

# Montgomery Conservation Connection



Montgomery Soil  
Conservation  
District  
18410 Muncaster Rd  
Derwood, MD 20855  
301-590-2855

June 2021

## Calendar

Due to varying in person meeting requirements among the partner agencies at the Ag History Farm Park, the building will remain closed to the public until September 1<sup>st</sup>.

If you have a need to visit the building, we ask you call ahead to make an appointment so we can make the accommodation to meet with you and comply with building entry protocols. You will be required to do a COVID-19 Screening before entry is allowed.

**2021-22 Cover Crop Program Sign Up:**  
July 1<sup>st</sup> -16<sup>th</sup>—Please see our website for more information about the 2021-2022 Cover Crop program changes.  
<https://www.montgomeryscd.org>

**Montgomery County Fair**  
August 13<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>

**Holiday Observance Office Closures**  
Monday, July 5<sup>th</sup>  
Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup>

**Take a self guided Local Ag Tours!**

- Grape and Grain Tour
- Farms-2-Feast

See the **Office of Agriculture Website**  
<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ag-services>

**MSCD Annual Cooperators Dinner**  
Wednesday Sept 15<sup>th</sup>. Our Host this year is  
Butler's Orchard More details to follow



## The State of Maryland Crowns a New Envirothon Champion

The 2021 Maryland Envirothon was held virtually the week of April 26<sup>th</sup>. While the global pandemic forced the cancellation of our Montgomery County Envirothon for this year, the State Envirothon Program leadership developed an alternative approach to ensure the program could proceed. For 2021, the Maryland State Envirothon decided to conduct the competition in a total virtual setting and to make up for Counties not being able to hold local sponsored competitions, allowed multiple teams from each County to participate. This meant that each county in the State was permitted to submit as many teams as wanted to participate. Montgomery County sent 2 teams from Richard Montgomery High School.

Each participating high school team was made up of 5 members whereby they competed by completing one test per day from the four environmental testing disciplines. These testing categories were aquatics, forestry, soils and wildlife. Normally about 20 teams compete in the State Envirothon competition. A total of 50 teams from Counties across the State participated this year. It is important to note, as the number of teams increased this year, so did the level of competition!

We are delighted to report, that a team of students from Richard Montgomery High School received 1<sup>st</sup> Place honors. "Team A" members, Lynna Deng, Connor Palansky, Josh Goozman, Katie Yang and Sienna Burns are all high school Juniors and impressively finished with the top score in each of the four test areas including a perfect score on the soil's exam. This was a remarkable achievement especially in a year where the learning and test taking had to be done virtually. The Richard Montgomery High School "Team A" students will now participate in the National Envirothon which will be held virtually from Lincoln Nebraska in July. A second team, "Team B" from Richard Montgomery High School finished 5<sup>th</sup> overall in the State Competition.

Montgomery County last took the State title in 2003 and 2004 with teams from Montgomery Blair High School. The top Montgomery County Envirothon team has regularly finished in the top 5 at the State level for the past several years. We would also like to thank the Edward B. Byrd Foundation for their continued support of this program in Montgomery County. The Foundation has provided tremendous support which allows us to continue to host this event for our county students. We are extremely proud of our Montgomery County Teams and wish "Team A" the best of luck as they represent the State of Maryland in the National Competition later this summer.

We hope to return to a normal program in 2022. Teams will form in the winter and will begin to study for the County Envirothon which will be held in March of 2022 at the Agricultural History Farm Park. For more information on this program, contact the District at 301-590-2855.



*The Winning Team from Richard Montgomery H.S.*

## The District Welcomes These New Faces.....

### Linda Lewis, District Supervisor – County Executive Appointment



Linda Lewis, District Supervisor

In March, the District welcomed Linda Lewis as the County Executive's Appointment as District Supervisor to the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. Linda replaces Pam Saul who stepped down in January after serving 15 years on the District Board.

Linda and her husband Robert are the owners and operators of Lewis Orchard's. Their family-owned business has been a treasured part of Montgomery County, Maryland life since 1888. Robert and Linda Lewis are the fourth generation to own and operate Lewis Orchards Farm Market at the intersection of MD State Route 28 (Darnestown Road) and Peach Tree Road. While a local favorite for locally grown fruits and vegetables, their operation is an excellent example of farm stewardship. Linda and her husband take great pride in the food they produce for their community and have worked with the District over the years to develop conservation plans and implement conservation practices on their lands. Their farms are also enrolled in both the State and County Agricultural Land Preservation

Programs and participate annually in the County's Farm Tour and Harvest Sale. Linda also served two full terms on the County's Agricultural Advisory Committee where she was active in protecting farmer's interests when changes to County zoning, or other regulatory proposals created potential impacts to our farmers. The combination of Linda's collective knowledge involving Montgomery County land use, local knowledge of farms, her agricultural production experience and participation with District programs will make her a valuable member to the District Board. We are thankful for her willingness to serve. Please join us in welcoming Linda in her new role as District Supervisor. We are very happy to have Linda on board!

### Doug Tregoning, District Supervisor – U of MD Extension Appointment

The District also welcomes Doug Tregoning as the District's University of Maryland Extension appointment. Doug was appointed by the State Soil Conservation Committee in April of this year. Doug replaces Robert Stabler who served as the Extension appointment to the Board for over 30 years. While these are big shoes to fill, Doug's background working in the agricultural sector in Montgomery County will serve our Board well.

