

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



# Making the Connection

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

M·A·S·C·D





## Neighbors Connect for Conservation

Talbot Soil Conservation District recognized the Shortall and Beaven families as 2020 Co-cooperators of the Year for a project to install a series of conservation practices that spanned their contiguous farms to solve erosion issues.



## ECO City Farms Hosts USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

The Prince George's Soil Conservation District received an urban agriculture conservation grant, joining with ECO City Farms and multiple partners to develop an 11-acre urban farm incubator project.



## Persistence Creek Farm Receives Leopold Conservation Award

Persistence Creek Farm was the recipient of Maryland's first Leopold Conservation Award. The Warring Family applies conservation practices in their farming, forestry and fishing operations in Faulkner, MD.



## Maryland Farm and Harvest Returns for Season 9

Maryland Public Television's popular original series, *Maryland Farm & Harvest*, returned for a ninth season to take viewers around the state to experience what it's like to run a 21st-century farm. Watch online at: [mpt.org/farm](http://mpt.org/farm)



## Rick Holloway Honored

Rick Holloway of Harford County was awarded MASCD's Outstanding Leadership Award. He has demonstrated exemplary leadership as a board member and spokesperson for agriculture.



## 75 Years Strong

Anne Arundel and Somerset Soil Conservation Districts celebrated 75 years of helping landowners care for the natural resources on their farms.

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# 21 Our Strength is in Our Partnerships.



After a challenging year of quarantine followed by adaption to continue our work in the community, we all came to appreciate the importance of connection in our work and our daily lives. 2021 became a year to embrace the strong connections within our partnership and build on the successful strategies that we had developed through necessity.



Maryland's soil conservation districts are natural connectors. Each and every day, they partner with their county governments, state and federal agencies, businesses, communities, non-profit organizations, and others to get conservation projects on the ground. District staff provides technical assistance to farmers and landowners, from discussing their conservation goals to designing and finding funding to adopt the practices that will work best on their land.

This year saw a robust increase in our capacity to provide technical assistance. Our partners at the Maryland Department of Agriculture and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service worked hard to recruit and hire new staff, resulting in new positions in every county across the state. These conservation planners and technicians are our "boots on the ground," and are essential to implementing conservation practices and meeting our Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

We're active in our communities, too! We speak at local forestry boards, lead merit badge trainings for the Boy Scouts, judge local science fair contests, exhibit at county fairs and sponsor community fundraisers.

We help farmers to utilize state cost-share and Farm Bill funding and pursue additional grants to increase our capacity and the funding available for projects. Because the districts serve as a connection point for so many partners and funding sources, we can effectively leverage resources to increase the impact of conservation investments.

We want to thank the members of the Maryland General Assembly for their support of state funding to hire additional staff, as well as our state and federal partners for their many contributions to support our mission. Finally, we are grateful to our farmers and cooperators for their stewardship and dedication to protect our natural resources.

*Our shared success grows through the connections we continue to build together.*

**Bruce Yerkes, President**

**Jen Nelson, Executive Director**

Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts



# CHESAPEAKE BAY UPDATE

Soil conservation districts' role has expanded since they were formed after the Dust Bowl crisis to help farmers reduce erosion from their land. In addition to working with farmers to identify, design and install conservation practices that reduce soil loss, the districts provide technical and financial assistance to manage nutrients, reduce pollution and improve habitat.

In 2010, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) initiated the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan to restore water quality in the Bay by 2025, soil conservation districts were ready to help farmers to do their part. Farmers have stepped up their efforts, and the districts and our partners have worked together to keep the restoration effort on pace.

**2021** saw a dramatic addition of technical capacity, thanks largely to the support from Maryland's General Assembly to increase technical staff. *These staff members—conservation planners, conservation technicians, and engineers—are essential to planning, designing and installing best management practices to meet our water quality goals.*

## On the Farm

Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plans, or Farm Plans, are the cornerstone of the collaboration between technical staff and farmers to implement conservation practices on the ground. In the development of each plan, conservation planners, technicians and engineers go through a series of steps to create and implement the practices that work for each operation:

- work with farmers to identify their conservation goals for the farm
- diagnose resource needs and trouble spots
- determine the practices that are a best fit for the farm
- develop designs
- secure funding
- assist with implementation
- develop maintenance plans

**These plans are developed free of charge** by the conservation districts. Because every farm is unique, each plan is different. The plans take into account different production types and environmental factors, identifying a tailored set of solutions to be adopted over a realistic time frame.

**A plan for a livestock farm** may include a stream crossing, a grazing management plan to ensure adequate nutrition and improve soil health or roof runoff structures to direct rainwater away from the barns.

