environmental responsibility in young people.

At the high school level, districts sponsor the Maryland Envirothon, an outdoor natural

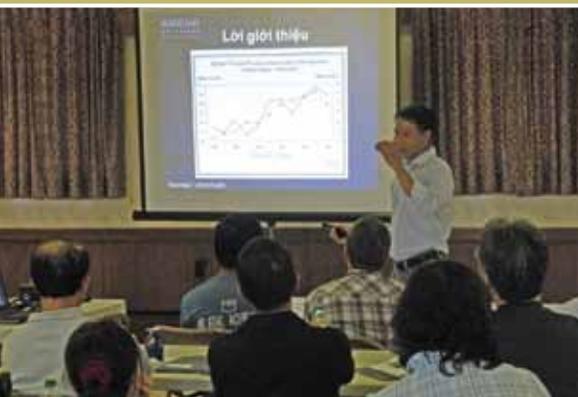
resources competition for teens interested in learning about natural resources and gaining a better understanding of today's complex environmental issues. Designed by soil conservationists, foresters, wildlife experts and other natural resource professionals, the Maryland Envirothon challenges students to move beyond the classroom in order to solve real life environmental problems in a natural setting. Students from

virtually every Maryland county compete at the local, state and national levels.

A five-member group of Boy Scouts from Carroll County won this year's state competition and went on to place fifth among teams from 45 U.S. states and nine Canadian provinces at the 2010 Canon Envirothon held at California State University. The team was awarded \$7,500 in Canon scholarships.

▼ MASCSD sponsored two foreign language workshops for farmers.

▼ The new Baltimore County Center for Agriculture.



MARYLAND'S 24 SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757
Baltimore County	410-527-5920, 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	301-334-6950, ext. 3
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
- University of Maryland Extension

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