

# Montgomery Conservation Connection



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

June 2020

## District Celebrates 75 Years of Service to Montgomery County

Did you know that the Montgomery Soil Conservation District will turn 75 on August 7<sup>th</sup> of this year? Districts were organized and created by federal law in 1937 in response to devastating soil erosion conditions that existed in the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1929, the United States Congress appropriated about \$160,000 for erosion control experiments. The work of research centers established with these funds expanded as the economic disaster of the Dust Bowl in the Midwest became a cause for national concern. The Soil Erosion Service (SES) of the U.S. Department of the Interior was created as a temporary organization in 1933. Its purpose was to demonstrate the values of soil and water conservation by placing conservation measures on farms in cooperation with landowners. In addition, the federally created Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was assigned to aid in erosion control work across the country. Two years later, in 1935, Congress established a federal policy concerning soil conservation. By an Act of Congress on April 27, 1935, the personnel and resources of the Soil Erosion Service were transferred to the Soil Conservation Service as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was the first step in creating a local voluntary system around a core of federal expertise and support. On February 27, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all State governors recommending enactment of soil conservation district legislation.



The proposed act suggested that districts be established to direct and manage soil erosion control programs, using local citizens participating voluntarily in planning and installing conservation practices. Each district so designated would be empowered to determine local needs, would have personal contact with local individual landowners within the community, and would thus be able to encourage maximum cooperation on a voluntary basis. The first Soil Conservation District in the United States was organized on August 4, 1937 in North Carolina by Hugh Hammond Bennett (often referred to as the father of the conservation movement).

Maryland's enabling Act was passed in 1937 and the 24 districts were then organized. Kent County became the first Soil Conservation District formed in Maryland on May 11, 1938. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District was formally established on August 7, 1945. Today, all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have passed enabling legislation necessary for the creation of approximately 3,000 local districts.

The first meeting of the Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors was on April 29, 1946. The meeting was held at the County's Agricultural Office in Rockville, Maryland where the first order of business was to establish the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer among the duly appointed 5 Members Board of Supervisors through an election of Officers.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Board of Supervisors consisted of:  
Eugene S. Walker, Chairman  
Thomas. M. Garrett, Vice Chairman  
J. Raymond Kemp, SSSC appointee  
George Lechluder, Treasurer  
James King, SSSC appointee  
Otto. W. Anderson, County Agricultural Agent, Secretary

### Calendar

*Because of COVID-19 Events  
and Dates are subject to  
change*

2020 Cover Crop Program sign up tentatively scheduled for June and July. Details to follow from the MDA and District

July 3<sup>rd</sup>—Independence Day  
MSCD Office Closed

Remember to Visit our Booth  
At the Montgomery County Fair  
August 14 –22, 2020

September 7th Labor Day  
MSCD Office Closed

MSCD Annual Cooperators  
Dinner- September 9, 2020

### Important COVID-19 Program Information

Agricultural producers can now apply for **USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP)**, which provides direct payments to offset impacts from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Farm Service Agency is available over the phone and virtually to walk you through the application process. Applications will be accepted through August 28, 2020. For more information, Contact Missy Donnelly at 301-662-1321 ext. 2

Maryland has a program too, its called the **Pandemic Adjustment Funding for Agricultural, Forestry and Seafood Businesses** administered by MAR-BIDCO, for more information contact Steve McHenry at (410) 267-6807.

## 75 Years of Service to Montgomery County (continued)

The second order of business was a discussion of the conservation equipment needs of the District. It was discussed that the State Committee could purchase "Martin" Graders which would be suitable for a considerable portion of District work and there was a track record of success by Districts already using this equipment. The first act of the Board was to pursue the purchase of this equipment through the State Committee.

