

PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



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APPLYING A "CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT" MINDSET AT MASCD, A MESSAGE FROM JEN NELSON, MASCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Not long before I came on board with MASCD in 2020, Maryland's State Soil Conservation Committee shared with the districts a Leadership Self-Assessment Tool, to help the boards to reflect on their effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses in four key areas: organization and governance, work planning, program delivery and community engagement.

Almost all the districts participated, and together they determined that their strongest area overall was in community engagement (average score of 3.38 out of 4), while their weakest area was in work planning (average score of 2.32). In response, SSCC and MASCD have worked together to offer ongoing training and develop a library of resources on MASCD's website. (<https://mascd.net/resources/for-districts/>)

It's important that the districts periodically take time to reevaluate their performance and impact and look for areas that need improvement. Indeed, a number of funding opportunities that I've looked at over the past year *require* that districts have certain written policies in place (such as a conflict of interest policy), strategic plans, succession plans, or outreach plans, because the development of these documents itself demonstrates thoughtful and effective leadership.

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2023 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE, FROM PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES LOBBYING FIRM

Summer of Change - 2023

As the summer heat rolls in, the bulk of Marylanders are packing their cars and heading to Ocean City to enjoy their summer vacations. For legislators, the interim period allows them the opportunity to spend time in their district with constituents and host events within their communities. While it is typically a slower time of year, the House Chamber has been going through several changes ranging from new committee assignments to new leadership positions.

House Environment & Transportation Chair Kumar Barve, a veteran lawmaker, left his post in May to accept an appointment to the Maryland Public Service Commission and in-turn created a domino effect of changes. House Majority Leader and Montgomery County Delegate Marc Korman assumes the new role of Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee (E&T). With a vacancy in the majority leader slot, Speaker Adrienne Jones looked to Delegate David Moon to assume the new role and tapped House E&T Vice-Chair Dana Stein to step into the speaker role

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MASCD WELCOMES CHELSEA GEBBIA AS OUTREACH AND EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Chelsea Gebbia has a passion for farming, agriculture, and conservation. Born and raised on a family poultry farm on the eastern shore, she developed a deep appreciation for the land and its potential. Today, Chelsea operates a 30-acre hay farm in Laurel, DE. With her wonderful wife Katelyn, who shares her love for the land and supports her farming endeavors, they continue to embrace agricultural roots and contribute to the local farming community.

With a keen interest in exploring the world of agriculture, Chelsea takes delight in experimenting with oddball produce, pushing the boundaries of traditional farming to discover new and exciting crops that may hold untapped potential. Her adventurous spirit and curiosity have led her to uncover unique and innovative ways to grow and nurture plants, enriching her farm with diversity and ecological balance.

Education played a significant role in shaping Chelsea's approach to farming. She holds a degree from the University of Delaware, where she honed her knowledge and skills in agricultural practices, sustainable farming, and environmental conservation. Her time as a conservation scout and planner allowed her to develop a deeper understanding of the delicate balance between human activities and the natural world, motivating her to adopt environmentally conscious practices on her farm and others.

In everything she does, Chelsea embodies the spirit of "razzle dazzle," a term that encapsulates her zest for life, her determination to tackle challenges head-on, and her ability to find joy and creativity in every aspect of her farming journey. With a combination of dedication, innovation, and a heart full of passion, Chelsea Gebbia continues to make her mark on the farming world, leaving a legacy of sustainable practices, diversity, and a love for oddball produce.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE

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MASCD is no exception. Over the next year, MASCD and SSCC will continue to work on the development of these materials, both at the state level and at the individual district level. MASCD’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee is working on developing a work plan that we’ll present at our Annual Meeting in August, that will outline a set of recommendations to increase outreach and engagement among our local communities. Also at the Annual Meeting, the SSCC training will focus on “Best Practices for Board Meetings”. We’ll also look for opportunities to host hands-on workshops for MASCD and conservation district boards, with their input, to develop some of the planning documents and written policies that are important for our continued success.

In the meantime, I’d ask the boards and our conservation district partners to consider the following three fill-in-the-blank questions to help prepare your mindset for these activities:

1. In my role within the conservation partnership, I want to be known for...
2. The next action that I can take to make that happen is ...
3. I can take the following action to help to prepare new leaders within our organization ...

I always welcome your feedback by contacting me at (302) 353-9733, or at jen.nelson@resourcesmartllc.com, and I look forward to seeing you all at MASCD’s Annual Meeting later this month!

Delmarva Chicken Festival

October 7 | 1:00 -7:00 PM

Perdue Stadium, Salisbury, Md.

dcachicken.com/festival

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

(Continued from page 1)

-tem position for the 2024 Legislative Session. Elevated to the rank of Vice-Chair within the Environment & Transportation Committee will be Baltimore City Delegate Regina Boyce, who has been a strong voice for agriculture in the Maryland House of Delegates.

Although it has been a rather busy summer for most legislators across the State, many of them will be heading to Ocean City later this month to network and collaborate with other state and local leaders at the Annual Summer Maryland Association of Counties Conference – August 16th-19th.

For any legislative related questions please contact us directly at 410-343-9340 or by email mason@providence.llc

Future Dates to Remember	
Aug 27-29	MASCD Annual Meeting, Cambridge
Sep. 13	MAEF Golf Tournament, Hampstead
Sep. 21	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Oct. 19	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Oct. 24	MASCD Board Mtg., TBD
Nov. 16	SSCC Meeting, MDA

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ITEMS OF INTEREST

MDA INVESTS \$650,000 IN INNOVATIVE SOIL HEALTH/ AGROFORESTRY PRACTICES



The Maryland Department of Agriculture recently announced that 16 projects will receive grant funding totaling \$650,000 through the new Healthy Soils Competitive Fund. This unique program provides financial assistance to qualifying farms—large and small—and organizations that adopt innovative conservation practices that benefit climate, soil, and water.

