

Maryland's 24 Soil Conservation Districts

Allegany	301-777-1747, ext. 3
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757
Baltimore County	410-666-1188, ext. 3
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3
Charles	301-934-9588, ext. 3
Dorchester	410-228-5640, ext. 3
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Garrett	301-334-6951
Harford	410-838-6181, ext. 3
Howard	410-489-7987
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3
Montgomery	301-590-2855
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3
Somerset	410-651-1575, ext. 3
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 3
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3

There's no better time to get a...

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan

*Good for your farm, good for your bottom line,
good for the Chesapeake Bay*



What Is A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan?

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP)—sometimes referred to as a farm plan or conservation plan—is a tool that helps farmers protect and enhance the natural resources that support productive and profitable farming operations. Unlike nutrient management plans, which deal specifically with fertilizer and manure applications, SCWQPs address a range of natural resource concerns for the entire farming operation. SCWQPs help farmers manage their operations more efficiently, save on energy and labor costs, promote productive soils, enhance wildlife habitat and care for forest resources.



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All of the information developed in a SCWQP belongs to the farmer or property owner who is ultimately responsible for making management decisions concerning the operation and implementing the plan. SCWQPs may be modified over time as a farm's business focus changes. A SCWQP does not provide public access to the property—the farmer or landowner controls right of entry and use.



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of Resource Conservation

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www.mda.state.md.us



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Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
Earl F. Hance, Secretary



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of Resource Conservation



Watering troughs provide a clean, reliable water supply for livestock away from streams.



BEFORE

Streambed and streambank erosion caused by animal traffic.

AFTER

Livestock use the crossing instead of the streambed to navigate the stream.

Benefits of a Conservation Plan

A Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (SCWQP) can help farmers succeed in today’s challenging economic times by making the best possible use of a farm’s soil and water resources. It is no secret that crops grow best in deep, fertile topsoil. Topsoil that washes or blows away takes valuable minerals, nutrients and organic matter with it. Crops growing in shallow, eroded soils develop poor root systems, are more prone to drought and require more fertilizer to achieve acceptable yields.

If erosion problems are visible, (rills, gullies, etc.) chances are the farm is already losing about 15 tons of soil per acre annually. That is four to five times the tolerable rate, or the rate at which new soil is formed. Even if problems are not visible, there are benefits to having an evaluation of natural resources on the farm.

Protecting soil also benefits water quality. Agriculture has been identified as a major contributor of nonpoint source pollution to the Chesapeake Bay and local waterways. SCWQPs help keep sediment and nutrients out of waterways and protect and conserve natural resources for future generations. In addition, farmers with SCWQPs are in a better position to comply with environmental requirements and may be eligible for state and federal farm programs.

How to Get a Conservation Plan

Trained conservationists from the Maryland Department of Agriculture or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service working with local soil conservation district staff provide farmers with SCWQPs free of charge. These plans include a menu of best management practices (BMPs) that can be used to manage the farm’s resources, control soil erosion and protect water quality. The BMPs are usually implemented by the farmer in stages, as time, need and money allow, much like a homeowner plans for home improvements such as replacement windows or a new energy efficient furnace.

Because each farm is unique with its own management system and set of challenges, no two farm plans are alike. A livestock crossing or fencing may be recommended for dairy operations to keep animals away from streams. Grassed waterways or cover crops may be recommended to control soil erosion and reduce nutrient runoff from crop fields. Dead bird composters or manure storage help poultry farmers manage and store animal waste.



Grassed waterways constructed in natural drainageways help prevent gullies from forming and control soil erosion.

What is the Cost?

The SCWQP itself costs nothing. Some BMPs, such as varying the crop rotation or farming on the contour, may only require a change in the way the farm is operated. Other BMPs such as grassed waterways or livestock fencing may require an additional construction investment.

Is Financial Help Available To Implement BMPs?

The Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program provides grants that cover up to 87.5 percent of the cost of installing eligible BMPs called for in a SCWQP. Other federal incentive programs may also be available and typically assist with 50 to 75 percent of the BMP cost. Programs can be used together to maximize cost-share assistance. The local soil conservation district will help determine all available financial resources and walk farmers through the application process.

Environmental Requirements

Because of their importance in protecting and managing natural resources, SCWQPs are required by the Federal Food Security Act on all highly erodible lands. Here in Maryland, SCWQPs must be implemented on all farmland enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation Program as well as farmland located in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area—the 1,000 ft. strip of land along these shorelines. In addition, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) requires certain livestock and poultry farmers to implement SCWQPs as a condition for obtaining its new permit for animal feeding operations. Farmers who have a SCWQP are also exempt from MDE fines if a sediment runoff problem should arise. Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay Program has established a goal of managing 1.4 million acres of farmland across the state using SCWQPs.

Farmers Have the Final Say

There is nothing mysterious about a SCWQP. It is simply a set of options designed to help farmers get the most from their land while protecting and conserving natural resources for future generations. Farmers have the final say on what BMPs to adopt, how to improve their operations, and the best way to protect water quality in Maryland’s streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Call or visit the local soil conservation district today to get started.

What Does A Conservation Plan Include?

- An aerial photograph, map or diagram of the farm
- An inventory of natural resources on the property
- A soil map showing the type and location of soils on the farm
- A list of management decisions, agreed upon BMPs and an implementation schedule
- An operation and maintenance plan for installed BMPs
- Additional information on soil loss, seeding, tillage and fertilization may be included



Getting Started: Questions to Ask

- What natural resources are on my farm?
- What crops do I plan to grow?
- Am I rotating crops in order to reduce disease and pest problems?
- Am I using commercial fertilizer and/or animal manure in accordance with my nutrient management plan?
- Have I minimized runoff?
- Could I use wetlands or vegetated buffers to reduce nutrients leaving my farm?
- What types of wildlife do I want to encourage?
- Will a new BMP interfere with or cancel out another BMP?
- Do I have forest resources that could be better managed?