### The First Five Years of District Priorities:

- Securing important Equipment: Martin ditcher and securing a tractor to pull it as well as equipment available through Soil Conservation Service (SCS), a carryall for pond construction and other equipment that included a bush and bog harrow, a Brillion Cultipacker Seeder available at a charge of .75 cents per acre.
- Irrigation: Streams that had capacity to pump 500 gallons per minute, damming streams to impound water as a reservoir, or construction of new ponds.
- The movement of soil and how to conserve it in association with pond projects.
- Reestablishing productive fields abandoned for scrub/shrub removal.
- The need for a mounted "wood" saw would be helpful in clearing these areas.
- A MOU was executed by the Maryland Game and Inland Fisheries Commission to partner with the Commission on establishing and maintaining wildlife including game fish on farms as well as agreement with the SCS.
- Partnered with the Maryland Game and Inland Fisheries Commission on the Colesville School Game Refuge project. Toured by the State Committee on 1/20/1948.
- Erosion control problems adjacent to the Suburban Sanitary Commission property at Brighton Dam was discussed along with a partnership with Howard County to partially or completely eliminate the siltation in the reservoir.
- Approval of Conservation Plans on Montgomery County Farms.
- One of the 1<sup>st</sup> purchases approved by the Board in the Minutes was for an expense of \$2.00 to purchase 500 folders for keeping of office records.
- The Board trailblazed diversity by recommending a female appointment to the Natural Resources Committee presumably for the State Association.
- Discussed use of dynamite for establishing on farm drainage ditches. Two demonstrations were held on the farms of Eugene Walker and James King.
- Discussed that less help was available for surveys as a result of budget cuts.
- Conservation Education: Board supported the purchase of numerous sets of conservation books for each County school as a means of furthering soil conservation through education.
- Dues for both MASCD and NACD were \$5.00 per year.
- Hugh Hammond Bennett, Ed Davis, SCS Director and a delegation from South Africa toured conservation in Montgomery County in 1948.
- State Funding to the District 1949-1950 (FY) = \$2,954.00.

**LET ONE MACHINE DO ALL THE JOBS-**

**DRILL IN GRAIN**  
**FERTILIZE SOIL**  
**PULVERIZE & PACK SOIL**  
**SEED LEGUME**  
**SEED BROME**

**ALL AT SAME TIME**

Five machines in one. Just think what it will do—drills in cereal grains, fertilizes soil, pulverizes and packs the soil, seeds legume and brome grass—all at the same time! This machine will really save you time, labor, seed and tractor use (you pull one machine over the field—not three). Savings soon pile up and pay back the initial cost. Above all its use assures fast germination of grain and grass seeds... you have "a good catch"—a "SURE-STAND". The principle of operation is not new... it has been proven on thousands of farms throughout the country in the BRILLION "SURE-STAND" grass-seeding-pulverizer-packer.

for complete details, and ask for name of your nearest dealer where you can see this new money saving machine.

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**Send!**

**RALPH U. STARR & SONS** AUBURN MASSACHUSETTS

**BRILLION IRON WORKS, INC.** BRILLION, WISCONSIN

This is an important milestone for the District, and we are planning to commemorate our 75<sup>th</sup> year with a celebration in conjunction with our Annual Cooperator's Dinner. While more details will be forthcoming, please mark your calendars for a dinner on September 9<sup>th</sup>. Also, look for historical fun facts about the District which will be posted to both our Facebook and Twitter social media outlets over the next few months.

## Local Farms Provide Fresh Food Options

Since long before the emergence of industrial agriculture, local farms have been a reliable source of quality produce and meats for their communities. These farms, often family-run, work tirelessly to tend to their crops and livestock so that they can provide a local alternative to produce trucked in from states and countries far away. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maryland has seen a renewed appreciation for the reliability and accessibility of locally grown farm products. Even when supermarket shelves are bare, local farms are still eager to serve their communities. Montgomery County is a good example of how local farmers have stepped up to meet the needs of our communities.

In order to protect their customers' health while continuing to provide quality products, our family farms have been busy over the last few months updating their websites and making electronic, non-contact purchases easier. The public demand has emptied the freezers and shelves of several local markets. Through the months of April and May, farmers have sold out of available products well before their markets closed. Farmers are also seeing increases in the number of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) customers and sales. This increased volume in customers has provided much-needed relief to local family farms in the face of plummeting commodity prices. With the continued support of Montgomery County citizens, these farms will hopefully continue to operate profitably, ensuring that Montgomery County has a reliable source of local food.



*One Acre Farm – Dickerson, Maryland*

The following is a list of websites for Montgomery County farms that are currently producing and selling agricultural products. The Montgomery County Office of Agriculture encourages you to continue supporting these farms and others like them with your business:

Pleasant Valley Farm	Damascus, MD	<a href="https://pleasantvalleyfarmmd.com/">https://pleasantvalleyfarmmd.com/</a>
East Rivendell Farm	Damascus, MD	<a href="http://eastrivendellfarm.com/">http://eastrivendellfarm.com/</a>
Butler's Orchard	Germantown, MD	<a href="https://www.butlersorchard.com/">https://www.butlersorchard.com/</a>
One Acre Farm	Dickerson, MD	<a href="https://www.oneacrefarm.com/">https://www.oneacrefarm.com/</a>
The Farm at Our House	Brookeville, MD	<a href="http://www.thefarmatourhouse.com/">http://www.thefarmatourhouse.com/</a>
Lewis Orchard	Poolesville, MD	<a href="https://www.lewisorchardfarmmarket.com/">https://www.lewisorchardfarmmarket.com/</a>
Homestead Farm	Poolesville, MD	<a href="http://www.homestead-farm.net/">http://www.homestead-farm.net/</a>

