

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

## Calendar

Upcoming 2021 classes sponsored by University of Maryland Extension : <https://extension.umd.edu/montgomery-county>

**Beginning Farmer Success Course Registration Deadline**  
February 5th  
<https://extension.umd.edu/montgomery-county/agriculture/small-farm-program>

**Virtual Fruit Grower Meeting**  
February 10th  
<https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-02-10-0800-virtual-fruit-grower-meeting>

**Office Closed: Federal Holiday**  
Feb 15

**CFAP 2 application or producers who need to modify an existing app can do so between**  
Jan. 19 and Feb. 26

**Nutrient Management winter application prohibited period ends**  
February 28

**Annual Implementation Reports Due**  
March 1

**Kill down/suppression for Cover Crops takes place**  
March 1 thru June 3. Farmers who terminate cover crops after May 1, 2021 may be eligible for an Extended Season incentive payment.

**How to Write a Nutrient Management Plan Webinar. U of MD Extension: March 8th—12th**  
Registration is required  
<https://go.umd.edu/March2021-HTWNMP>

**Virtual Maryland Envirothon Competition Begins**  
April 26th

**Webinars at Anytime Offered by the University of Maryland Learn and Earn CEU's**  
[mda.maryland.gov/resource\\_conservation/Pages/asynchronous.aspx](https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/asynchronous.aspx)

# Montgomery Conservation Connection



Montgomery  
SCD

February 2021

## *Conservation Leader Steps Down After 30 Years*

By John Zawitoski

After more than 30 years of serving on the Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors, Robert “Bobby” Stabler is stepping down so that he can focus on family and Pleasant Valley Farm which he shares with his son and granddaughters. When Bobby told me that it was time for him to step down, I could not help but think back to when I first met him. It was in the early 90’s when I attended my first District Board Meeting as the Patuxent Area Coordinator for the Maryland Department of Agriculture. I remember being so nervous as I looked across the room because I was in the presence of some of the County’s best farmers and agricultural leaders. The Board then was comprised of Chairman, George Lechluder, Chester Leishear, John Richardson, Howard Williams and Bobby Stabler. George always liked to give the “new guy” a razzing when they attended their first meeting. While all in good fun, I remember Bobby being so gracious in welcoming me to the County and from there, not only did our professional relationship grow, so did our friendship.



*Robert Stabler, Pleasant Valley Farm, Inc.*

Bobby is a true leader in the Agricultural Community. His knowledge of agriculture, soil conservation, land use and public service are unparalleled. One thing I appreciate most about Bobby, is his humility. Always wanting to find ways to help people and never making anyone feel uncomfortable, even in the most difficult of situations. His sense of personal responsibility in wanting to do things the right way was highly evident not only with how efficient Pleasant Valley Farm is operated but through his commitment to soil conservation through the numerous best management practices implemented on the farm. Bobby’s commitment to agriculture and soil and water conservation was also evident by the time he provided educating legislators, government officials, teachers, and students that was extended through tours of the Pleasant Valley Farm Operation as well as giving back to the community with support to the County’s 4-H program and serving on the Montgomery County Fair Board. These days it becomes all too easy to get caught up in the moment and to make situations more difficult than they need to be. I am going to miss Bobby’s common-sense approaches to problem solving and the stability he brought in his role as District Supervisor. He is well respected by his peers and fellow agriculturalists not only across the County but throughout the State of Maryland. Bobby would be the first to tell you that agriculture has provided him and his family a great way of life and serving his community was just one way of giving something back. He will be missed on the Board in the years ahead. Please join me, in wishing Bobby the best in his future endeavors and thank you Bobby for your years of service to Montgomery County.

## 2021 Ushers in More Changes to the Montgomery District



### **Pam Saul, District Supervisor and Treasurer Steps Down After 15 Years of Service to Montgomery County**

By John Zawitoski

After 15 years of serving as District Supervisor as well as several terms as treasurer, Pam Saul has stepped down effective December 24th 2020. Pam has been serving as the County Executive's Appointee to the Board since being first appointed by then County Executive Douglas Duncan in 2005.

