



# CONSERVATION MATTERS

Montgomery Soil Conservation District  
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## SUNNY RIDGE FARM COOPERATOR OF THE YEAR



*David Lechlinder and Drew Stabler receive the MASCD Cooperator of the Year Award from Hans Schmidt of MASCD (not pictured – Fred Lechlinder)*

At their 2011 Annual Meeting, the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) recognized Sunny Ridge Farm for their commitment to conservation and honored them with the Cooperator of the Year Award. This marked the first time that a Montgomery County Cooperator has won the award. Sunny Ridge Farm has been a leader in demonstrating that conservation practices can be an integral part of agricultural production. Congratulations to Sunny Ridge Farm.

## COVER CROP

Farmers throughout Maryland have been using cover crops as one way to reduce the amount of nutrients that end up in the Chesapeake Bay.



**Sign-up for this year's program is June 21<sup>st</sup> -July 16<sup>th</sup> and it is on a first come, first served basis.** The MD Department of Agriculture has \$18 million allocated for the program this year. The base rate for traditional cover crops is \$45 per acre. Additional incentives are available based on planting method, planting date and other factors. Farmers who would like to harvest their cover crop under the commodity program will receive \$25 per acre. **Last year farmers in Montgomery County certified over 13,000 acres!**

Thank you to all who participated and we hope to work with you again this year. Please visit our office to sign up, or check out the details of the program on MDA's website-[www.mda.state.md.us](http://www.mda.state.md.us)

## SAVE THE DATE - MSCD ANNUAL COOPERATORS DINNER

Mark your calendar for Thursday, September 6<sup>th</sup> to attend the 2012 MSCD Cooperators Dinner. The event will be held this year at Ruppert Nurseries in Laytonsville. This state of the art nursery is recognized as one of the premier growers in the Mid-Atlantic region. Attendees will have a chance to tour the tree nursery, LEED Certified buildings and learn about the solar energy operations. There will also be hay wagon rides throughout the property to look at conservation practices and research studies.

## OUTSTANDING DISTRICT AWARD



*MSCD Representatives from 1-r; Robert Butts, David Plummer, George Lechlinder, Robert Stabler, Pam Saul, Robert Butz and Wade Butler.*

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) won 1<sup>st</sup> place for the Outstanding District Award at the MASCD 2011 Annual meeting. The award is sponsored by Mid Atlantic Farm Credit in recognition of overall District operations and accomplishments.

## WEED OF THE MONTH:

Kudzu has been called “the vine that ate the south,” but it threatens and outcompetes native plants and animals as far north as Connecticut,



"Kudzu was originally advertised as an Ornamental Plant..."

Oregon, and North Dakota. It was first introduced in the United States at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, advertised as an “ornamental plant” that could also serve as a forage crop. When soil conservation became a priority following the dust bowl, Farmers were encouraged to plant Kudzu as a soil stabilizer. Even the government commissioned large-scale plantings of it. The promotion of Kudzu continued until the Mid-1950’s, when it was finally identified as potentially invasive.

Kudzu reproduces primarily through rhizomes and runners which root at the leaf nodes wherever they touch soil. Kudzu prefers mild winters and hot summers, and is not easily killed by frost due to its extensive root system. A single kudzu crown can weigh up to and beyond 600 lbs. This large taproot also enables it to survive droughts which weaken and kill other plants, allowing it to become that much more invasive. It is often found around reservoirs and other sites reclaimed over 50 years ago.

Within 1-2 years, kudzu can entirely engulf mature trees, leading to tree death. It thrives wherever there is adequate moisture and sunlight, and is able to grow up to a foot a day in optimal conditions. Control of established patches can take upwards of 10 years, the best control of the plant being complete extrication of its root system. If kudzu manages to creep onto your property, eliminate it quickly, or else, as the old Georgia legend goes, “You may need to close your windows at night to keep it out of the house.”

LARRY W. MITICH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Extension Weed Scientist Emeritus, Department of Vegetable Crops, University of California, Davis, CA 95616.

## “PASTURE ENVY” AT THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY SPRING PASTURE TOUR

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District would like to thank Gayle and Joe Joyce of Damascus for making the Montgomery County Spring Pasture Tour on April 24, such an outstanding event. All the participants were impressed with the equine facility, the pasture management and the excellent homemade North Carolina barbecue provided by the hosts. Not only did the participants learn about pasture management, but they left with “Pasture Envy”.

The Joyces’ efforts to protect soil and water resources provided a valuable example for other landowners to follow. The Joyces participated in MSCD’s Pasture Renovation Program and followed a series of implementation guidelines for establishing their pasture, and the positive results were obvious. During our tour, it was clear to the participants that the conservation practices the Joyces have implemented are a reflection of their management style and dedication to land stewardship.

