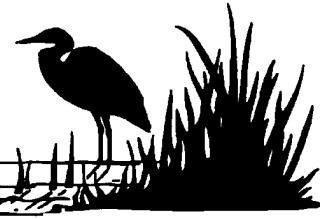


PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



WINTER 2025 VOLUME 32 ISSUE 1

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - BY JEN NELSON

Now is the Time for Leaders and Advocates

The last two weeks have seen the start of both the 2025 Maryland Legislative Session and the second Trump Administration and it's been a whirlwind! I'm writing this on January 30, and things have been changing so quickly that I'm certain that this article will be out of date by the time this issue is distributed. With that in mind, let's consider this a time capsule that illustrates the critical importance of effective advocacy and leadership.

First, let's talk about Maryland's legislative session- and more specifically, Maryland's proposed budget. Some good news for conservation is that despite a large structural deficit that has the Moore administration looking through all the sofa cushions for potential savings, the Governor has continued to make funding for cover crops and technical assistance a priority. Very concerning, however, is the lack of funding- as in \$0- for the Maryland Agricultural Cost Share Program.

The budget line item was zeroed out with this explanation: "Planned funding has been removed from FY 2026 the program has a sufficient existing fund balance to fund projects through FY 2026." While funding is planned to resume in FY27, Maryland's budget is projected to be similarly tight for multiple years and this is a slippery precedent for this critical funding to become unpredictable in the future. The analysis that current funds are sufficient to carry farmers over for a full year is also based on a number of assumptions, which brings me to the new Trump Administration...

In the short time since President Trump took office on January 20, his administration has issued a flurry of guidance related to federal funding. The Office of Management and Budget first issued a memo on January 27 that issued a temporary pause on funding for the green new deal, which may include the Inflation Reduction Act. A number of MASCD's and our partners' projects are supported at least in part through IRA funds, not to mention the Farm Bill funding that our farmers have been approved for to implement conservation projects.

On January 28, a judge issued a temporary block to the funding freeze, and on January 29, OMB rescinded the memo. MASCD's grants and agreements are still active as I write this, but the administration's first actions have cast uncertainty on the durability of our funding. Of course we'll keep the districts up to date on official guidance as it becomes available.

MACS funding and Farm Bill funding are structured to comple-

ment each other. Conservation projects can be cost-shared solely through either funding source, or they can be paired together for a farmer to receive up to 87.5% of the cost to implement a project. The Inflation Reduction Act had significantly increased the funds available through EQIP and CSP, which had impacted the need for MACS funding. Now, with some uncertainty about IRA funding specifically and federal budgets more generally, the ability of MACS funding to cover a full year is also in question.

There is no better messenger to advocate for conservation and the value of these funds than the farmers who have adopted conservation practices on their farms. 2025 has just begun, but the next several years are already shaping up to be more important than ever to reach out to your elected officials. Call them, write them, and invite them out to your farms. Tell your story and to urge our leaders to help us continue the amazing progress that Maryland has made in protecting our natural resources for the generations to come!

A MESSAGE FROM PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES

On January 8th, Maryland's 447th Legislative Session kicked off. This session, Governor Wes Moore and his Administration are tasked with the challenge of addressing Maryland's budget deficit and closing out the BRFA (Budget Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act.) Concerningly, funding for the MACS program is zeroed out in the Governor's proposed budget, citing that they have enough funds to carry over from FY25 into FY26.

Providence Strategies is tracking over 50 different pieces of legislation for the Association and will be holding our bi-weekly legislative calls with Soil Conservation District Managers and staff on Monday mornings at 9:00am (Next Meeting is February 10th). One bill to note is Senate Bill 176, introduced by the request of the Department of Agriculture, which would make a soil conservation and water quality plan available to the Maryland Department of Agriculture for enforcement action. The bill was heard in the Energy, Education and the Environment Committee Tuesday, January 29 and the association weighed in with a letter of information. Please join us on February 4th for MASCD Advocacy Day in Annapolis.

For the full 90-Day legislative report for MASCD please contact Mike Mason at mason@providence.llc.

Providence Strategies is the lobbying firm for the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

PERSONNEL NOTES

NRCS WELCOMES...

Lucia Gonzalez Goyco, Natural Resources Specialist, Cecil County

Rachel Heisey, Soil Conservation Technician, Harford County

Connor Horne, Soil Conservation Technician, Carroll County

Chelsi Lewis, Program Support Specialist for Carroll and Baltimore counties

Logan Arendale, Executive Assistant, State Office

Diamond Lennon, Management Analyst, State Office

NRCS TEMPORARY CHANGES...

Lauren Koerner, Acting District Conservationist for Wicomico and Dorchester counties

Edmund Robidoux, Soil Conservationist for Somerset and Worcester counties

NRCS BIDS FAREWELL TO...

Andrew Patterson, Soil Conservation Technician, Somerset County

Patricia King, Soil Conservationist, Wicomico County

ITEMS OF INTEREST

MARYLAND'S HEALTHY SOILS COMPETITIVE FUND

The Maryland Department of Agriculture will accept applications for our Healthy Soils Competitive Fund from December 2, 2024 - March 7, 2025.