**A corn and soybean operation's plan** might include buffers to increase habitat and reduce pollution, a grassed waterway to reduce soil loss in the field or a denitrifying bioreactor to reduce nitrogen runoff.

**A small urban farm plan** could design a plan for cisterns to capture rainwater and a micro-irrigation system to deliver the water to plants.

**Soil conservation district staff** also review the plan with the farmer periodically, and make any updates needed to stay on track. In 2021, soil conservation districts helped 715 farmers install 1,923 practices on their farms.



# Financing Conservation Projects

Another way that Maryland's soil conservation districts work with farmers is by helping to calculate the cost to adopt practices and apply for local, state and federal financial assistance. While farmers typically share in the costs, districts can help to leverage different sources of funding to provide maximum support. In 2021, the districts helped farmers secure \$37.8 million in conservation assistance from these organizations:

## Maryland Department of Agriculture

- **Cover Crop Program:**  
**\$19 MILLION—433,116 ACRES**  
Provided 1,349 farmers with cost-share grants to help offset seed, labor and equipment costs associated with planting cover crops.
- **Capital Program/Special Project Grants: \$3.7 MILLION**  
Provided 240 farmers with cost-share grants to install 387 BMPs on farms to protect natural resources.
- **Manure Transport Grants:**  
**\$1.9 MILLION—397,886 TONS OF MANURE TRANSPORTED**  
Provided cost-share grants to truck manure away from areas with high soil phosphorus levels. Poultry companies provided an additional \$847,320 in matching funds to transport poultry litter.
- **Manure Injection Grants:**  
**\$338,429**  
Provided 50 farmers with grants to help offset costs to inject manure below the soil surface on 8,997 acres.

## USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service\*

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):**  
**\$10 MILLION—9,190 ACRES**  
Provided financial and technical assistance to help 230 landowners address natural resource concerns.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program:**  
**\$880,000—7,402 ACRES**  
Provided financial and technical assistance to 14 farmers participating in partner-driven conservation projects.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program:**  
**\$1.2 MILLION—12,018 ACRES**  
Helped 32 farmers maintain and improve existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation practices to address priority resource concerns.
- **Agricultural Management Assistance Program:**  
**\$486,809—528 ACRES**  
Provided financial and technical assistance to help 33 farmers improve water quality.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program:**  
**\$331,000—96 ACRES**  
Provided financial and technical assistance to help two farmers protect and enhance wetlands.

\*USDA-NRCS data estimates are preliminary and subject to change.



## BY THE NUMBERS



1,177

### SOIL CONSERVATION & WATER QUALITY PLANS

Developed or updated 1,177 soil conservation and water quality plans to protect 112,730 acres of land throughout Maryland.

1,923

### BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Managed the construction or installation of 1,923 best management practices to help 715 farmers control soil erosion, manage nutrients and protect water quality in the streams and rivers that flow to the Bay.

### \$37.8 Million GRANTS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Secured roughly \$37.8 million in financial assistance from state and federal agencies to help farmers install best management practices on their farms.



## Cooperator of the Year: WHISPERING ACRES FARM

Mike, Brandy, Matthew, and Luke Lewis, of Whispering Acres Farm near Myersville, have transformed their 30-acre farm from a single pasture and row crop operation to a rotational grazing system for their 40 head of beef cattle.

The Lewis Family selected a different mix of forages for each of their pastures to be utilized at their peak during different times of the year. Four pressure troughs, a supply well, and fencing including streamside fencing were built to provide water and boundaries to the pasture paddocks. While most of the fencing was cost-shared, the Lewis' installed some at their own expense and did the installation themselves on the troughs and fencing.

They also worked with the Catoclin District to design and erect a covered Heavy Use Area (HUA) structure to be used in conjunction with their rotational grazing plan, with Mike and his family doing most of the grading work for the building. The structure provides shelter and manure storage for their cattle during periods when weather conditions make it impractical to have the cattle on pasture. They are very happy with the way the structure fits in with their management of the herd, allowing them to feed hay along a fence-line feeding area at the rear of the structure. The cattle have access to all the pastures as they exit the structure, with gates to direct the cattle to a specific pasture.

In addition to the cost-shared projects, they have installed a 'built-to-last' culvert stream crossing without any cost-share assistance. All this was accomplished with Brandy and Mike both having jobs off the farm. MASCD honors the Lewis family for their conservation efforts to improve water quality in our county and state.