Doug brings a wealth of knowledge to the District Board. Not only does Doug have over 60 years of experience as a local farmer, but he has served better than 40 years as an agricultural educator with the University of Maryland in Montgomery County. Doug retired from his position as the Extension Director for Montgomery County in July of 2010. While retired, Doug has remained active in Montgomery County agriculture working with both the University of Maryland and the County's Office of Agriculture as an Agronomy Educator where he coordinates the Close Encounters with Agriculture Program, assists local producers with marketing grain products and ag education outreach. Doug is a graduate of West Virginia University where he has earned both Bachelor of Science (Magna Cum Laude - Agribusiness) and Master of Science (Agricultural Economics) degrees.

Doug is a well-respected member of the County's agricultural community and has invested his entire life to helping our residents better understand the importance of Agriculture. Whether through educational outreach programs such as the Close Encounters with Agriculture Program or agronomy workshops, his knowledge and expertise in agriculture and conservation will make him an excellent addition to the District Board. Please join us in welcoming Doug to the District Board, we are happy that the State Soil Conservation Committee appointed such an excellent resource.



Doug Tregoning with his wife Christine

## District Chairman, Robert Butz Begins 6<sup>th</sup> Term as District Board of Supervisor

In April, the State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC) reappointed Robert Butz to the Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Robert was first appointed by the SSCC in 1996 as an At Large Member. With this reappointment, Robert will begin his 6th term as a Board Supervisor. It's hard to believe he has served for 25 years now, but we are extremely fortunate to have Robert on board. His knowledge and expertise in agriculture, agribusiness, conservation and excellent leadership skills makes him an invaluable member of the Board which enables him to serve the agricultural and conservation community so well. Robert along with his brothers, are owners and operators of Windridge Farm located in the Poolesville Area and were recognized in 2019 as Conservation Cooperators of the Year. We are truly appreciative of Robert's commitment to soil and water conservation in Montgomery County.



Pictured from left to right: Justin Culler, Robert Butz, Jeremy Butz and Theodore "Teddy" Butz of Windridge Farm LLC.

## District Welcomes New MDA Conservation Planner

The Montgomery SCD office welcomes Kathleen Herr as the new MDA Soil Conservation Planner. Kathleen was hired by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), to assist Montgomery County farmers with their conservation needs. Over the next few months, Kathleen will be working with District Planners to get more familiar with County farms and the Conservation Desktop planning platform needed to assist our cooperators with their conservation planning objectives.

Kathleen graduated from the University of Maryland in 2015, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree (Magna Cum Laude) in Plant Sciences. Kathleen also has an Associate of Science degree (Summa Cum Laude) in Botany from Anne Arundel Community College. As a part of her undergraduate studies, she participated in research on the prevalence and impact of invasive plant species on rare species and natural communities in Maryland as well as assisted in a population genetics research project focused on the submerged aquatic grass, *Vallisneria americana*, in the Chesapeake Bay.

Professionally, she was employed by USDA ARS in their Mycology and Nematology Genetic Diversity and Biology Lab in Beltsville, MD. In this position she helped to curate the US National Fungal Collections herbarium and public database. She also performed a variety of literature research to document the occurrence of plant pathogenic fungi on agricultural crops, ornamentals, and native plant species from countries around the world.



Kathleen Herr, MDA Planner

Kathleen is very excited to join the MSCD team as she transitions her career focus from a research science to more applied sciences in the field of conservation. *"Making a difference in the lives of farmers in my home State of Maryland is something I am very passionate about, and I am thrilled to now have the opportunity to do so"* said Kathleen Herr, MDA Conservation Planner. We are very happy to have Kathleen join our conservation partnership team. Please join us in welcoming Kathleen to the District Office and Montgomery County.



## “Free” Fill Can Be A Costly Mistake



You may have some areas on the farm that you have always wanted to fill for various reasons; or you may be asked by a friend, neighbor or contractor to take some earth fill in order to make a little extra money. By doing so, you may dig yourself into a hole by trying to fill one.

If you accept fill material without obtaining the proper permits and plans, you may be subjected to fines, be required to obtain certain permits at considerable expense, and even may be required to remove all the fill material and transport it off your farm at your own expense. We bring this to your attention to illustrate how something obtained for “Free” can become quite expensive!

### **What is required of landowners for accepting earth fill onto their property?**

Under State Law, land disturbances of 5,000 sq. ft or more or the movement of 100 cubic yards of earth or more is a regulated activity and requires certain permits and plan approvals.

To comply with the law, a landowner must obtain a small land disturbance permit from the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services. Or, if the disturbance will be associated with an agricultural or conservation practice that is designed in accordance with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), the disturbance can be approved by the District through a District approved Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan along with specific erosion and sediment control requirements.

The District may be able to help with the utilization of earth fill as part of an agricultural activity through our District Earth Fill Policy. If you are considering an agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) or an approved agricultural practice that will need fill materials to implement the practice, our MSCD staff can assist you with sediment and erosion control authorization. Examples of Agricultural BMPs that may need earth fill include but are not limited to: waste storage structures, waterways and diversions, and agrichemical handling facilities. Approved agricultural practices also include pads for

barns or riding arenas provided they are designed and implemented in accordance with the FOTG standards and specifications.

**The first thing you should do before accepting any earth fill material is make a phone call to the Soil Conservation District.**

These discussions must take place before any material is brought into the farm- ideally, 8-10 months before the planned earth disturbance. When you call our office, please be ready to discuss with us the following information:

- **Do you have a current Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (also called a Conservation Plan or Farm Plan) for the farm?**

This is different from a Nutrient Management Plan. If you do not have a Conservation Plan, you will need to have one completed for your planned activity.