**As the growing season continues more farms will be open for business.** For more information about farm to table, please visit the County's Office of Agriculture website: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/agsservices/farm-to-table.html>

## Grassed Waterways: A Solution to Erosion and Overland Flow

Soil erosion is defined as the breakdown, detachment, translocation and deposition of soil particles by wind, water and gravity. Soil erosion on and off farmlands is of interest due to its impact on productivity, soil health, water quantity and quality and air quality. Grassed waterways (GWWs) are a conservation management practice that protects vulnerable cropland from erosion by systematically directing runoff from terraces, diversions and other water concentrations to stabilized outlets. A GWWs is a shaped or graded channel established with vegetation that transfers surface water at a reduced velocity in areas where concentrated surface flows may cause severe erosion and water accumulation. Properly implemented, GWWs address multiple resource concerns such as erosion, soil quality, excess water and water quality degradation. The practice is not applicable to areas where the present watercourse is not in danger of serious erosion and in areas where implementation would adversely affect established wetlands or woody wildlife coverings.

**What are the major benefits of a grassed waterway?** A waterway will carry large flows, making it suited to safely carry runoff from large upstream watersheds. Farm machinery can cross it, once vegetation is established, maintenance is low and when implemented correctly, GWW have the added benefit of providing animal habitat, water purification, and increased soil health benefits.

If you have a concentrated flow issue on your farm and believe a grassed waterway may be beneficial, please contact the District at 301-590-2855 to request our assistance. We will be more than happy to come to your farm and conduct an on-site evaluation.

## 2019 MSCD Annual Report

### 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 Resources Conservation Service's Federal Conservation Programs, the MDA's— Cost Share Program and the District's Conservation Cost-Share Program, we were able to assist Montgomery County farmers in securing over \$624,000 in conservation funding in 2019. 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 2019, Montgomery County farmers certified 12,883 acres of traditional cover crops resulting in cost share payments of \$257,865. The excessive rainfall in the late summer and fall of the 2018-19 program year led to the State initiating a late season Healthy Soil Biomass Cover Crop Pilot Program. Under this Program, an additional 1,468 acres were certified by our cooperators resulting in \$22,025 of Program payments to our farmers.

### The District Continues Its Commodity Cover Crop Program

In 2017, cost share for commodity cover crops were discontinued at the State level. To fill this conservation program gap, the District funded the first commodity Cover Crop Program. During 2019, **3,608** acres were certified by producers for payment under the **2018-19** program. This resulted in a total payout of **\$54,115.50** of program funds in 2018. For the **2019-20** program year, over **4,744** acres of commodity cover crop were fall certified, that will provide a total of **\$71,160** 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 2018-19 program year was excessively wet, impacting cover crop establishment. While conversely, the 2019-20 program year saw dry late summer/fall weather creating unfavorable field conditions for planting cover crops. 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 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.

### Agricultural Conservation Programs

**Soil Conservation and Water Quality Planning:** **37** Conservation and Water Quality Plans were developed for Montgomery County landowners to protect **4,221** acres of land for **2019**. There are over **36,104** acres of farmland covered under current plans with an additional **13** plans in excess of **1,500** acres that are in the conservation planning process.



## 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 farmland 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 and regulations that threaten agricultural viability and sustainability. The MSCD has embraced new approaches to conduct outreach to local and State elected officials on the conservation efforts made by our agricultural community.

Each winter, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors visits Annapolis for 2 days during the legislative session to meet with State Delegates and Senators. The goal is to discuss proposed legislation as well as State funding priorities for the benefit of 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 the 2-day period. Last year, Supervisors met with 5 State Senators and 17 Delegates briefing them on the accomplishments of the Districts and how they assist farmers in addressing resource concerns on their land. Supervisors also discussed important legislation and the required funding needed to help agriculture meet the Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

To further enhance these efforts, the District, along with our conservation partners, took the lead in promoting a local Legislative Luncheon. This is an 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. This event was attended by Federal, State and local representatives who interacted with our agricultural leaders as well as the representatives of the agencies that provide assistance to farmers in the County. This event is held each December at a local farm.

## Technical Assistance to the Equine Community:

The District continues to expand the availability of programs to our growing equestrian community. On May 28, 2019, the District hired Travis Gorleski as the MSCD's Equine Resource Conservationist. Mr. Gorleski is an experienced Equine Conservation Planner, with over 9 years of experience working with equine producers with the Maryland Department of Agriculture. Travis' skill set enabled him to hit the ground running with conservation planning and other technical assistance to the equine community. While Travis began his tenure with the District halfway through the 2019 program year, his efforts over his first six months made a big impact. The adjacent page provides a short summary of some of the accomplishments he has made during his initial tenure in the position.