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY WINTER PASTURE TOUR

Anyone who has horses will probably tell you that what they want to see when they look at their pastures is green grass. So what can be done in the winter time when the grass stops growing, the ground freezes and thaws into a muddy mess, and the horses continue to feed and exercise on the pasture field? The answers to these important winter pasture management skills and how they can benefit your operation will be discussed at this year’s Winter Pasture Tour. Join us on Wednesday, November 28, 2012 (rain/snow day Wednesday December 5, 2012).

To register for this event, or for more information, please contact Mr. Eddie Franceschi at 301.590.2855 or visit our website [www.montgomeryscd.org](http://www.montgomeryscd.org).

## SPRING EQUINE SEMINARS

If you missed this year’s equine seminars hosted by MSCD and UM Extension, you can go to our website ([www.montgomeryscd.org](http://www.montgomeryscd.org)) to view presentations, including talks on the equine digestive system, forage quality, pasture weeds and their control, and developing an equine business plan.



# Montgomery Soil Conservation District

## 2011 Annual Report

*With the county population nearing 1 million people, educating our citizens about conservation is one of the most important things the Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) can do to promote the future of agriculture.*

### **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH AGRICULTURE**

MSCD provides this educational opportunity for students in conjunction with Maryland Extension. This three week program involves about 2700 fourth grade students and 500 teachers and parents for a total of 3200 participants. Close Encounters represents a comprehensive agricultural learning experience for students from schools across the County. Many young people today are unaware of the benefits agriculture provides and of their responsibility to be good stewards of the land. Close Encounters with Agriculture creates a rare opportunity for these students to enjoy a hands-on learning environment, which can really have an impact on their lives. The children go home and teach their parents about the things they learned, increasing the benefits of the program even further.



With the assistance of the Farm Bureau, Master Gardeners, and local farmers, the students experience interactive programs in nutrition, production agriculture and conservation. It is a fun day for everyone and the kids learn about topics not normally covered in their regular curriculum.

Tens of thousands of students have participated in Close Encounters with Agriculture over the years. Each child gains a better understanding of where their food comes from and how agriculture helps to protect our soil, water and other natural resources.

**EQUINE SEMINARS** – MSCD partnered with University of Maryland Extension and Montgomery County DED Agricultural Services Division to continue the series of educational seminars being offered to the equestrian community. The goal of these seminars is to help educate participants on which combination of practices will provide the most successful pasture management. Seminars were held at the new Equine Rotational Grazing Demonstration area at the University of Maryland's Central Maryland Research and Education Center in Clarksville. These seminars highlight several important considerations for horse owners:

- Examples of proper pasture management and rotational grazing techniques.
- Selecting forage species based on nutrition and growth qualities.
- The value of heavy use areas and opportunities for establishing vegetative HUAs.
- Weed identification and management techniques.
- Cost-share and technical assistance available to horse owners.



## **AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS**

**Planning and Implementation** - Eighty-seven Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans were developed for Montgomery County landowners to protect 7,884 acres of land. The District continued to expand the availability of programs for the growing equestrian community. Providing cost-share programs and technical assistance to horse owners and the growing organic farming community will continue to be critical components of conservation efforts in Montgomery County.

### **Best Management Practices**

Following is a list of the practices completed by MSCD Cooperators in 2011.

Crop Rotation	1206	Acres
Contour Farming	88	Acres
Cover Crops	11,304	Acres
Nutrient Management	2,806	Acres
Integrated Pest Management	1,060	Acres
Critical Area Planting	11	Acres
Residue Mgmt	159	Acres
Pasture and Hay Planting	28.5	Acres
Waste Utilization	233	Acres
Waste Storage Structure	2	Structures
Heavy Use Area Protection	.9	Acres
Grassed Waterway	3	Acres
Forage Management	153	Acres
Fencing	9,210	ft.
Watering Facility	10	Structures
Prescribed Grazing	134	Acres
Forest Stand Improvement	144	Acres
Wildlife Upland Habitat Mgmt	.3	Acres
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	32	Acres
Riparian Forest Cover	2	Acres
Roof Runoff Mgmt	3	Structures
Brush Management	248	Acres



### **Cost-Share Funding for Landowners**

Leveraging private investments in conservation with government sponsored cost-share funding provides additional opportunities for landowners to implement practices that will improve water quality. Financial incentives represent an important link in the efforts to clean up our local streams and the Chesapeake Bay. By offering landowners a combination of state, federal and local cost-share, the District strives to help farmers protect their soil, water, and other natural resources.

One example of leveraging funds for conservation projects is the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Cover Crop Program. Cover Crops are one of the most important practices for cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, and Montgomery County farmers have consistently increased their participation in this valuable conservation program.

In 2011, Montgomery County farmers planted 11,304 acres of cover crop resulting in cost share payments of \$425,386. Farmers received an additional \$169,720 in grant funding from MDA for installing other conservation practices, bringing the total MDA cost share payments for Montgomery County to well over a half million dollars. This also means that farmers invested considerable amounts of private capital in conservation this year.