## Reducing Runoff in Urban Areas

### Erosion and Sediment Control Plan Reviews

Soil erosion occurs in urban settings, too. Construction and road-building projects can increase sedimentation and pollution runoff if appropriate measures aren't in place to protect our local waterways. Since 1972, soil conservation districts have been authorized to review and approve erosion and sediment control plans for construction and land development projects in their counties. In 2021, districts reviewed 11,268 plans on 34,000 acres.

### Urban Compliance Activities

Soil conservation districts in Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Cecil, Frederick, St. Mary's and Washington counties perform compliance activities for the Maryland Department of the Environment's Sediment, Stormwater and Dam Safety Program. Establishing this authority at the local level makes it easier for developers to have access to enforcement officials and results in faster turnaround time for projects. In 2021, participating districts performed 283 pre-construction meetings and

368 inspections to ensure that erosion and sediment control measures are working to protect water quality.

*“In spite of supply shortages and so many other issues, people continue to build homes, start or expand businesses and live their lives. All these activities have the potential to affect the soil and water quality around us and we are here to help them protect these resources.”*

—Rick Glasgow, Wicomico SCD



# Education and Outreach

Maryland's soil conservation districts (SCDs) are active members in their communities, supporting outreach and education activities for farmers, homeowners, students and teachers to ensure that all stakeholders understand the importance of conservation for clean water and healthy, productive food systems.

## Farmer Outreach

Each year, the conservation districts sponsor demonstration projects, field days and workshops about soil health, precision agriculture, stream restoration and more. With an eye to health and safety, the districts were back out in the field in 2021 to bring information about new equipment and innovative management strategies to farmers and provide opportunities for them to share their successful projects.

## Citizen and Youth Outreach

The districts also work with students, teachers, homeowners and communities to increase awareness about the connections between conservation and clean water. For example:

- The Allegany SCD supported the Allegany County Public Schools effort to include two new elective courses; Introduction to Agriculture & Natural Resources and Wildlife & Forest Management, to the county's high school programs.
- The Talbot SCD started an annual scholarship opportunity for students focused on agricultural engineering/conservation, called the Roy R. Scott Memorial Scholarship Program.
- Montgomery SCD hosted numerous events: Envirothon for high school students, a virtual program for elementary students called "Close Encounters with Agriculture," Ag Summer Camp for middle-school STEM students and a STEM teachers continuing education program.
- For the 3rd year in a row, Harford SCD partnered with Harford Community College and local farm groups and helped develop, produce, and participate with a live-streaming event with pre-recorded segments titled "Rooted in Agriculture Symposium," which aired in March.

## Maryland Envirothon

Now in its 31st year, the Maryland Envirothon provides a hands-on experience for high school age students to learn about the natural world. Teams throughout the state receive training in topics such as aquatic ecology, forestry, soils, wildlife and a current issue that changes each year. 2021's current issue was "Water Resources Management: Local Control, Local Solutions."

Teens compete at local, state and national levels. In 2021, Richard Montgomery High School of Montgomery County won the 2021 Maryland Envirothon, placing first in every category and going on to place 9th at the virtual North American Envirothon Competition in July.