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



*Travis Gorleski Equine Resource Conservationist*

## 2019 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

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

- Regularly attends the Maryland Horse Industry Board meetings
- District Sponsored Meet and Greet with the equine community
- Attended the MASCD Summer Meeting
- Participated in the 2019 Horse Forum
- Resource Professional at Maryland State Fair, Horseland Exhibit
- Resource Professional at Montgomery County Fair, Agricultural Exhibit
- Resource Professional at Montgomery County Close Encounters with Agriculture Program

### ***Conservation Planning:***

- 6 Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans completed/approved.
- 3 Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans Awaiting Board approval.
- 9 Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans in planning queue.
- 5 new contacts made for conservation technical assistance.
- 104.1 acres of conservation plans completed.
- 76.73 acres of conservation plans in the planning queue.

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

- Conservation design for farm access road
- Stream fencing
- Critical area planting
- Rotational grazing systems: Resource Improvements verified
- Dry waste storage systems: Resource Improvements verified

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

Between June 2019 and November 2019, Travis has completed 18 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 2019, the District provided technical assistance with 4 high tunnel installations as well as providing conservation planning to those in 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 some of the practices completed by MSCD Cooperators in 2019.

Code	Practice	Extent /Units
314	Brush Management	0.40 AC
317	Composting Facility	1.00 NO
327	Conservation Cover	73.61 AC
342	Critical Area Planting	0.20 AC
342B	Critical Area Planting -Const	7.40 AC
378	Sediment Control Pond	1.00 NO
382C	Streamside Fence (35'+ Trees)	900.00 FT
382D	Non Streamside Fence	6,868.00 FT
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	18.80 AC
412	Grassed Waterway	1.80 AC
422B	Hedgerow Planting (Trees)	320.00 FT
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	89.00 FT
484	Mulching	0.40 AC
528	Prescribed Grazing	11.50 AC
528	Rotational Grazing	4.30 AC
558	Barnyard Runoff Control	2.00 NO
560	Access Road	200.00 FT
575	Animal Trails and Walkways	200.00 FT
578	Stream Crossing	1.00 NO
590	Nutrient Management	58.90 AC
606	Subsurface Drain	540.00 FT
614	Watering Facilities	9.00 NO
	Cover Crops	16,491 AC
	Healthy Biomass Planting	1,468 AC
	Small Pond/Retro Fit Approvals	6 Ponds
	Sediment & Erosion Control- Forest Harvests	2 Plans
	Sediment & Erosion Control- Fill Activities	4 Plans
	Sediment & Erosion Control – Ag Structures	4 Plans



### 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 we promote to implement these objectives. These programs include:

#### Close Encounters with Agriculture

Many young people today are unaware of the benefits agriculture provides and how they can become good stewards of the land. Close Encounters with Agriculture (CEWA) creates a special opportunity for students to enjoy a hands-on learning experience that can create tangible impacts concerning their future. Students often take the lessons learned back home and discuss with their families. This results in an extension of benefits beyond the student's participation in

## 2019 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

the program. In 2019 this program was expanded to 4-weeks, presented jointly by the University of Maryland Extension and MSCD. It provides approximately 4,700 fourth grade students, teachers, and parents from across the County with a comprehensive agricultural learning experience. The program includes not only Extension and MSCD staff but also receives volunteer assistance from the County Farm Bureau, local farmers, and members of the Master Gardener program. Presentations include information on nutrition, production agriculture, conservation and the environment. Each group has a full day of fun activities that provide a great opportunity to learn about things not usually covered in their regular curriculum and reconnects them with their agricultural heritage.



*Students participating in the Close Encounters with Agriculture*

In addition to the CEWA, the MSCD provides a variety of educational opportunities for landowners, students, and to the public about agriculture and conservation and these efforts are a cornerstone to our educational initiatives. Below is a listing of some of our conservation educational programs offered during 2019:

**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 partnership with local resource professionals, that volunteer their time and talents in training and preparing student led teams on competition day. The District also has been successful in expanding our local program through the engagement of the private sector through organizations like the Izaak Walton League. The 2019 competition saw 10 high school teams comprised of more than 50 students competing for the chance to go to the State contest. The 2019 winning Montgomery County Team placed 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Maryland Statewide Envirothon Competition.



*High School Students Participating in the Envirothon*

**Agricultural Tours:** The MSCD and its staff coordinated tours for the public and government officials. During 2019, the District promoted two agricultural tours:

### **National Wheat Foundation Conservation Tour**

The District played a prominent role in the National Wheat Foundation Hosting Conservation Tour sponsored by NRCS. The tour was directed at Senate and House Legislative liaisons and aides for the purpose of educating, informing and creating greater awareness involving agriculture, conservation and wheat production. The intent of the tour was to provide attendees a “boots on the ground” perspective on how directives from a national level trickle down locally and more importantly, what impacts they have on producers and the industry. The schedule for the tour included a combination of presentations and walking guided tours of conservation measures put into practice.