## CONSERVATION EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The MSCD provides a variety of educational opportunities for landowners, students, and the general public. Educating the citizens of Montgomery County about agriculture and conservation is one of our most important initiatives. Some of our educational programs for 2011 are listed below:

- Envirothon-The MSCD has one of the largest county Envirothon Competitions in the state, with 35 teams (175 students) participating in the 2011 program.
- Volunteer Tree Plantings-MSCD staff, through a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, coordinated two volunteer tree plantings at the Oaks Landfill in Laytonsville in cooperation with Montgomery County DEP. Over 175 students and volunteers from other organizations participated in the tree plantings on Earth Day and another in the fall. The Earth Day event was attended by Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett. More than 1000 trees and shrubs were planted between the two projects.
- Workshops, Fairs, and Expos-The MSCD staff also contacted thousands of constituents through their participation in the County and State Fairs, Maryland Horse Expo, the Flower and Garden Show, Arbor Day and Earth Day Events.
- Cooperators Dinner-The purpose of the MSCD Cooperators Dinner is to recognize members of the agricultural community for their contributions to conservation, and to inform legislators about conservation practices being implemented in Montgomery County. Approximately 130 people attended the event, including several local and state elected officials. The event was held at an equestrian facility to showcase this interesting component of agriculture.
- MSCD representatives serve on a variety of Workgroups – Montgomery Forestry Board, Horse Council, County Agriculture Advisory Board, Mid Potomac Tributary Team, Patuxent Reservoirs Watershed Protection Group, Regional Agricultural Workgroup, and Forest Conservation Advisory Committee.



## Outreach to the Equine Community

- Assisted the University of Maryland in promoting a Pasture Demonstration site at the Clarksville Farm facility. This site has been a tremendous resource for educating owners of equestrian facilities on a variety of management and conservation practices.
- Worked with local horse farm owners to establish Bermuda grass demonstration plantings to help exhibit the potential for using this grass in horse pastures and heavy use areas.
- Provided outreach to the equestrian community on better methods for managing their manure. These efforts resulted in 6 new planned manure storage facilities to improve water quality and increase farm efficiency.
- Helped coordinate Equine Seminars focusing on conservation practices for horse farms and pasture improvement and renovation. Provided attendees with examples of different pasture planting techniques.
- Developed a letter in cooperation with the Maryland Horse Council (MHC) describing some of the conservation assistance offered by MSCD. MHC distributed the letter to their members in Montgomery County.



## LIMING AND SOIL TESTING

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 Amanda Laudwein at 301-590-2840.

## TREE PLANTING FOR EARTH DAY AT OAKS LANDFILL

The MSCD received a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to help establish new forest on the Oaks Landfill site in



Laytonsville. The Oaks Landfill, managed and owned by Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), was closed down as a waste disposal site in 1997.

The area now includes a nature trail and a methane gas recapture system, as well as over 50 acres of open fields that are mowed throughout the year. The site represented the perfect location for a reforestation demonstration project, and with the cooperation of DEP, UM Extension and Master Gardeners, Montgomery County Public Schools, PEPCO, MNCPPC, Maryland DNR, Montgomery Forestry Board and other partners, over 5 acres of newly planted trees have been restored.

Planting projects were held on Earth Day and in the fall, involving over 200 volunteers and cooperating agency staff. The fall project was completed by students from Environmental and Horticultural classes from Sherwood High School. County Executive Isiah Leggett attended the spring Earth Day event and pitched in to help plant several trees.

The grant from Chesapeake Bay Trust provided funding to fence the site to protect the trees from deer. So far, over 1200 trees and shrubs have been planted, with more area left to restore.

## NEW PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT LAW

The MD Department of Agriculture has proposed new changes to the Nutrient Management Law that may impact farmers in Montgomery County. For details go to [www.mda.maryland.gov/pdf/proposednmregs2.pdf](http://www.mda.maryland.gov/pdf/proposednmregs2.pdf)

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*(Please tri-fold, seal and return)*

**Let Us Know If We Can Help You!**

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District provides technical assistance for a variety of conservation practices free of charge. In addition, the Maryland Agricultural Cost-Share Program (MACS) may pay up to 87.5% of the installation cost of these practices for qualifying landowners:

- |                                 |                              |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| _____ Waste Storage             | _____ Grassed Waterway       |
| _____ Riparian Buffer           | _____ Winter Cover Crop      |
| _____ Diversion                 | _____ Field Border           |
| _____ Heavy Use Area Protection | _____ Filter Strip           |
| _____ Roof Runoff Mgt System    | _____ Stream Fencing         |
| _____ Trough or Tank            | _____ Strip Cropping         |
| _____ Nutrient Mgt Consultant   | _____ Stream Crossing        |
| _____ Spring Development        | _____ Critical Area Planting |

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If you would like to see if you qualify for cost share, want more information on these or other conservation practices, need help with developing a conservation plan for your property or updating an old plan, please mail or fax this form to us and we will contact you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax to 301-590-2849

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