“We are delighted with the response to this new grant program that encourages innovative conservation ideas and strategies from local farmers and growers,” said Maryland Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks. “It’s a win-win for healthier food, cleaner air, and improved water quality in our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.”

The pioneering projects funded through the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund receive up to \$50,000 to support three years of enhanced healthy soil practices. Grant recipients receive 20% of the funds upfront, with the remainder distributed annually upon verification of progress. Innovative conservation practices supported by the fund in 2023 include:

Whole farm conservation practices for small-scale vegetable/organic vegetable production and cut flower production (6 projects)

- Alley cropping for chestnut production (1 project)
- Multi-story agroforestry for diversified fruit and vegetable production (2 projects)
- Silvopasture systems for organic hogs and sheep (3 projects)
- Vermiculture for vegetable production (1 project)
- Specialized conservation equipment sharing for small-scale vegetable production (1 project)
- Silvopasture and Burgundy and Appalachian Truffle production (1 project)
- Biostimulant and nutrient reduction field trials (1 project)

Maryland’s Health Soils Competitive Fund was developed based on recommendations by the Soil Health Advisory Committee. Funding support is provided by the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund and through the Moore-Miller administration’s support of the Climate Solutions Now Act. Farm size is not a consideration for grant approval. In the program’s pilot year, the department received 42 applications from farmers across the state, with 16 applicants selected for funding. In addition to the conservation practices listed above, grant awardees will share progress over the course of the grant term.

Maryland’s Healthy Soils Competitive Fund accepts applications during its annual open enrollment, which takes place for approximately 8 weeks beginning in January.

For updates and more about the program please visit [MDA’s Soil Health website.](#)

MAEF’S ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT



The Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc. is hosting the Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at the Oakmont Green Golf Course in Hampstead, Maryland. Join us for a relaxing day of golf with agriculture friends and help raise funds for students who are continuing their education in agriculture.

The 18-hole tournament is an exciting day of socializing with friends and a little healthy competition, while supporting the MAEF Academic Scholarship Fund. The tournament begins with registration and range balls available starting at 10 a.m., followed by a seated lunch at 11am and a shotgun start 11:30am. Following play, you will be asked to turn your score card into the staff and are welcome to socialize with MAEF staff and tournament attendees or head home. Tournament winners will be announced on social media as well as at the course. Player registration is \$125 of which a portion of it goes to our scholarship funds. We encourage you and your business to become a sponsor and support local students pursuing a career in Agriculture!

These deserving students received MAEF Academic Scholarships in 2023, through your generous contributions; Jaclyn Bryant of Frederick, Md., Sydnie Grossnickle of Union Bridge, Md., Makenzie Hereth of Woodbine, Md., Laura Maher of Essex, Md., Anthony Righter of Boyds, Md., and Meg Smolinski of Takoma Park, Md. The MAEF Academic Scholarship was open to rising junior or senior undergraduate or graduate students enrolled in majors leading to careers in agricultural education or Extension education. For more information, visit <https://maefonline.com/>

ENVIROTHON

A team of high school students from **Harford County** has won the 2023 Maryland Envirothon competition. The team from North Harford High School beat out teams from 13 counties with a winning score of 450 points out of 500 points. Teams from Allegany County (448 points) and Calvert County (441) placed second and third.





P Maryland Conservation **PARTNERSHIP PRESS**

is a quarterly newsletter published for and about the members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership: MD Department of Agriculture, MD Association of Soil Conservation Districts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, MD Cooperative Extension, and the State Soil Conservation Committee.

The deadline for articles is January 30, April 30, July 30 and October 30. Please direct comments or questions to the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts at 202-353-9733.

The members of the Conservation Partnership prohibit discrimination in their programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call 1-800-245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-

NACD APPLAUDS USDA BOLSTERING WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM

On Tuesday, June 27, 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the expansion of the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program. Since 2010, more than 8,400 producers in 48 states have teamed up under WLFW to conserve and enhance nearly 12 million acres of working agricultural lands. These efforts have provided substantial benefits for wildlife including sage grouse, monarch butterflies, American black ducks, and many more sensitive wildlife species.

WLFW expansion includes close alignment of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA), centered around WLFW Frameworks for Conservation Action. These frameworks are biome-level conservation strategies rooted in the latest science and best practices. Their research and conservation tools are used to align stakeholders and prioritize conservation actions to achieve landscape scale objectives and benefit both people and wildlife.

Successful implementation of these frameworks relies on the locally-led conservation delivery system, which engages landowners and operators to identify the most appropriate set of conservation actions on their lands. NACD applauds USDA's commitment to working lands conservation, which includes:

- \$500 million over 5 years to support landscape scale restoration via NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- Increased collaboration with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which provides for greater alignment with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

- Capacity building across the partnership to ensure there are sufficient resources to successfully develop and implement ecologically appropriate frameworks in key biomes across the country. These include existing frameworks for the: Great Plains Grasslands Biome, Sagebrush Biome, and Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands, and Savannas. Four new frameworks will also be developed: Western Migratory Big Game, Eastern Deciduous Forest, Eastern Aquatic Connectivity, and Southeastern Pine Ecosystems.

"NACD is pleased that NRCS is expanding WLFW frameworks for conservation action and dedicating resources over the next five years," said NACD President Kim LaFleur. "This strategy will provide producers and land stewards in critical biomes across the country the opportunity to voluntarily implement conservation that enhances wildlife habitats. NACD and conservation districts look forward to working closely with USDA and other partners to advance landscape scale conservation."

Read the full press release in [NACD's newsroom](#). Conservation districts, land operators, and partners can learn more by visiting <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/working-lands-for-wildlife>.

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