### **Chesapeake Bay Foundation S.T.E.M. Teacher Agriculture and Conservation Tour**

The District and other partner agencies conducted a day long activity for Montgomery County S.T.E.M. teachers to learn about agriculture as well as the important role farmers play in the conservation of our soil and water resources as part of the Bay clean up initiative. The Mini Course entitled “**Connecting Montgomery County to the Chesapeake Bay through Environmental Chemistry**” included a day long bus tour of several Montgomery County farms.

Teachers had the opportunity to learn how farmers are helping to clean up the Chesapeake Bay through the implementation of Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans, Nutrient Management Planning and other agricultural Best Management Practices that reduce nutrients and sediments entering our waterways. Teachers also learned that Agriculture and Wastewater Treatment facilities have been responsible for a majority of nutrient reductions to the Bay. The key takeaway is that farmers are doing their fair share, and more, to help clean up the Chesapeake Bay! Teachers also got a short course in farm economics by understanding the agricultural market challenges, cost of land, machinery and the inputs needed to nurture a crop all the way to harvest. Through this discussion, teachers learned that while agricultural Best Management Practices help to address soil and water resource concerns, most do not result in an increase to the farmer’s bottom-line. This means, farmers are voluntarily installing practices at their own expense and it is one reason there are publicly funded cost share programs designed to reduce the farmers cost of practice implementation.

We found our involvement and participation in the agricultural component of the five-day mini course to be an incredible success. The S.T.E.M. teachers saw firsthand the unique challenges that face agriculture in an urban County. The true measure of the success of our involvement in this program came from testimonials we received from the participants following the event. *“Everything was amazing, I could never have planned or even imagined a better day to immerse the teachers in farming of Montgomery County and it’s challenges and successes for the Bay. I think offering this opportunity for future Montgomery County Chesapeake Classrooms Courses as well as other interested teachers will provide a new but very powerful force to our classrooms and therefore our future”* **Kellie Rogers of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.**

These tours of local farms provide the public and elected officials access to our cooperators for one on one interactions. These types of open exchanges give everyone a better understanding of the challenges cooperators face and exposure to the types of agricultural land uses in our diverse County.

**Cooperators Dinner:** Our Cooperators’ dinner is a very important event for the District. The purpose of our annual dinner is to take a break from our day to day activities, to gather and celebrate soil and water conservation here in Montgomery County. It allows us to take the time to promote and educate others about the importance of being good stewards of the land, keep the community up to date on the changing environmental landscape as well as to recognize the cooperators in the County and others who have made a commitment to conservation. Through these efforts, it provides the opportunity to share our conservation experiences and exchange information



*County S.T.E.M. Teachers Touring County Farms*



*2019 Cooperator’s Dinner at Brook Grove Farm in Olney*

## 2019 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

with attendees in a very informal setting. Even more importantly, the dinner provides a pathway to extend our sincerest “thank you” to everyone that helps to make the conservation of our natural resources in the County a priority. The venue for this year’s dinner was Brooke Grove Farm which was graciously provided by our host, Dr. Charles Mess, his family and staff. Over 100 individuals attended and enjoyed the peaceful surroundings, conservation presentations, and recognitions as well as enjoyed a delicious meal. On site, our staff provided participants a tour and discussion of the conservation measures and practices Brooke Grove Farm has implemented over the years. We also featured two video presentations during the event.

“**Conservation Kids: A Green STEM Documentary**,” a 30-minute film developed by Cheryle Franceschi, a local film maker, explores the connection of learning in the STEM fields that include science, technology, engineering and math and practical learning in the natural world including agriculture.

We also had the opportunity to air excerpts from the documentary “**Losing Ground**” presented by the American Angus Association that exposes the impact of urban sprawl on American agriculture. This nationally televised documentary featured two Montgomery County Farmers who discussed the challenges as well as the opportunities of farming on the edge of a large metropolitan area. One of the main takeaways from this film is that we are losing farmland almost twice as fast as we had thought before. Which is about 1.5 million acres a year or 175 acres every hour!

The evening event culminated with the presentation of several recognitions to individuals that were conservation leaders this year within Montgomery County. James “J” Harne was recognized as the **District’s Outstanding Employee**. The District also recognized Dr. Charles Mess as the recipient of the MSCD **Contribution to Agriculture Award**. Last but certainly not least, the District and our conservation partners (MDA and NRCS) honored Windridge Farm L.L.C, with the District’s most coveted and prestigious award, **2019 Cooperator of the Year**. Windridge Farm L.L.C, owned and operated by the Butz brothers, is an excellent example of conservation leaders within the agricultural community of Montgomery County.