- **Why is the material needed and how much fill material is estimated for your project?**

Once you provide the District this information, we will evaluate your request to determine if the request fits within MSCD's Earth Fill Policy parameters. If your project can be approved through our fill policy, we will make a site visit to determine if there are any resource concerns regarding the project. In projects involving agricultural structures, our staff will determine if the chosen site is the best site available. Please be advised that the District may deny a request if the District determines the site is inappropriate due to soils, drainage, slope, as well as potential environmental impacts. We will work with you to determine a more appropriate location.

We draw this information to your attention as a cautionary tale as the repercussions for not having this conversation with District staff ahead of time can be very costly. If a Sediment Control Inspector visits your property due to a complaint, they have the authority to issue a stop work order, a citation, and/or require the application for an engineered sediment and erosion control plan. Citations can run hundreds of dollars and will require a day in court. Engineered sediment and erosion control plans can cost thousands of dollars. So you can see, the costs associated with “free fill dirt” adds up fast.

You should also be aware, that when you apply for sediment and erosion control through the County's Small Land Disturbance Permit, requirements under the Forest Conservation Law apply and require additional approvals. Requirements under the Forest Conservation Law could ultimately result in a Forest Conservation Easement being placed on your property.

By working with the District, our goal is to keep you from making these costly mistakes. While we cannot guarantee that your request will be granted, we can provide you with advice and guidance to keep you in compliance with the law.

If you have questions regarding conservation planning on your farm or a project that involves earth disturbance or fill, please give the MSCD office a call at 301-590-2855.

## MDA Announces Increased Cost Share Assistance for Farmers Installing BMPs



On April 14, 2021, Governor Larry Hogan signed SB 344 into law. This change in State Law will now allow the Maryland Department of Agriculture, through its Maryland Agricultural Cost Share Assistance Program (known as MACS), to provide up to 100% State funding assistance for certain Agricultural Best Management Practices eligible under this program. The current program that provides cost share assistance available to farmers is capped at 87.5%. MDA is currently evaluating which Agricultural BMPs will be eligible for the increased level of cost share assistance. Some potential projects being considered for 100% cost share assistance include, but may not be limited to, land retirement, tree plantings and conservation cover all which provide a high nutrient reduction credit when compared to the cost of implementation.

Since MDA is highly focused on achieving the EPA mandated Watershed Implementation (WIP) goals, MDA believes the increase in cost share will help target those BMP's that have a low per unit cost to implement but provide a high per unit reduction. The law goes into effect on July 1, 2021 and whether you are an owner of land or operating under a lease agreement, the 100% cost share assistance would be available to all producers who meet eligibility requirements. The only exception involves the installation of satellite waste storage facilities. To receive funding for this BMP, the applicant must be the landowner.

With the rising cost of construction materials as result of COVID-19, the increased level of cost share assistance may help ease the pain of these rising costs.

MDA also announced that cost share rates for Poultry Manure Transport has increased to \$28 per ton for qualifying farms.

If you want more information about the MACS Program please contact the District Office (301-590-2855) for more information.



# Save the date!

MSCD Annual Cooperators Dinner is scheduled for Wednesday, September 15, 2021

**Save the Date!**  
**2021 Cooperators Dinner**

Date: September 15, 2021  
Location Butler's Orchard  
Germantown, Maryland

Montgomery SCD  
1945 - 2020  
75th ANNIVERSARY

Come Help Us Celebrate Our 75th Anniversary

For More Information, please call the District at 301-590-2855

A Special Thank You to the Butler Family for Hosting Us for this Special Event!



# Montgomery Soil Conservation District 2020 MSCD Annual Report

## A Year of Coronavirus and Conservation

No one could have foreseen the impact COVID-19 would have on our society. This impact was far reaching, interfering with how the Soil Conservation District would be able to interact with our cooperators. Despite these challenges, the District endeavored to rise above these impacts to find ways to provide services across the County. This annual report outlines the numerous activities and assistances provided by our committed District staff to provide both technical and educational outreach assistance to our community.

## Conservation Cost-Share Assistance for Landowners

Leveraging private investments in conservation between farmers and government sponsored cost-share funding is an important component of the District. This service provides additional opportunities for landowners to implement practices that will improve water quality and the stewardship of their lands. These financial incentives represent an important link in the efforts to clean up our local streams and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. The District can offer to landowners a combination of state, federal and local cost-share assistance programs whereby we assist farmers with the protection of their soil, water, and other natural resources.

Utilizing funding from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service's Federal conservation programs, the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Maryland Agricultural Cost Share Program and the District's Conservation Cost-Share program, we were able to assist Montgomery County farmers in securing over \$814,253.84 in conservation funding in 2020.

One example of how we assist with leveraging funds for conservation projects can best be illustrated through the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Cover Crop Program. Cover Crops are one of the most important practices for cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay. Montgomery County farmers continue to embrace this valuable conservation program through their participation. For 2020, Montgomery County farmers enrolled 18,147.80 acres of cover crops of which 14,276 acres were certified for cost share payments totaling \$350,869.50

## District's Commodity Cover Crop Program Popular with Local Farmers

In 2017 the commodity cover crop program was discontinued at the state level. To fill this conservation program gap, the District funded the first commodity cover crop program. In the Spring of 2020, 3,871.7 acres were certified by producers for payment under the 2019-20 program. This resulted in a total payout of \$58,075.50. For the 2020-21 program year, 3,800 acres of commodity cover crops were fall certified. This will provide a total of \$57,000 in program payments for farmers from our program later this year. It seems that in recent years, weather more than any other factor is impacting the cover crop programs. What used to be the exception, seems more like the rule when it comes to the weather. The 2020-2021 season saw less than ideal planting conditions in the late fall, leading the state to extend program deadlines provided the cover crop established would not be killed down until after May 1<sup>st</sup>.



