



PRINCE GEORGE'S SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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Pollinator Habitat at Clyde Watson Park in Brandywine, MD.

MD GOVERNOR'S HALL OF FAME: THE CROSS FAMILY

BY MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (MDA)



The Cross Family has been farming in Prince George's County since John and Elizabeth Cross moved to North Keys in the mid 1800s, where they raised their 11 children. The Cross' grew tobacco and served as the local market for other growers in the area. The Cross brothers also operated a small feed and fertilizer store that would later become a Southern States Cooperative franchise location, giving them the ability to expand their market and serve a wider range of Maryland farmers. In addition to their tobacco and feed businesses, the Cross' grew a variety of field crops and raised beef cattle and chickens. As their operation continued to grow, the family decided to incorporate the family business in 1986, making Sandra Cross the president and 100% stockholder of R&D Cross, Inc.

In recent years, the family made the decision to transition away from growing tobacco, instead using those fields for corn and soybeans in rotation with cover crops. The embrace of cover crops is a great example of the family's commitment to conservation practices. The Cross family also hosts an annual public education dinner event on their farm that emphasizes various agricultural topics, including chemical and fertilizer use, equine updates, safety practices, and information on agricultural products. Their efforts to embrace conservation practices and educate the public earned them the honor of being named the Prince George's Soil Conservation District's Cooperator of the Year in 2009.

As an essential business, R&D Cross, Inc. has kept their operations running throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with stringent safety measures in place to protect their workers and customers. With curbside pickup and expanded delivery options, their store has been able to continue providing critical supplies to farmers, gardeners, and animal owners during these unprecedented times.

Off the farm, the family is also very active in their local community, playing various roles supporting 4-H groups, scouts, and little league sports teams. Sandra has taken on an active leadership role in the family's church, where she is celebrating 60 years of volunteer service as the organist and choir director. The Cross family is a great example of the kind of commitment and service that makes agriculture Maryland's top industry.

PRINCE GEORGE'S SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

The Prince George's Soil Conservation District (District) Board of Supervisors formally denounces racism and discrimination in any form. The District is committed to gaining awareness and understanding of issues important to diverse communities and supporting actions to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the pursuit to administer locally led soil and water conservation efforts in Prince George's County, Maryland.

We commit to examine the role that the District can play in fighting systemic racism. The District will take steps to examine diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of the organization including our policies, procedures, and hiring processes. These steps are imperative in order to make conservation programs and delivery accessible and available to all citizens and residents of Prince George's County regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation, physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally protected class.

The District is sensitive to the needs of our local Hispanic, Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities and will engage these communities to understand how conservation issues impact diverse populations. These efforts will encourage greater transparency and pursue more open dialogue in the delivery of District soil and water conservation programs.

The District is fully committed in its efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion across the full spectrum of District policies and programs, including those that the District administers for its local, state and federal partners, to include all people interested in the pursuit to implement locally led soil and water conservation. We invite cooperators, partners, and residents of Prince George's County's Hispanic, Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities to provide feedback on how we can deepen our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and better support our customers. We will keep listening, growing, and advocating equal justice for all.

URBAN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM UPDATE

BY KIM RUSH LYNCH

In 2020, the Urban Agricultural Conservation (UAC) program continued to support and connect with aspiring, new, and current urban farmers in Prince George's County. While the pandemic brought new opportunities for urban farmers to spend more time on the farm and provide products to consumers safely, some continue to have difficulty accessing land, infrastructure, and funding to launch their businesses.

The UAC program provided technical assistance to 34 aspiring or new urban farmers and 65 stakeholders, all of whom are interested in supporting urban agriculture initiatives in Prince George's County. Last year, the District reported on changes in legislation that allowed New Brooklyn Farms to farm in Mt. Rainier, MD. Once that resolution had passed, Doug Adams of New Brooklyn Farms was able to pursue his dream of owning a High Tunnel System. The District also worked with partners, including the Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE) to develop a MOU that allowed high tunnel systems certified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to be erected without a permit. This encourages farmers to use this valuable conservation practice and season extension method without incurring the additional time and costs in the permitting process.

This year, the UAC program launched the **Bloomin' PGC Urban Farmer Workshops** and monthly **Open Mic Nights**. The program kicked off in February at the Watkins Nature Center with two fantastic educators: Urban farm Cooperator Linda Jones of Elements of Nature Botanicals and Farmaceuticals, and Ester Mitchell of UMD Extension—together, they spoke on winter sowing techniques and vegetable planting strategies. The District's District Manager, Steve Darcey, spoke on soil health and conservation. He also demonstrated what happens to clear, clean water when topsoil is allowed to runoff fields in to local water bodies. In total, 40 new and aspiring urban farmers joined for a day of hands-on demonstrations, networking, and seed swap!



Left and Right:
Attendees participate in the Bloomin' PGC Urban Farmer Workshop at Watkins Regional Park in Upper Marlboro.



URBAN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM UPDATE (CONTINUED)

BY KIM RUSH LYNCH



Above: PGSCD District Manager Steve Darcey.