*John Zawitoski, District Manager and Robert Butz, District Chairman present James Harne with the Outstanding Employee Award*

Overall, the event was a huge success and we hope all that attended enjoyed the evening. Our dinner next year will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Montgomery Soil Conservation District.

**Workshops, Fairs, and Expos:** The MSCD and staff interacted with thousands of constituents through participation in local equine workshops, Close Encounters with Agriculture, Flower and Garden Show, and both the Montgomery County and Maryland State Fairs. The MSCD, and the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture once again joined together to create a booth for the Montgomery County Fair. With the assistance of the County’s 4-H Electronics Club, an interactive game developed by the Club was featured. The game allowed visitors to test their knowledge on general ag info to soil and water conservation. Our exhibit was so well received that we were awarded “*Grand Champion as Best Agricultural Exhibitor*” for 2019. The District also was an exhibitor and participant in the 2019 Spencerville Academy’s S.T.E.M. Exposition program. This day long event held for private schools across the region, provides the District an opportunity to interact with both elementary and high school students to discuss how applied math and science skills translate into careers in agriculture.



## Social Media and Educational Outreach: Website, Facebook, Twitter and Newsletter

Most of us use some form of social media every day, and whether it's for personal communication, self-promotion, or marketing, we use it religiously. Humans are creatures of habit, but we're 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. In 2019, the MSCD continued to expand the utilization of social media to help promote the District and to use the platforms to "get information out" in a format that informed in short concise posts. Through an expanded presence on both Facebook and Twitter, the District published between 20 and 30 "articles" per month covering a wide array of agricultural and land conservation issues. The goal was to post a steady stream of information in a format that was timely, concise and interesting. The District firmly believes as engagement increases so will our target audience. There is no other media method that can be targeted and accessed by use like these social media outlets and it is the reason we have invested financial resources in developing and implementing this social media campaign. Our newsletter, the foundation of the District's educational outreach campaign, has been consistently recognized by the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts as an outstanding publication. Renamed, Montgomery Conservation Connection in 2017, it is published 3 to 4 times a year, and provides conservation information, program updates, District accomplishments and a variety of articles of importance to cooperators, County residents and the community.



Example of a MSCD Facebook Post

## Conservation Outreach

In 2019, the District reengaged with its partnership with the Boy Scouts of America organization. The District provided assistance to scouts so that they could achieve merit badges in soil conservation. The District Manager assisted a local scout with achieving the requirements for obtaining the Soil & Water Conservation merit badge for local scouts. This activity involved going into the field to observe the different types of soil erosion and to discuss measures farmers can implement to solve these resource concerns. Scouts learned about the history of soil conservation and why protecting our nation's soil resources is everyone's responsibility. This activity and some hands-on exercises were instrumental in helping our local scouts achieve this merit badge honor. This District was proud to further extend our conservation and environmental education outreach to the Boy Scouts of America Organization in 2019 and will look forward to growing this partnership in the years ahead.



District Manager, John Zawitoski working with a local Boy Scout on achieving his Soil Conservation Merit Badge

## 2019 MSCD Annual Report (continued)

### The District Inducts 1<sup>st</sup> Soil Health Champion

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) established the National Soil Health Champions Network (SHCN) to recognize ranchers, farmers and woodland owners from across the nation who practice good soil health management on their operations and promote the use of soil health management systems in their communities. Currently, the SHCN is made up of for more than 240 farmers. We are very proud to have Doctor Charles Mess recognized as Montgomery County's 1st Soil Health Champion. His induction into this exclusive network, will help ensure his legacy and will encourage others to explore conservation efforts for their farm.



*Dr. Charles Mess, Soil Health Champion*

### 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 conservation technical assistance to our Cooperators. Our best conservation advocates are the cooperators that have good experiences working with the District. They help promote our assistance through their peer to peer network and our success is measured by the number of Cooperators that continue to request our assistance.



*District Chairman, Robert Butz, Supervisor Wade Butler, Karen Walker District OSC, John Zawitoski, District Manager with MASCD President Charles Rice awarding the District 2019 Conservation Education District of the Year award*

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. For 2019, the District received an award from the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) as the Conservation Education District of the Year. The District was also recognized by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for promoting volunteerism in conservation education through programs like "Close Encounters with Agriculture" and with "Earth Team" volunteers in the District Office. These recognitions serve to demonstrate how the District is viewed in our delivery of conservation technical assistance and education outreach to the public.