If you have an innovative conservation idea for your farm, this program is for you! MDA provides financial assistance to qualifying farmers who want to adopt a range of soil health and agroforestry practices.

This competitive grant program awards selected applicants with up to \$50,000 to support 3 years of enhanced soil health practices. Individual producers and organizations that want to take the next step to improve soil health may apply.

MDA will accept applications from December 2, 2024 - March 7, 2025. Grant recipients will be announced by May 30, 2025.

You must provide proof of compliance with Maryland's nutrient management requirements when you submit your application. If you have any questions about compliance, please contact the regional nutrient management specialist serving your county

Financial assistance is available to manage conservation practices in new and innovative ways that improve soil health, yield, and profitability and capture carbon. Eligible practices include:

- Conservation Cover
- Critical Area Planting
- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Nutrient Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Prescribed Grazing
- Soil Carbon Amendment

The following agroforestry practices are also eligible for funding:

- Alley Cropping
- Hedgerow Planting
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment
- Silvopasture
- Tree and Shrub Establishment

Those eligible are:

- Individual farmers operating in Maryland
- Groups of farmers operating in Maryland
- Individuals or organizations conducting research with farmers in Maryland (*participating farms must be named in the application*)
- You may apply for funding for more than one conservation practice

Farm size is not a consideration for project selection and there are no minimum or maximum acreage requirements.

1. Grant recipients will receive a portion of the funds (not to exceed 40%) upfront, with the remainder distributed annually following verification of progress.
2. The allowable upfront payment will depend on the proposed scope of work.
3. Funds may not be used to cover overhead or indirect costs.
4. Funds may be used to:
 - Support implementation of conservation practices.
 - Cover staff and administrative time for organizations that provide technical support to producers.
 - Cover research costs.
 - Purchase or rent equipment that supports the adoption of soil health practices.

Funding for this program is provided by the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Moore Administration.



ITEMS OF INTEREST



AGRICULTURE PROTECTING THE LAND AND WATER

Meet the farmers and conservation professionals who are working to protect the natural resources we depend on. MDA’s videos spotlight Maryland farmers and the conservation projects they have installed to manage manure, safeguard local streams, build healthy soils and protect the Chesapeake Bay. Please watch, learn and share.



WATER CONTROL STRUCTURE
 St. Mary's County | [Watch Now on YouTube](#) | 3:19

Learn how installing a new water control structure is helping this St. Mary’s County farmer keep his soil on his field and out of the St. Mary’s River.

FAMILY FROM BALTIMORE COUNTY RECEIVE STATE’S MOST PRESTIGIOUS AGRICULTURE AWARD

Last month Governor Wes Moore and Maryland Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks announced the Deford Family of Baltimore County as the 2024 inductees into the Governor’s Agriculture Hall of Fame.

The family will be honored at the 55th Annual Taste of Maryland Agriculture event, being held on Thursday, February 6, 2025 at Maryland Live! Casino and Hotel.

“The DeFord family represents the best of Maryland, and I am excited to welcome them into the Governor’s Agriculture Hall of Fame,” said Gov. Moore. “Across twelve generations, the Deford family farm has kept Marylanders fed, protected the environment, and helped to grow our economy. When we say that agriculture is our state’s top industry, it’s people like the Deford family who remind us why.”

Created by former Governor William Donald Schaefer in 1991, the Governor’s Agriculture Hall of Fame honors agricultural leaders who exemplify high standards of achievement and commitment to the industry and their communities. Nominations are accepted at local University of Maryland Extension offices.

“It is an honor to welcome the Deford Family into the Governor’s Agriculture Hall of Fame,” said Secretary Atticks. “Their record of agricultural excellence, community engagement, and advocacy proves time and time again that they are a cornerstone of Maryland agriculture. I’m looking forward to welcoming them to the Governor’s Ag Hall of Fame this February!”

WETLAND RESTORATION
 Talbot County | [Watch Now on YouTube](#) | 3:59

Wetlands provide farmers with a range of water quality and enhanced wildlife benefits. Learn how this Talbot County farmer transformed unproductive areas of his farm into wetlands with the help of 100% cost-share.



The Taste of Maryland Agriculture celebration, sponsored by the Maryland Agriculture Council, is the state’s premier agricultural event, bringing industry leaders together with state and national legislators. Nearly 900 attendees are expected to gather to celebrate during this year’s event.

The event will feature a bounty of Maryland agricultural products served throughout the evening, with food and tastings from the state’s beer, wine and cidery supporters. In addition to the induction of the Governor’s Agricultural Hall of Fame family, 11 outstanding programs will receive Maryland Agriculture Council Educational Grants during the program.



FARMING WITH YOUR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
 Washington County | [Watch Now on YouTube](#) | 4:03

Nutrient management plans help farmers protect quality and improve farm efficiency and profitability. Meet a Washington County dairy and grain farmer who gets the most out of his plan.