Given these continued weather-related uncertainties, we should continue to expect fluctuations in acres enrolled in these programs. It is also important to understand the farmers who participate in these cost share programs, commit considerable amounts of private capital as their investment in conservation to help meet nutrient reduction goals associated with the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. This investment demonstrates the agricultural community's commitment to the stewardship of their lands and to restoring the Chesapeake Bay.



### Outreach to Local and State Elected Officials

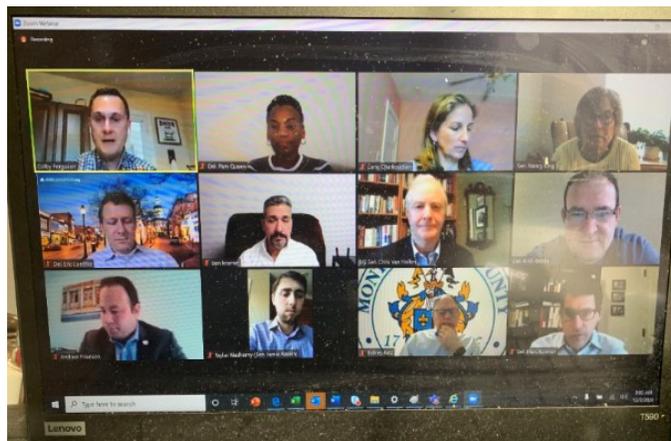
Although Montgomery County is the most populated County in the State of Maryland, it boasts a robust and diverse Agricultural Industry that employs over 10,000 people and contributes over \$287 Million to the economy. Our thriving agricultural sector is due primarily to our award-winning Agricultural Reserve, a 93,000-acre agricultural zone created in 1980 by the Montgomery County Council to preserve farm land and rural space in the north-western part of the County. The Agricultural Reserve comprises a third of the County's land mass and is ranked 3rd in the Nation for total easement acres protected. While we are blessed to have such a wonderful agricultural resource, there are many challenges that face our farmers. One these challenges are the unintended consequences created by new laws and regulations that can cause negative impacts to farmers that threaten agricultural viability and sustainability. The MSCD has embraced new approaches to conduct outreach that was intended to provide new opportunities to educate both local and State elected officials on the conservation efforts by our agricultural community.



*Supervisor Pam Saul meeting with Senator Craig Zucker from District 14 during MASCD Winter Meeting*

In February 2020, the Montgomery Soil Conservation Board of Supervisors descended on Annapolis for 2 days during the legislative session to meet with State Delegates and Senators to discuss proposed legislation as well as State funding priorities for the benefit soil conservation, water quality and a better environment. As you can imagine, with a County that has 8 State Senators and 24 Delegates, arranging meetings can be quite daunting over a 2-day period. During this time, Supervisors met with 7 State Senators and 18 Delegates briefing them on the accomplishments of the Districts and how they assist farmers in addressing resource concerns on their lands. Supervisors also discussed important legislation and the State funding needed to help agriculture meet the Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

Moving forward, COVID 19 would change the landscape on how the District would interact with legislators for 2020. Normally in December the District, along with our conservation partnership agencies, would host an annual event for legislators that provided an excellent opportunity for legislators to meet directly with farmers to discuss the importance of agriculture to the County as well as the many challenges facing the industry today. Due to COVID-19, this face-to-face meeting with legislators had to be reevaluated for this year. We felt this annual event was just too important to cancel and explored holding this meeting in a virtual setting. To accomplish this, District and our partner agencies reached out to the Maryland Farm Bureau to enlist their help by launching our annual event as a webinar. The format provided farmers a method for interacting and engaging panelists with questions important to Agriculture and Montgomery County.



*Montgomery County Federal, State and Local Legislators Participating in the Legislative Webinar*

The event was held on December 3, 2020 and was well attended by both farmers, legislators or their representatives. The questions raised and responses given resulted in lively and informative discussions as well as follow up action items. This Legislative Webinar helped to demonstrate to farmers that Montgomery County Legislators are interested in hearing their views concerning important agricultural issues.



## 2020 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

### **Agricultural Conservation Programs**

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Planning: 34 Conservation and Water Quality Plans were developed for Montgomery County landowners to protect 2,706 acres of land for 2020. There are over 27,471 acres of farmland covered under current plans, of which the District has a 36,000 acre goal to reach by 2025. Based on latest WIP Implementation Progress reports, the MSCD is currently 76% in meeting the 2025 WIP goal. These planning efforts led to the implementation of 139 Best Management Practices on Montgomery County Farmland.

### **Technical Assistance to the Equine Community:**

The District continues to expand the availability of programs to our growing equestrian community. Travis Gorleski as the MSCD's Equine Resource Conservationist, who was hired by the District in 2019 continues to provide excellent conservation technical assistance and outreach to our equine community.



*Travis Gorleski Equine Resource Conservationist*

Mr. Gorleski's wealth of knowledge and experience as a Equine Conservation Planner provides our Equine Community with an excellent resource aiding them with their conservation planning and other technical assistance needs. Listed below are some of the more notable achievements Travis has accomplished during this reporting period.