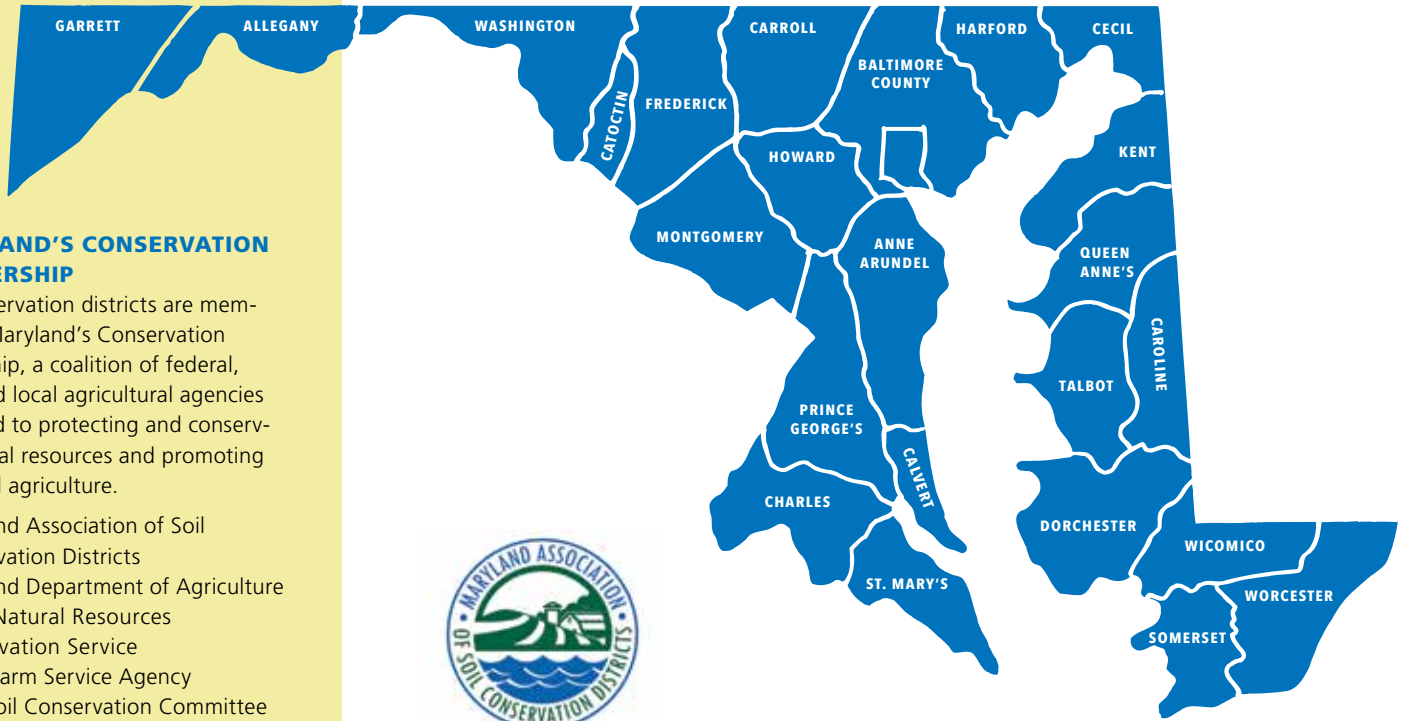
## URBAN AG HIGHLIGHT



**The Urban Agriculture Initiative is a collaborative effort with Howard County Public Schools and the University of Maryland Extension – Master Gardeners Program to create vegetable gardens with Howard County Title I schools. The Howard Soil Conservation District installed raised garden beds at Swansfield Elementary and Cradlerock Elementary. The gardens provide a wonderful opportunity for students and the local community to learn about growing vegetables.**







## MARYLAND'S CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

Soil conservation districts are members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership, a coalition of federal, state, and local agricultural agencies dedicated to protecting and conserving natural resources and promoting Maryland agriculture.

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

## ABOUT SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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

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 funded through a combination of federal, state, and local sources as well as grants.

Soil conservation districts carry out many federal and state mandates at the local level and serve as the agricultural representative on local, regional, and statewide environmental task forces and committees charged with protecting natural resources and the Chesapeake Bay.

## MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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Maryland's Soil Conservation Districts		
Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3	<a href="http://www.alleganyscd.com">www.alleganyscd.com</a>
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757	<a href="http://aascd.org">aascd.org</a>
Baltimore County	410-527-5920, ext. 3	<a href="http://bcscd.org">bcscd.org</a>
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3	<a href="http://calvertsoil.org">calvertsoil.org</a>
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3	
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3	<a href="http://carrollsoil.com">carrollsoil.com</a>
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3	<a href="http://catoctinfrederickscd.com">catoctinfrederickscd.com</a>
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3	<a href="http://cecilscd.com">cecilscd.com</a>
Charles	301-638-3028	<a href="http://charlesscd.com">charlesscd.com</a>
Dorchester	410-228-5640, ext. 3	
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3	<a href="http://catoctinfrederickscd.com">catoctinfrederickscd.com</a>
Garrett	301-501-5856, ext. 3	<a href="http://garrettscd.org">garrettscd.org</a>
Harford	410-638-4828	<a href="http://harfordscd.org">harfordscd.org</a>
Howard	410-313-0680	<a href="http://howardscd.org">howardscd.org</a>
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3	<a href="http://kentsoilandwaterconservationdistrict.org">kentsoilandwaterconservationdistrict.org</a>
Montgomery	301-590-2855	<a href="http://montgomeryscd.org">montgomeryscd.org</a>
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3	<a href="http://pgscd.org">pgscd.org</a>
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3	<a href="http://qascd.com">qascd.com</a>
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3	<a href="http://stmarysscd.com">stmarysscd.com</a>
Somerset	410-621-9310	
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 5	<a href="http://talbotscd.com">talbotscd.com</a>
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3	<a href="http://conservationplace.com">conservationplace.com</a>
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3	<a href="http://wicomicoscd.org">wicomicoscd.org</a>
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3	

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