Pam has been an extremely valuable member of the District Board while juggling her responsibilities with her family's Rolling Acres Farm in Sunshine. Her knowledge of the Equine industry, agriculture and conservation will be missed in the years ahead. Pam has been a tremendous asset to the County's agricultural community as she was always willing to open her operation up to discuss with legislators and other governmental agencies the positive things farmers were doing in the name of conservation and a healthy environment. She possessed the unique ability to convey complex environmental issues with local, State and Federal legislators. She helped to fortify significant gains and improved interpersonal relationships with legislators by communicating the needs of the agricultural community. On a personal note, Pam will be sorely missed as she has been a tremendous asset to me through her support in my role as District Manager. One thing I will remember most about Pam, is her passion for agriculture and public service. She never once hesitated to step up to help on any issue, whether to help take registrations at Cooperators Dinners, or to present testimony at public hearings before our legislators. Her goal was to make sure the efforts and accomplishments by farmers in soil conservation and enhanced water quality were being acknowledged by policy makers.

Please join me by extending gratitude to Pam for her 15 years of service and our wishes for a continued prosperous future as she pulls up stakes and heads to the Sunshine State for a well-deserved retirement. We will be jealous of her during these cold and windy winter days and nights. Florida sounds like the place to be right now. Best wishes to Pam and her family.

### **MSCD Welcomes MDA Soil Conservation Technician Udeni Leanage**

The Montgomery SCD office welcomes Udeni Leanage as the new Soil Conservation Technician. She will work alongside our lead technician, Paul Meyer and R C & D Soil Conservation Technician, Chris Zawitoski, and will be responsible for surveying, staking, and construction inspection along with designing conservation best management practices for our cooperators. Since joining MDA in 2019 she has worked on and completed Ag conservation projects in several County Soil Conservation Districts. Most recently she was stationed in Charles County. She is a graduate of Rutgers University with a degree in Civil Engineering in 2004. Her work on various municipality/city watershed improvement projects got her interested in conservation work for the State. We are extremely fortunate to be able to bring Udeni onboard. Her experience in the field and knowledge of computer drawing will be a tremendous asset to the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. Welcome Udeni, we are glad you are here.



### **NRCS Provides Temporary District Conservationist support to MSCD**

Many of you are aware that our NRCS District Conservationist, Charlotte Brewster is on extended leave. To fill this technical assistance gap, NRCS has appointed Mitchell LeMueix and Sam Engler to serve as the Acting District Conservationist for the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. Mitchell's last day was Friday, January 15, 2021 and Sam Engler began his tour of duty on Tuesday, January 17, 2021. Charlotte will return to us in March. In the meantime, If you have questions about conservation work on your farm or about specific federal programs for cost share, you may contact the Montgomery Soil Conservation District main phone line and we will get you in touch with the acting District Conservationist at 301-590-2855. We are very appreciative to both Mitch and Sam for their help during Charlotte's absence.

## Cover Crops: A Cost Effective Nutrient Managing Conservation Tool

### Cover Crop Update – Spring 2021



Last fall Montgomery County Farmers reported 17,637 acres as part of the State Cover Crop program. This represents a 500 acre decrease from the fall of 2019, and is attributed to wet weather that provided less than ideal planting conditions. In response to these weather factors, the Maryland Department of Agriculture extended the final planting date for cover crops two times. First from November 5<sup>th</sup> to November 12<sup>th</sup> and then an extension from November 13<sup>th</sup> all the way to December 1<sup>st</sup>. This certainly helped to increase acres planted to be near those reported in 2019. One important program requirement associated with these planting extensions, it that the cover crop acres planted during the final extension, Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>-Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, will require the farmer to delay cover crop suppression until after May 1<sup>st</sup> of 2021 to qualify for reimbursement.

In looking ahead to this spring, the cover crops planted before the extended planting dates may begin suppression after March 1<sup>st</sup> unless a later kill down date is required based on your planting method or date. As a program reminder, nutrients may not be applied to cover crop acres until after March 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### Cover Crops Subject to Delayed Suppression Program Requirements