### **Equine Conservation and Education Outreach:**

- Regularly attends the Maryland Horse Industry Board meetings
- Participated in MDA Manure Composting Webinar (Oct 2020)
- Conducted "Leap into Conservation" Pasture Walk and Workshop (Feb 2020)
- Resource Profession at Montgomery County Close Encounters with Agriculture Program
- Resource Profession is County S.T.E.M Teacher Virtual Field Trip (July 2020)

### **Conservation Planning:**

- 18 Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans completed/approved.
- 544 acres of conservation plans completed with an additional 380 acres in the planning queue.

### **Conservation Best Management Practices completed/implemented:**

- 7 cooperators from obtaining and implementing nutrient management plans
- 5 cooperators with sediment and erosion control guidance
- 5 cooperators with sediment and erosion control guidance
- 3 cooperators with planning and implementing rotational grazing systems
- 2 cooperators with exclusion fencing to keep animals out of streams
- 2 cooperators with brush management and farmland reclamation
- 1 cooperator in obtaining Maryland FSCAP certification

### **On Site Evaluations Completed:**

- Between June 2020 and April 2021, Travis has completed 42 on-site conservation land evaluations.

### **Support and Technical Assistance for Local Agricultural Products**

The locally grown food production and organic farming movement continues to grow in our area. Consequently, so did the need of the District for conservation technical assistance. During 2020, the District provided technical assistance with 7 high tunnel installations as well as providing conservation planning to these urban and suburban farms, including associated best management practices and nutrient management planning coordination with Extension. Providing cost-share programs and technical assistance to all these areas of agriculture will continue to be critical components of our conservation efforts throughout Montgomery County.

**Best Management Practice (BMP) Implementation**

Following is a list of the some of the more notable practices completed by MSCD Cooperators in 2020.

Code	Practice	Extent	Units
560	Farm Access Road	1,520	FT
575	Animal Trails and Walkways	200	FT
314	Brush Management	0.5	AC
317	Composting Facility	1	NO
327	Conservation Cover	80.61	AC
342	Critical Area Planting	0.2	AC
342A	Critical Area Planting - HEL	3	AC
342B	Critical Area Planting -Construction	8.25	AC
RI-01	Dry Waste Storage	1	NO
412	Grassed Waterway	2.45	AC
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	0.28	AC
422B	Hedgerow Planting (Trees)	320	FT
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	30.7	AC
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	156	FT
516	Livestock Pipeline	520	FT
484	Mulching	0.6	AC
282D	Non Streamside Fence	1,830	FT
500	Obstruction Removal	0.5	AC
512	Pasture & Hay Planting	13	AC
590	Nutrient Management	482.5	AC
528	Prescribed Grazing	49.8	AC
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	18.8	AC
558	Roof Runoff Structure	1	NO
798	Seasonal High Tunnel System	16,520	SF
378	Sediment Control Pond	1	NO
578	Stream Crossings	2	NO
382C	Streamside Fence (35'+Trees)	900	FT
606	Subsurface Drain	1,940	FT
620	Underground Outlet	40	FT
633	Waste Recycling	6.4	AC
RI-17	Water Control Structure	4	NO
642	Water Well	1	NO
RI-04a	Watercourse Access Control	2,160	SF
614	Watering Facility	14	NO
	Cover Crops	18,147.80	AC
	Small Pond/Retro Fit Approvals	7	Pond
	Erosion & Sediment Control - Forest Harvests	1	Plan
	Erosion & Sediment Control - Fill Activities	3	Plans
	Erosion & Sediment Control - Ag Structures	5	Plans



Grass Waterway



Remote Waterer



Fencing



Ag Waste Storage

## 2020 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

### Conservation Education

With a population that exceeds 1 million people, there is an increased demand for conservation education to serve this growing community. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) Board and staff have made educating this growing population a top priority by promoting the future of agriculture and the conservation of farmland within the County. There are numerous programs and initiatives the District promotes to implement these objectives. A summary of these educational outreach programs are summarized below:

#### Award Winning “Close Encounters with Agriculture” Program Endures Despite COVID-19.

For over 28 years, the award-winning Close Encounters with Agriculture program has been offered each year to Montgomery County fourth grade students. Since 1993, over 90,000 students have participated with this hands-on educational program designed to teach students about modern agriculture, maintaining a healthy environment and leading a healthy lifestyle.

While the field trip associated with this program had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, a team of agricultural and educational professionals from the University of Maryland Extension: Montgomery County Office, Montgomery Soil Conservation District, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montgomery County Master Gardeners, Montgomery County Farmers, Montgomery County 4-H and Youth Development Program, and the Montgomery County Family & Community Educators came together to work on an alternative format to deliver this program to County students during the pandemic. These efforts have resulted in an incredible virtual version of our annual in-person program. This virtual format has provided an opportunity to enhance the program’s content as we were not limited by time constraints associated with implementing the program as part of an in-person field trip.

Much like our in-person program, the virtual lessons were divided into three sections: Agriculture, Nutrition, and the Environment. There are 12 video lessons in total, each with a brief video of less than 20 minutes in length, as well as short quiz questions and a variety of student activities and worksheets to help reinforce the lessons presented to students.