The pandemic didn't stop the District from continuing to host urban farmer-led workshops virtually on fall planning and indoor sowing, too. In the fall, the UAC program launched the **Open Mic Night** for urban farmers to connect and support each other by sharing their challenges and best practices in an informal format. The UAC program was featured on Episode 23 of the *Cottage in the Court* podcast with Teri Speight and the October issue of *Washington Gardener Magazine*.

The staff gave numerous presentations on its program including the Urban Ag Symposium at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting, NACD's Urban and Community webinar series, NRCS-NY program on "Working Effectively with Urban and Suburban

Agriculture Producers", University of Maryland's (UMD) Plant Science and Landscape Architecture class on urban agriculture, UMD Extension's Winter Urban Ag Meeting, and Maryland Farm Bureau's Winter Webinar Series session on Urban Agriculture. Staff continued to provide support and expertise to several county advisory groups including the Food Equity Council, the Food Security Task Force, and the Prince George's County Public School System's Environment Ag and Natural Resources (EANR) Program Advisory Committee.

Visit our blog online to read about the District's COVID-19 Plant Giveaway partnership with MD-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Council Member Dannielle Glaros District 3, UMD Extension, and the William S. Schmidt Outdoor Education Center. Together, we worked to distribute seedlings from Gwynn Park High School's EANR Program at local meal distribution sites!



Next year, the District looks forward to announcing details about a new collaboration with ECO City Farms and the MD-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to develop an urban farm incubator at Watkins Regional Park. With help from a NACD-UAC capacity building grant, this project has the potential to help urban farmers access land and infrastructure to launch their urban farm enterprises, while also learning about soil and water conservation practices to protect our soil and water resources.

Left: Site visit at Doug Adams's farm in Mount Rainier with Michael Baker of NRCS.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BY DIANA LAGUNES



PLANNING ACTIVITIES	CONSERVATION APPLICATION
New Cooperators (21) 826.	Farmers Applying BMPs 43 ea.
New Farm Plans (43) 3,873 ac.	BMPs Installed on Farms 193 ea.
Revised Farm Plans (9) 1,203 ac.	Acres Receiving Treatment 4,393 ac.
Total Plans (52) 5,076 ac.	Estimated Tons of Soil Saved 1,414 tons

BMP Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCE	BMPS
MACS Capital Projects (4 Agreements)	13
MACS Cover Crop (11 Farmers)	1,770 ac/ 51 Tracts
USDA-EQIP (15 Contracts)	10
USDA-AMA (1 Contract)	For 2021 Installation
BMPs Applied with Cost Share	116
Farmer/Landowner Funded	77
TOTAL BMPs Applied	193

Rental Equipment Program

EQUIPMENT TYPE	FARMERS	ACRES
No-till Drill (10') OLD	1	150
No-till Drill (10') NEW	7	70
No-till Drill (6')	9	89
Pasture Aerator	1	20
5 ton Lime Spreader	1	75
Post Pounder (# of posts)	7	500 Posts
Manure Spreader	1	15
Lime Spreader	1	60
Vicon Fertilizer Spreader	1	2

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONTINUED)

BY DIANA LAGUNES

PRACTICE	AMT APPLIED	PRACTICE	AMT APPLIED
COVER CROP	1,770 ac	RESIDUE & TILLAGE MANAGEMENT	1,240.9 ac
HEAVY USE AREA PROTECTION	0.2 ac	FENCE	13,256 ft
NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT	30 ac	ACCESS ROAD	8,926 ft
ROOF RUNOFF STRUCTURES	2 ea.	CONSERVATION CROP ROTATION	527.5 ac
PASTURE/HAY LAND PLANTING	117.5 ac	WATERING FACILITY	2 ea.
FOREST STAND IMPROVEMENT	12.4 ac	LIVESTOCK PIPELINE	1,450 ft
UNDERGROUND OUTLET	470 ft	ROTATIONAL GRAZING	17.4 ac
DIVERSION	75 ft	LINED WATERWAY	12 ft
CRITICAL AREA PLANTING	3.3 ac	CONSERVATION COVER	311 ac

- **Total Tons of Soil Saved:** 1,414 tons.
- **MDA 2020-2021 Cover Crop Program:** 11 farmers fall certified 1,770 acres for \$61,957.
- **MACS Cost Share Payments:** 3 agreements for 4 BMPs totaling \$32,120.60.
- **MACS Applications Submitted:** 2 applications for 2 BMPs.



Left: Multispecies cover crop prevents soil erosion, improves soil health, suppresses weeds, and breaks pest cycles. Taken at Edgewood Farms in Upper Marlboro, MD.

COOPERATOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2020 IN PICTURES

BY WADE HAMPTON & HARRISON PALMER

2020 has been a difficult year and has slowed down many aspects of our lives, but the conservation business has never been busier at the Prince George's Soil Conservation District. This year—which is also one of the wettest years on record—Cooperators have had more time at home to reflect on conservation issues on the farm. The District has been working hard to keep up with demand, all while navigating a new way of conducting business during COVID-19. Our goal has always been to keep our Cooperators and employees safe as we move forward. Here are some snapshots of projects that were completed by PGSCD Cooperators in 2020!