*Karen Walker and John Zawitoski being presented the USDA-NRCS Award by Sam Tyler*

This year represented another tremendous step forward for the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. Whether through our conservation technical assistance programs & initiatives or through farm tours, seminars, workshops, field events, social media and educational outreach, the District remains committed to leading the effort toward the conservation of our natural resources. The District plays a large role in preserving the future of agriculture in Montgomery County as well as enhancing the conservation of our agricultural land.

### Important COVID-19 Program Information

Agricultural producers can now apply for USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), which provides direct payments to offset impacts from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Farm Service Agency in Maryland is available over the phone and virtually to walk you through the application process. Applications will be accepted through August 28, 2020. For more information, Montgomery County Producers should Contact Missy Donnelly at 301662-1321 ext. 2.

The State of Maryland has a program too, its called the Pandemic Adjustment Funding for Agricultural, Forestry and Seafood Businesses administered by MARBIDCO, for more information contact Steve McHenry at (410) 267-6807.

## Montgomery County Loses Staunch Agricultural Advocate

Michele Anne Cropp of Barnesville, Maryland passed suddenly on March 22, 2020. Michele was a valued member of the Montgomery County agricultural community and one of its beloved leaders. She grew up in Rockville, MD and was a graduate of the University of Maryland. She will be deeply missed by her friends and family.

Michele, along with her husband Dr. Craig Cropp and sons Michael and Matthew, raised Angus cattle on their Cropp Family Farm. Michele had a real gift with animal husbandry and loved her animals. Anyone that visited their farm was always amazed just how gentle her animals were. This was directly attributable to the love and care she provided to them. She loved farming and was very proud of being a Montgomery County Farmer. She was a tremendous agricultural advocate and a goodwill ambassador, always promoting the good things agriculture provides as well as the great things our farmers are doing to protect the environment. Michele was elected a two-term President of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau, a member of the Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee, a member of the Montgomery Agriculture Producers, and she was active in the American Angus Association. As an agricultural leader she was a force in forming local and statewide agricultural policies as well as helped to ensure new laws, regulations, and local zoning were harmonious with agriculture. She logged countless hours reviewing drafts of legislation and proposed zoning changes to assess potential impacts to the industry. She invested the time needed to understand the issues and what the proposed legislation or zoning changes were trying to solve. Often these changes had potential negative impacts to agriculture. Michele had an incredible skill at being able to grasp the depth of an issue as well as being able to effectively communicate with elected officials the unintended consequences of legislation. Her wise words and ever-sound advice will be missed by the agricultural community.

Michele was not only a staunch supporter of agriculture; she was also incredibly kind to everyone she interacted with. She was a longtime supporter of agricultural education through her activities with the agricultural fair as well as support to the County's 4-H program. She had been active with Montgomery County 4H Clubs for over 2 decades and for many years served as a livestock superintendent during the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair. As a much-loved educational consultant, her advocacy for children and their education contributed greatly to bettering the lives of many Montgomery County Public School students. Her advocacy will be missed by many parents and their children.

Michele was a strong woman who was also vibrant, passionate, funny, and totally dedicated to her family. She was one of the kindest people I have ever known, and she will be missed very much. Last year, Michele was featured in a documentary produced by the American Angus Association entitled, "LOSING GROUND." The intent of this documentary was to expose the impact of urban sprawl on American agriculture. It showed how farmers and ranchers from across the country are dealing

with increasing urbanization of rural America. While urbanization brings challenges, it can also present opportunities. If you have not seen this documentary, I would encourage you to watch as this film epitomizes the intelligent, passionate, and kind soul she was. We are fortunate that her spirit has been preserved in this incredible documentary. You can view the documentary by following the attached link or by searching "Losing Ground" on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAEKCl2eis>  
Rest in Peace Michele, your good work on this earth is complete.



*John P. Zubits*

## Can You Afford to Divide Your Pastures? (Yes, You Can!)

Along with flowers and evening thunderstorms, temporary electric fencing is popping up all around Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve these days. Why?

Because it works! Horses know what they like; when the gate to a pasture "buffet" opens they go for the best and leave the rest. The result? Tender young grasses are grazed down to the ground while older, tougher grasses are allowed to become even older and tougher. Continued over many weeks this grazing pressure will suppress and eventually kill those tender young grasses, opening the door for weeds to take root in the bare soil that is left behind. The horses will eventually get to the older grasses, but by then it may already be too late. This lends a continuously grazed pasture to become an under-performing mixture of weed and clover pastures, bare spots, and old mature grasses.



Particularly if you are on a small-acreage farm, this scenario is all too common. The owners of a small horse farm in Damascus who recently installed temporary fencing said as much. "Last year we rotated the horses between two 2+ acre fields every week, but after a few rotations those fields had tall grass and weed patches all over."