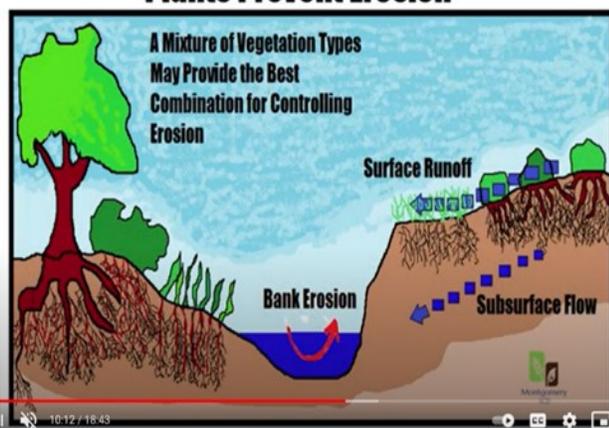
What is terrific about our virtual program, is that lessons do not have to be completed in any particular order and students can decide which lessons appeal to them along with the supplemental activities and worksheets. A benefit for teachers is that they can decide which lessons fit

into the needs of the class and a methodology is provided to measure what the students are learning through both pre and posttests. The program was offered to Montgomery County Schools in early December and we have received some wonderful comments from teachers.

*“My kids were completely engaged, and they were responding to the questions posed in the Beef Video. They willingly took the quiz and were excited that they could see how they did when they were finished. (I even learned a lot myself!)”,* said Lisa Menendez, Little Bennett Elementary School. Elizabeth Monzon said *“We did the Goats and the Plants we Eat. They were both EXCELLENT! The kids absolutely loved it. I will definitely try to do the other video lessons.”*



### Plants Prevent Erosion



While COVID-19 has created so many challenges and so many negative impacts, it did result in something very positive for our program. Given capacity issues that impact participation for our in-person program, the virtual program we created will enable outreach to every 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in the County. Furthermore, the program can be utilized by teachers outside the County that are looking for ways to incorporate Agriculture, Nutrition and the Environment as a new and exciting learning activity.

**Envirothon:** The MSCD has one of the most competitive county Envirothon programs in the State with the Montgomery County team finishing no less than fourth in the state competition in the past few years. One strength of our local program involves a very strong inter-jurisdictional partnerships with local resource professionals, that volunteer their time and talents in training and preparing student led teams on competition day.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 both the Local and State Envirothon Programs were suspended for 2020. While a disappointing for both the Students who participate and the District who promotes this program locally, we took this time out opportunity to pursue both grant and program donations to help sustain this program for years to come. The Envirothon program relies entirely on donations as it receives no governmental funding for this program. In 2020, the District was successful in receiving a \$1,500 grant from the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts to support our local Envirothon Program. The District was also successful in receiving a generous donation from the Ed Byrd Charitable Foundation that will support our local Envirothon program for years to come. As result of this donation, and in honor of our generous benefactor, the District renamed its Envirothon program to the Ed Byrd Charitable Foundation Envirothon.

#### **Agricultural Tours, Pasture Walks and Educational Outreach: Leap into Conservation Workshop (Feb 2020)**

No one could have foreseen the impacts COVID 19 would bring to the County by the Spring of 2020. The District was fortunate to have been able to conduct an important Equine Conservation Educational Outreach Event before gathering of this type would become prohibited for health concerns. Our equine winter session entitled, **Leap into Conservation**, was held in late February 2020 and was attended by more than 50 equine operators from across Montgomery County. This winter session was made possible through the District's cooperative partnerships with the University of Maryland Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and our gracious hosts, Dave and Ellen Quirk of Blue Moon Farm in Damascus, Maryland. The Quirks have been benefactors of funding made possible through the District's Local Conservation Cost Share Assistance Program. As recipients of these Conservation Grants provided by the District and as participants in our Equipment Share Program, the Quirks were excited to showcase the conservation measures implemented on their farm with the assistance of the Soil Conservation District. The event was also used to demonstrate various conservation equipment that is available through the District for use on smaller operations. In addition to these demonstrations, there was also several presentations that discussed the benefits of temporary fencing and how it can be used to divide pastures and improve grazing efficiency, the ease of installation as well as how cost share assistance programs are available for conservation practices through the District.

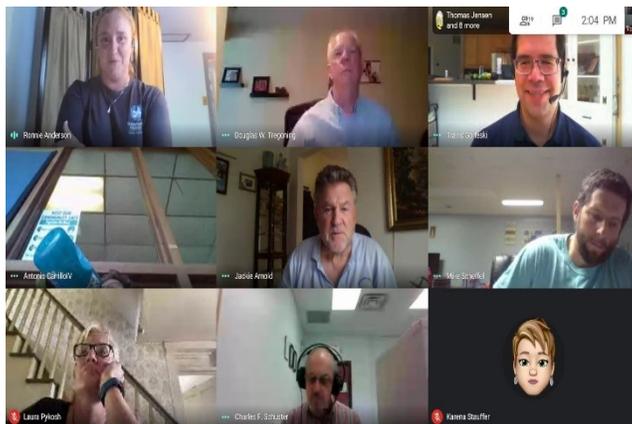


*Chuck Schuster, Retired Extension Educator Demonstrates Use of District's Native Seed Drill*

## 2020 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

### The Montgomery District Goes Virtual with County Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (S.T.E.M) Teachers Program

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture (OAG) and University of Maryland Extension-Montgomery County participated in a Chesapeake Bay Foundation sponsored a mini course for Montgomery County S.T.E.M teachers. Last year, the program consisted of visits to Montgomery County farms where participants learned about Montgomery County Agriculture and the role farmers play in protecting the Chesapeake Bay. Much like every part of our lives that have been impacted by COVID-19, programs like these were also affected. This year's program was conducted in an exclusively virtual environment. Over the course of 2 ½ hours, County S.T.E.M teachers learned about a variety of agricultural topics detailing the importance of the industry, the challenges farmers face and how farmers play the pivotal role in the conservation of our natural resources. S.T.E.M teachers learned about how COVID-19 impacts extended into agriculture and how the virus created disruptions to our food supply. They learned about the programs that were developed to help provide assistance to both large and small-scale producers.