As highlighted earlier, Some cover crop acres may not be killed down until May 1<sup>st</sup>. These include acres intended for the delayed suppression bonus and acres planted between November 13<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> of 2020. Spring certification of cover crop kill-down or harvest must be submitted to your local Soil Conservation District by June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Options for end of winter suppression include green chopping (for on farm use only), plowing under, or use of a burn-down herbicide. Grazing of cover crops after they are well established is allowed however grazing is not an acceptable spring termination method. Green planting or planting through a living cover crop that is intended for the delayed suppression incentive is not allowed. The field will however be eligible for the base cover crop payment after suppression of the cover crop unless originally planted between November 13<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you to all who participate in the Cover Crop Program. The nutrient reduction credits gained from this best management practice are a critical component for the agricultural sector to reach the 2025 Chesapeake Bay reduction goals. As in years past, commodity cover crop acres harvested in Montgomery County will be eligible for the Water Quality Incentive Program reimbursement. While no longer eligible for reimbursement through the Maryland Department of Agriculture program, these acres do benefit water quality and help Montgomery County with the nutrient reductions required by the agricultural sector. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District would like to thank the County Council and County Executive for providing the funding for this cost effective nutrient managing conservation tool.



*No till planted cover crop following corn harvest*



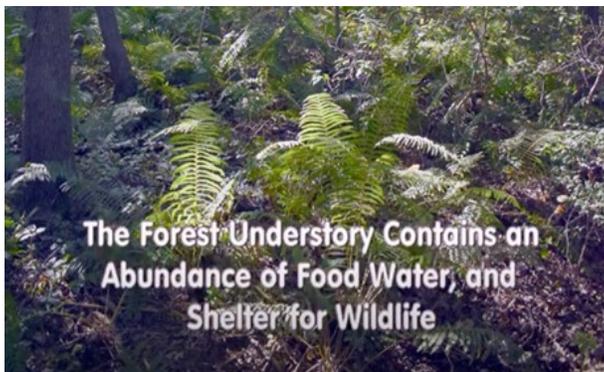
## Award Winning “Close Encounters with Agriculture” Program Endures Despite COVID-19.

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 in this hands-on educational program designed to teach students about modern agriculture, maintaining a healthy environment and leading a healthy lifestyle.

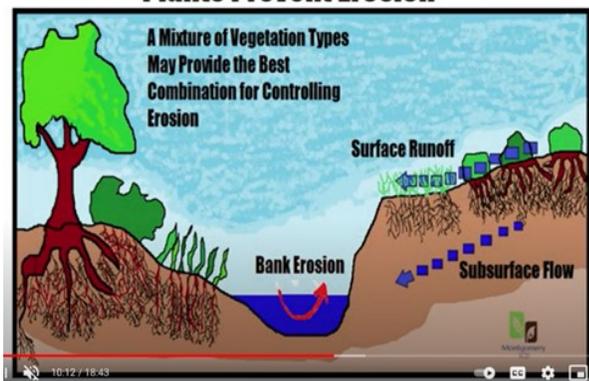
While the field trip associated with this program had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, a team of agricultural and educational professionals from the University of Maryland Extension: Montgomery County Office, Montgomery Soil Conservation District, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, Maryland National 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 for us to enhance the program’s content because 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 are 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 in the provided 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 mechanism is provided to measure what the students are learning through both pre and post tests. The program was offered to Montgomery County Schools in early December and we have received some wonderful comments from teachers..



### Plants Prevent Erosion



*“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!)” Lisa Menendez, Little Bennett Elementary School.*

*“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” Elizabeth Monzon, Little Bennett Elementary School.*

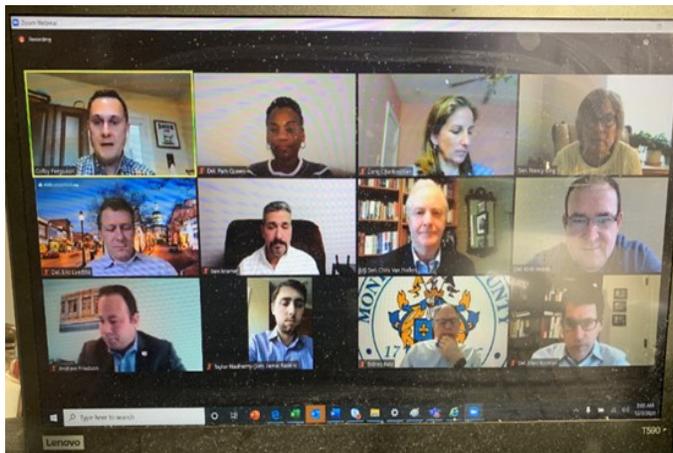
While COVID-19 has created so many challenges and so many negative impacts, it did result in something very positive for our program. Given capacity issues that impact participation for our in-person program, the virtual program we created will enable outreach to every 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in the 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. If you are interested in learning more about this program, or want to inquire as to opportunities to participate, please contact the District at 301-590-2855.