The Deford family is the 56th inductee in the Governor’s Agriculture Hall of Fame. More information on each hall of fame family is available on the department’s [website](#).

SSCC Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

A MESSAGE FROM LORETTA COLLINS, SSCC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Thank you to all of the District staff and Boards that welcomed me kindly over the last several months. Meeting and getting to know all the folks working hard across the state to conserve our natural resources is my favorite part of the job.

Highlights of recent SSCC meetings are summarized below. For more details, SSCC monthly meeting minutes can be accessed on MDA’s [State Soil Conservation Committee webpage](#).

SSCC ADMINISTRATION

The SSCC approved its workplan for 2025 (subject to change based on timeliness and speaker availability).

Timing/Priority	Topic
Monthly	Supervisor Training: Short training as standing agenda item (5-15 min)?
	"Good News" stories from SCDs
On-going	Farm Bill/USDA Updates
	Budget shortfall: Impacts on agricultural programs
January	2025 Workplan Approval
	SSCC administrative housekeeping (closed)
February	Legislative Update (During-session) - 10 min
Feb/Mar	LEEF and BFF updates and opportunities
March	Forest Clearing Workgroup (1 st Update w/ periodic updates)
March-April	PFAS update
	Food Processing Residuals
	Pesticide labeling and conservation requirements
May	Bay Program Updates: 2024 Progress, WIP 2025, and Beyond 2025. What next? New goals? Update on model “re-run” and impact to the agricultural baseline
June	Legislative Update (Post-session)
	Property tax increases on equine facilities and other agricultural businesses that are being considered "commercial"
	Agrivoltaics- Overview of solar implementation on preserved farmland
June/July	MDE Updates: CAFO regulations and issues like on-farm incinerators (to satisfy CAFO permits)
	Consistency in regulations across the state on agri-tourism uses.
September	MDA updates: Nutrient Management regulations.
Sept/Oct	MACS Updates: Project cancellations (\$ reversion) & possible solutions, progress on small farm/low animal unit cost share
October	USDA Leasing Process (SCD offices) and Its Impact on Districts: Overview of timelines and requirements and how to navigate the process.
November	Reserved for priority topic
December	Workplan 2026 Draft Discussion
January (2026)	TBD in December

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY COST-SHARE PROGRAM (MACS) UPDATES

In December the SSCC had a discussion regarding concerns about MACS flat rate schedules for 2025. MDA has been encouraging transition to a component-based system to simplify flat rate project estimates. This approach was successfully piloted in Western MD last year. Several districts continue to have concerns about this transition and are hesitant to roll up their itemized flat rate estimates to consolidated components. To address these concerns and other pertinent topics, a MACS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will be re-established in February 2025. Speaker: [Jason Keppler, MDA](#)

(Continued on page 5)

SSCC MESSAGE

(Continued from page 4)

WOODLOT CONVERSION TO AG LAND

After some delays, the Forest Clearing Workgroup had its first meeting in January to seek clarification and guidance on forest/wooded lot clearing for ag production in regard to permitting requirements and oversight authority.

The group includes district managers from across the state, as well as representatives from MDE, DNR, and NRCS. The group will document clear and consistent guidance for district staff on communicating with landowners interested in clearing trees for agricultural purposes. Additionally, the group will clarify where enforcement authority lies to address acres cleared without proper permitting and/or land management. Periodic updates will be provided to the SSCC on the group's progress.

SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENTS

Allegany SCD – Carl E. Robinette
 Baltimore County SCD – Mark T. Duvall
 Carroll SCD – Kim Crone (county appointment)
 Carroll SCD – Greg Dell
 Garrett SCD – Dorsey R. Guard
 Prince George's SCD – Denise Daniels
 Harford SCD – David R. Doran
 Queen Anne's SCD – Richard Weaver

NACD PUBLICATIONS

NACD issues a number of publications to keep member conservation districts informed of recent association activity, the latest news affecting districts and their customers and newly available resources.

Publications are provided to districts free of charge.

eResource - eResource is an electronic collection of weekly news briefs sent to members and partners every Tuesday. You can read eResources online or subscribe to receive.

The Resource - NACD's quarterly print and electronic publication – The Resource – provides in-depth coverage of the association's recent activities and features columns from NACD's CEO, president, and closest partners.

Forestry Notes - NACD publishes Forestry Notes to highlight forestry issues of importance to districts and to showcase district-related forestry projects and success stories. Forestry Notes is funded through a cooperative agreement between NACD and the U.S. Forest Service.

Conservation Clips - Conservation Clips are a weekly round-up of the latest conservation news affecting members and partners. Clips are sent to subscribers electronically every Friday morning.

For more information, visit <http://www.nacdnet.org/news/publications/publications>.

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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 Service, 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) 720-5964 (TDD). Agencies in the Maryland Conservation Partnership are equal employment opportunity employers.

MASCD ANNUAL REPORT 2024 AVAILABLE

For a digital copy, <https://arcd.is/0zie4v>