Montgomery County S.T.E.M Teachers Learning about Agriculture and Conservation of Natural Resources

S.T.E.M teachers were treated to a presentation about conservation programs. Including a video demonstration of a no-till drill in action and explained what conservation tillage is along with a multitude of benefits this preferred tillage method provides. Teachers learned about the importance of planting cover crops, different types of BMPs farmers implement and the nutrient reductions of nitrogen and phosphorus associated with the implementation of conservation practices. Teachers learned how agriculture has evolved over the years in the County and the role County Extension plays in educating farmers in the application of new technologies. The training concluded with an overview of the County's commercial horticulture industry, small scale agriculture, nutrient management and a terrific presentation on the County's agricultural industry.



Example of a Structural Conservation Practice Implemented by Farmers

Ideally, we prefer the opportunity to take teachers out to farms where they can learn about agriculture and see what farmers are doing first hand; however COVID-19 has changed the ways we can safely interact with people. By having a virtual format, it provided an excellent alternative to educate teachers about agriculture. We are hopeful that next year we can return to a more normalized environment that will allow us to provide hands-on agricultural tours for the teachers. Given the circumstances, the training day with our S.T.E.M program teachers was well received by all that attended virtually.

### Cooperators Dinner:

Unfortunately, COVID-19 forced the cancellation of our annual Cooperator's Dinner and 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. This important District event allows everyone to take a break from their day-to-day activities, to gather and celebrate soil and water conservation here in Montgomery County. Our Cooperator's Dinner also allows the District to recognize Conservation Leaders through local District Awards. We did not want to allow COVID-19 to inhibit us from recognizing our Conservation Leaders in 2020. In October of 2020, the District held a private gathering, adhering to CDC and County outdoor gathering guidelines to recognize our Conservation Leaders.

### Laytonville Landscaping Honored as the District's Cooperator of the Year

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District was pleased to honor Laytonville Landscaping Inc. as the District's **2020 Cooperator of the Year**. Laytonville Landscaping Inc is owned and operated by the Doug Lechluder and family. Doug Lechluder and the Laytonville Landscaping Inc family are excellent examples of conservation leaders within the agricultural community of Montgomery County.

Mr. Lechluder has been proactive partner when it comes to addressing resource concerns on his farms. Some of the more notable conservation practices that have been implemented include: the installation of three grassed waterways, a roof runoff with underground outlet system, a gravel dripline with underground outlet on another barn. He has also utilized both the MACS & EQIP program for cost share assistance for installing Agricultural Best Management Practices on his farms as well as established buffers between cropped and sodded areas and along riparian areas that he has installed and maintained at his own expense and is in the construction phase of an agricultural chemical handling facility, participates in both the MDA Cover Crop and District's Commodity Cover Crop Programs. Doug also is agricultural leader off the farm as he serves on numerous agricultural committees and organizations, including County's Agricultural Advisory Committee, where he serves as the Committee's Chair, the Maryland's Agricultural Commission and Maryland Turf Council to name a few. He is a proven leader in promoting soil and water conservation as well as a sustainable agricultural industry in Montgomery County and throughout the State and is well deserving of this recognition. It is with all these achievements in mind that the District proudly recognizes and congratulates Laytonville Landscaping Inc, as the District's **2020 Cooperator of the Year**.



*John Zawitoski, District Manager, Doug Lechluder and Charlotte Brewster, District Conservationist Presenting the Cooperator of the Year Recognition to Laytonville Landscaping, Inc.*

### Blue Moon Farm Honored as the District's Equine Cooperator of the Year

The Montgomery Soil Conservation also recognized Blue Moon Farm, as our **2020 Equine Cooperator of the Year**. Blue Moon Farm is located in the heart of one of Montgomery County's thriving equine districts. In just three years, Blue Moon Farm and its owners, Dave and Ellen Quirk have taken a ten-acre hayfield and developed it into shining example of farm stewardship within the county's equine community.

Like many new operations, Blue Moon Farm first came to the Soil Conservation District seeking technical assistance and design ideas for the layout of their farm. This request for assistance came during a period of transition for the Soil Conservation District's Equine Program that saw Blue Moon Farm working with several layouts and different planners before arriving at its current form.

Through all this the Quirks always stood ready to conserve, explore, and educate themselves in new and innovative approaches to equine management. To date, Blue Moon Farm has seen the installation of a number of best management practices including: Roof Runoff Control and Conveyance, Nutrient Management Plan Implementation, Pasture Renovation, Prescribed Grazing System, Enhanced Grazing using Temporary Fence, Heavy Use Area/Dry Lot Management and Manure Composting and Recycling. The Quirks have been excellent cooperators and are always eager to explore innovative ways to improve their pastures and overall operation and we are fortunate to have such great conservation partners and proudly recognize Blue Moon Farm as our **2020 Equine Cooperator of the Year**, as an honor well earned.