## Legislator Webinar, Offers an Alternative to Local Legislative Luncheon

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 northwestern 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 of these challenges are the unintended consequences created by new laws that threaten agricultural viability and sustainability. In recognition of the challenges that continue to face our agricultural community Montgomery County farmers, in partnership with the Montgomery Soil Conservation District, the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, University of Maryland Extension and the Montgomery County Farm Bureau have conducted an annual Legislative Luncheon. 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 remote setting. To accomplish this, the Legislative Luncheon Planning Committee 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.

The event was held on December 3, 2020 and well attended by both farmers and legislators or their representatives. The questions raised and responses given resulted in lively and informative discussions as well as follow up action items. The Legislative Webinar helped to demonstrate to farmers that Montgomery County Legislators are interested in hearing their views concerning important agricultural issues. They encouraged the elected officials to use them as a resource when they are developing new legislation or are deliberating on legislation that may impact agriculture. "This is an incredibly valuable event as witnessed by the turnout by our legislators and farm community" explained John Zawitoski, District Manager. "This event enabled the farm community to strengthen their relationships with legislators and I am very encouraged by the level of interest our legislators have with agricultural issues" commented Robert Butz, Chairman of the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. "Having an open dialog with our legislators continues to be critically important as the 2021 Legislative Session gets underway".



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

### Important Dates Concerning Winter/Spring Nutrient Applications

#### Winter Applications (December 16 - February 28 of the following year)

##### EMERGENCY PROVISION

Liquid manure only (operations w/ 50 > animal units). Solid manure must be stacked and spread later. Request for Emergency Waiver direct to NMP by calling 410-841-5959 or contact Regional Nutrient Management specialist. Application shall be made to existing vegetative cover maintained as such until March 1.

Application prohibited within 100' of surface waters, on slopes > 7 %, soil is saturated, ground is covered with > 1" snow or ground hard frozen > 2".

#### Spring / Summer Applications (March 1-September 9)

Inject or incorporate within 48 hours, except those operations managed to obtain the benefits of no-till farming. Application prohibited when soil is saturated, ground is covered with snow > 1", or ground hard frozen > 2". MDA reserves the right to require incorporation of organic nutrients on a case by case basis

## Winter Pastures: Green is Good, Sometimes....

Many Horse Pastures throughout Maryland and Montgomery County are looking a lot like this picture below right now. Often displaying shades of brown and tan,



with islands of green and hopefully, if the farmer has been keeping up their management, minimal weeds. We would all like to see more lush green grass and new growth bursting through the thatch right now, but unfortunately, dormant winter pastures are part of living in the Mid-Atlantic region.

This past Fall was good to Montgomery County pastures. In the picture depicted above, horses and goats were taken off the field in December and the grass was still growing. Periods of daytime temperatures hovering in the fifties kept the soil warm while plentiful rain kept it moist enough for the grass to have an extended growing season. Now with several weeks of temperatures at or around freezing, the tans and browns have moved in. But what about that green? Green in winter may not necessarily be a harbinger of a productive spring pasture. To understand why, it is a good idea to take a closer look at those “islands of green”. The results can provide important direction on what steps to take ahead of spring growth.



The picture below was taken from the same pasture. While there are some folded-up blades of fescue, much of that green was in fact winter weeds, such as chickweed, ground ivy, and buttercup. The picture, taken in Late January, shows that these weeds were still growing. Winter weeds can tolerate colder temperatures and frequent frosts and go into dormancy at lower temperatures than forages like orchard grass. Seeds are generally set in late Spring or early Summer, where they will wait near the surface until temperatures cool down in Fall. Winter weeds generally don't develop much surface growth until the Spring, making them hard-



er to detect. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) includes elements which maximize effectiveness against targeted pests while minimizing risk to crops and forages. One of the key factors in IPM is the “right timing”. To control these winter weeds and prevent seed setting while minimizing risk to forages, appropriate herbicides should be applied AFTER winter weeds begin growing again, but BEFORE forages begin growing again. When is that? It might even be right now! It is important to understand that chemicals should NOT be applied on snow covered ground.