The farm owners tried a couple different options, but it wasn't until they attended the **Spring into Conservation!** pasture walk hosted by the Soil Conservation District earlier this year that they saw an easy and affordable solution in temporary fencing. "In general, we were thinking in the \$1000-\$2000 range, but once we settled... the all-in price was less than \$800 for two separate five-hundred-foot sections. The actual installation took about 2 hours per field."

Though it is still early in the year, the farm owners are already seeing fewer weed patches and more balanced grazing. The landowners continued, "The horses respect the fence. They don't test it. They don't even go close to it."

If the price tag still gets your mane in a knot, you are not alone. Still, there is help. Healthy pastures are good for the environment, and for this reason the Montgomery Soil Conservation District offers reimbursement for temporary fencing, covering up to \$1.50 per linear foot of fencing installed. The landowners quoted in this article made use of this program. Their experience? "The paperwork was the easiest part. The proposed layout was measured and discussed during a site visit and we completed the application in about ten minutes."

With the District's help, the final cost for the landowners came to less than thirty cents per linear foot! With a price tag like that, can you afford to divide your pastures? The answer is yes, you can!

## Cover Crop Update – Spring 2019

Montgomery County Farmers certified 18,147 acres as part of the State Cover Crop program in the fall of 2019. This number, up significantly from 2018, is closer to the average number of acres planted by our cooperators in years past. A dry September provided great weather for harvesting corn and soybeans however, the dry soil caused much of the cover crop seed to lie dormant until rain came again in October.

The spring of 2020 brought new and unprecedented challenges for all of us. With District staff teleworking, cooperators were asked to spring certify acres over the phone or through email. We would like to thank all our program participants for their patience and cooperation. Even in these uncertain times, the best bang for the buck conservation practice for the Chesapeake Bay continues to be the utilization of cover crops as part of a crop rotation. With the 2025 WIP Phase 3 goal rapidly approaching, all the work done to limit soil loss and improve nutrient uptake in the field will certainly have the impact needed to help meet the Bay's pollution diet.

## Cover Crop Update – Spring 2019 (continued)

Last summer, MDA decided to provide a new incentive to the 2019-2020 Winter Cover Crop Program. A \$15 per acre incentive was available to those farmers who wanted to enroll 500 acres or less where the cover crop would be suppressed after May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Several of our cooperators applied for this new incentive payment. Whether this incentive is fully adopted by the ag producers in the program remains to be seen but those who did participate generally were going to a year of soybeans in their rotation.

Once again for 2019-2020, the Montgomery Soil Conservation District provided a \$15 per acre cost share reimbursement for those who planted cover crops for harvest in the County. Cooperators were directed to follow establishment guidelines set by MDA but could fall fertilize their crop based on their Nutrient Management Plan and restrictions set forth by MDA for small grains. Montgomery County is the only County in the State to provide a Commodity Cover Crop reimbursement. We hope to continue to do so in the future. Our ability to provide this cost share comes from the willingness of Montgomery County to provide funds allocated through the Water Quality Protection Charge, paid by all County residents. We appreciate the willingness of the County to share these funds which benefit conservation in the Agricultural Reserve.

As we quickly move from spring to summer, it won't be long before sign-up for the next cover crop season is here. Hopefully District offices will be open to the public by this time. The sign-up dates have yet to be set by MDA. As soon as they are announced, the District will promote them on our website. You must have a current Nutrient Management Plan to be able to participate. A Nutrient Management Certification form signed by your nutrient management consultant is required. If you do not have a current plan, you will have until November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to complete one. Thank you to all who participated in the 2019-2020 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.

## The Conservation Stewardship Program: Taking Conservation to the Next Level

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the District helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners earn payments for expanding conservation activities while maintaining agricultural production on their land through a variety of Federal, State and local conservation cost share assistance programs. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), is a program designed to encourage the adoption of new technologies and management techniques. **Some examples include multi-species cover crops, field borders, enhanced nutrient management, continuous no till planting.**

"CSP continues to be a very effective tool for private landowners working to achieve their conservation and management goals," said Terron Hillsman, NRCS State Conservationist in Maryland. "It is the largest conservation program in the United States with more than 70 million acres of productive agricultural and forest land enrolled."



*Multi-Species Cover Crops*

CSP is offered in Maryland through continuous sign-ups. The program provides many benefits including increased crop yields, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP is for working lands including cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of a tribe. If interested, the District can help you with sign-up with this program, new enrollments for this program are being accepted from now until 2023.

For additional information about CSP, please contact the District at 301-590-2855 or via email to Charlotte Brewster, District Conservationist at [Charlotte.Brewster@md.usda.gov](mailto:Charlotte.Brewster@md.usda.gov)

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