*Charlotte Brewster, District Conservation, Ellen and Dave Quirk, John Zawitoski, District Manager, & Travis Gorleski, Equine Conservation Planner Present Equine Cooperator of the Year to Blue Moon*



# 2020 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

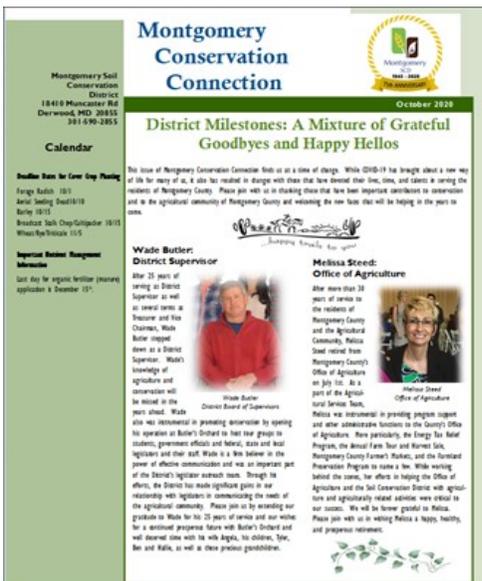
## Social Media Outreach: Website, Facebook, Twitter and Newsletters

Most of us use some form of social media every day - whether it is for personal communication, self-promotion, or marketing, we use it religiously. Humans are creatures of habit but are also opinionated and impatient. Those two traits alone are the reasons why social networks thrive. People want the news fast and they want to talk about it now. During FY20, the District continues to make the investment in utilizing social media to help promote the District and to use the platforms to “get information out” to inform the public in short concise information blasts.

The District also completed the redesign of the **District website**, with the objective to have our information in a format that was more accessible, reader friendly and aesthetically pleasing. The District greatly expanded our social media presence on **Facebook and Twitter**, which resulted in an increase of information and technical assistance requests from County landowners. In a normal month, we publish between 20 and 30 “articles” primed for social media publication. As a result, we have a steady stream of informational posts that are not only timely but also interesting to our browsers. The District has seen first-hand how this engagement increased interactions with our target audience.



Example of District Facebook Post



Our quarterly newsletter continues to be an excellent medium used to educate our clientele. Each newsletter is carefully crafted to include articles designed to reach our audience in an informative and entertaining format. The District receives positive feedback about the content and the enjoyment subscribers receive by reading it. We currently have over 1,000 mailed subscribers. We also provide our internet guests electronic versions that are available free of charge through the District website.

## Other Agricultural Educational Outreach Initiatives:

The District produced 4 educational videos that were utilized as a part of our conservation education outreach. The District is very proud of the quality and production value of each video that was written, filmed, edited, and produced all in-house utilizing, District Staff's time and talents. Below are links to each of these video presentations.

### Environmental Videos for Children: Close Encounters with Agriculture Virtual Field Trip

- **The Earth Beneath Your Feet: Why Projecting Soil is So Important**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLP8PcQH1c&feature=youtu.be>
- **Wildlife Habitat: The Key to a Healthy Ecosystem**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta50HWYHJas&feature=youtu.be>

### Virtual Farm Tour for Adults: One Acre Farm — Office of Agriculture

- **One Acre Farm Virtual Farm Tour**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReiBgu81aHM>
- **Composting Horse Manures — MDA Horse Management Webinar**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J05hTujLYf8>

### Measures of Success

The best measure of our success comes from the Cooperators that have requested our assistance. District Supervisors and staff endeavor to provide quality and timely conservation technical assistance to our Cooperators. Our best conservation salesmen are the cooperators that have good experiences in working with the District. They help promote our assistance through their peer to peer network and is measured by the number of Cooperators that continue to request our assistance.

Another measure of positive gains achieved by the District, can be best quantified through the awards and other recognitions we have received this past year. During 2020, the District received several awards from the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) and other District Partners. Our District takes great pride in providing excellent customer service to our Cooperators while promoting Soil Conservation and Water Quality Protection educational outreach to the residents of the County. In July of 2020, the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation District's (MASCD) recognized the Montgomery Soil Conservation District for several of the Association's top awards. The District Newsletter, "*Montgomery Conservation Connection*" was honored as *Outstanding Newsletter*. Our newsletter is consistently recognized for its outstanding content as we have received this top honor 4 out of the past 5 years. The District was also awarded the *Conservation Education District of the Year*, an honor we have received for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row. Through programs like the Close Encounters with Agriculture, the State Envirothon and other educational outreach presentations to both public and private schools, environmental and S.T.E.M programs, the District is making a tremendous difference in educating the next generation of policy leaders, environmental professionals, business leaders and farmers. These programs highlight the shared responsibilities every individual has in protecting and enhancing the stewardship of the land. This past year, the District has reached in excess of 5,000 students and adults and was a key component of the District's environmental educational outreach efforts.



*The Montgomery Soil Conservation District Award Winning Team*

The commitment to excellence is further demonstrated by the MASCD recognizing James "J." Harne as this year's recipient of *MASCD's Outstanding Employee Award*. J. Harne is well deserving of this recognition. "J". is a valued asset to the MSCD conservation team as well as to the State's Conservation Partnership. While we are very proud of these award recognitions by our State Association, the one we are most proud of is being recognized as the *MidAtlantic Farm Credit Outstanding District of the Year*. This Award is presented to the District that exhibits comprehensive soil and water conservation programs, demonstrates leadership in promoting and achieving conservation throughout their District, and annual fulfillment of the District's mission. We are very appreciative of MASCD recognizing the Montgomery District for this Award. Being recognized by your peers as the top District among 24 District's in the State is indeed quite the honor!

This year represented tremendous challenges for Soil Conservation District's across the State. Despite how COVID-19 ravaged our entire State, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District rose to the challenge and found innovative ways to maintain our level of services and educational outreach during a global pandemic. We are very proud of what we were able to accomplish during this health emergency and these efforts further document the District's commitment in leading the effort to help our cooperators advance their resource conservation needs that will ultimately result, in the intended outcome, where the District plays a role, in preserving the future of agriculture in Montgomery County as well as enhancing the conservation of our agricultural land for years to come.



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***The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status.***