Naturally, not all pastures behave the same. Whether your pasture is in a sheltered valley, a sunny slope, or the top of a hill where the wind never seems to stop blowing, microclimatic factors have a direct impact on what is growing and when it is dormant. To assist you in understanding, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District's technical staff can perform a pasture assessment and connect you with Nutrient Management, Grazing, and Weed Control specialists from the University of Maryland who can shed even more light on what management steps would work best for your operation. You can reach them by contacting the District at 301-590-2855 or by emailing the Equine Resource Conservationist at [travis.gorleski@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:travis.gorleski@montgomerycountymd.gov)

## Soil Testing and the Importance of PH

Maintaining soil pH is a crucial component of proper pasture and crop management. Unfortunately, it is often overlooked in favor of soil amendments that have a more immediate impact on plant growth. Indeed, after lime is applied, it may take up to six months for soil pH to be affected. This means that if you intend on planting a pasture or crop in August, you should apply lime as early as February of that year. The importance of maintaining your soil's pH in the range of 6.0-7.0 cannot be overstated. Soil pH does more than improve the growth of desirable species; it can also reduce the growth of weeds. Most of the weeds native to our area are adapted to thrive in the highly acidic soil of the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region. Raising the pH of our soil makes conditions less hospitable for such weeds. Moreover, a number of herbicides commonly used to control broadleaf and grassy weeds are locked up by the soil and thus less effective at pH's of less than 6.0.

Besides impacting the effectiveness of herbicides, maintaining a pH of between 6.0 and 7.0 also raises the effectiveness of fertilizer applications. This is because some of the most important components of soil fertility, including nitrogen, phosphorous, and sulfur become less available to plants when soil pH is outside that range. Thus, the application of sufficient quantities of lime is a practical way to get more for the money you put into herbicides and fertilizers. Lime comes in several forms, including the pulverized and pelletized varieties. When selecting what kind of lime to use, it is important to pay attention to the fineness of the lime. Finer limes are generally cheaper and affect the soil pH faster, but you may want to avoid them if you have animals grazing on your fields. Lime and fertilizer applications should occur no less than two months apart, and the time it takes for lime to soak into the ground varies depending on the amount of rainfall.

Just because your soil had a good pH twenty years ago doesn't mean you don't need to lime today. Due to acid rain and clay soil, our soil has a tendency to become more acidic over time. In some examples, a neutral pH can begin trending down within two to three years. This makes it all the more important that you get your soil tested regularly. For information about soil samples and proper sampling techniques, you can contact Natalia Salazar, U of MD Nutrient Management Advisor at 301-590-2840.

## Nutrient Management-Annual Implementation Reports Due March 1<sup>st</sup>

Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) documenting nutrient applications for calendar year 2020 are due to the Maryland Department of Agriculture Nutrient Management Program by March 1, 2021. New this year, farmers will have the option to file their AIRs electronically using the Maryland OneStop portal. The e-filing option became available on January 11, 2021 and can be accessed now to fill the annual AIR. Please visit [www.mda.maryland.gov](http://www.mda.maryland.gov) for more details.

### Short Explanation on How to File an Electronic AIR.

- The Maryland OneStop portal can be accessed at [www.onestop.md.gov](http://www.onestop.md.gov).
- From the home page, you can select to browse by agency.
- Select the Maryland Department of Agriculture.
- You will need to register as a new user on the website if you have not utilized the portal previously.
- The electronic forms will look like the paper forms. All the same information will need to be completed.
- There will be a box for electronic signature at the end. Do not forget to sign prior to submittal.

A consultant may complete the forms for you however there is a special signature page if this occurs. The Maryland Department of Agriculture is encouraging all farmers to use the online portal if possible. Electronic submission will help prevent forms being lost in the mail and will provide an instant record of submittal. Electronic submission will also allow the agency to better track and record the data reported in the forms.

For farmers who want to continue to submit paper reports, PDFs will be uploaded to the [www.mda.maryland.gov](http://www.mda.maryland.gov) website early in January. Paper reports can be completed as usual and returned to the regional office. Please remember to include the account identification numbers of any parcels you picked up or lost in 2020. It is important to keep the list of account identification numbers up to date so that the acres in your plan are accurate.

If you have questions regarding the form or how to complete it, you should contact your nutrient management planner or the nutrient management regional specialist for your area. The contact information for the regional offices can be found at [www.mda.maryland.gov/resource\\_conservation/](http://www.mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/)



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