Before



After



Above: Heavy Use Area Protection installed at Edgewood Farms in Upper Marlboro to reinforce areas heavily used by horse traffic. Before it was a muddy quagmire after rain events, but now it is a firm stone-dust area.



Above: Rock outlet and structure for water control at Wild Bay Farm.



Above: Grading and Critical Area Stabilization of a failing roadside ditch at Three Springs Farm in Brandywine.



Above: UMD Hayden Farm Sub-Surface Drainage Flowing at the Outlet.

COOPERATOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2020 IN PICTURES (CONTINUED)

BY WADE HAMPTON & HARRISON PALMER

Before: Failing rock outlet and structure for water control at Wild Bay Farm.



After: Completed structure for water control with flatter backslope and permanent vegetation to protect the access road.



Left: Run-in shed with root runoff management for Heavy Use Area and Vegetated Treatment Area installed at 804 Cattle Co. in Upper Marlboro to reinforce areas affected by horse, cattle, and goat traffic.

Before

After



Above: Stream Crossing installed at Palmer Farms in Brandywine to allow passage across a drainage path.

LAND PRESERVATION UPDATE

BY JEANINE NUTTER

There are several preservation options in Prince George's County: Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), Historic Agricultural Resource Preservation Program (HARPP), and the Rural Legacy Program (RLP). All of these programs purchase development rights and place a conservation easement on the property. Should a landowner want to donate a conservation easement, there is the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET). Three HARPP properties (219 acres) and one MALPF property (86 acres) were permanently preserved in 2020 for a total of 305 acres. A total of 76 properties for 7,129 acres have been permanently preserved under the District's administration. Currently, 9 properties, totaling 872 acres have applied to sell an easement. Of those 3 properties, 477 acres have received an offer and expect to settle this year. We continue to seek out landowners who would be interested in applying for these programs.

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF EASEMENTS PRESERVED	PRESERVED ACRES	NUMBER OF PENDING APPLICATIONS	ACRES AWAITING PRESERVATION
HARRP	49	4,245	8	628
MALPF	20	1,971	1	244
RURAL LEGACY	7	916	0	0
TOTAL	76	7,129	9	872

SOIL HEALTH & MULTI-SPECIES COVER CROP

BY DONNELL RICHARDSON



Above: Multispecies cover crop including legumes, grasses, and brassicas.

A multispecies cover crop has many benefits: it helps to improve biodiversity, fortify against damaging weather, and protects the soil against soil erosion. It also provides much needed pollinator habitat and can also provide winter edibles such as kale, turnips and radishes.

However, it is important to use a blend of species that complement each other in order to reap the maximum benefits, especially as far as growth management is concerned. For instance, it is best to plant the multispecies blend at a time that is beneficial for all the species instead of one, as well as choosing a natural herbicide that can terminate all the cover crops equally.

But most of all, it is always best to terminate them without tilling the soil. No-till farming allows the soil itself to become more resistant against erosion and increases soil organic matter, providing farmers even more long-term benefits for crop production.

TOYS FOR TOTS UPDATE

BY DONNELL RICHARDSON

For the eighth year, PGSCD was proud to participate in the local Toys for Tots Drive! Run nationwide by the United States Marine Corps Reserve, Toys for Tots has been bringing joy to children and their families since 1947. The nationwide campaign encourages the collection of donations of new, unwrapped toys to be distributed to those in need. Businesses and organizations participate on a local level and encouraged their community to engage with the program. We were proud to donate over three full boxes for the Toys for Tots Drive! We'd also like to thank Corporal Schnitzenbaumer for his help and service in the community.



Left: The Grinch and PGSCD District Manager Steve Darcey.

For 2020, Prince George's County made another huge impact with the donation of 62,808 toys, helping a total of 20,500 children! And for the campaign overall, Marine Toys for Tots distributed over 20.2 million toys, books, and games to over 7.3 million children. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't stop this campaign from being even bigger than the year before!



The Grinch delivering the District's donations for Toys for Tots.

FAREWELL . . .

BY KIM SUMMERS

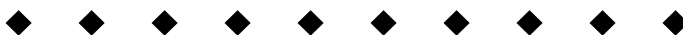


Spencer Evans

Urban Engineer, PGSCD

In June, Urban Engineer Spencer Evans moved on to a new position with the Federal Government. Spencer joined the District in November 2018 and worked in our Urban Conservation Section providing detail-oriented reviews of sediment and erosion control plans.

We will miss Spencer's dedication and work ethic. We wish him the best of luck in his new career endeavor!

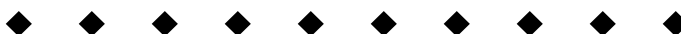


Katie Bliley

Administrative Aide, PGSCD

In October, with new baby in tow, Administrative Aide Katie Bliley moved out of state to be closer to family. Katie was a team member for our front office administrative staff for 3 years. She was always ready to assist customers and staff with a professional, friendly demeanor and was an extremely productive, hardworking member of our team.

We wish Katie, her husband Joey and baby Piper all the best with their new family adventures!



Michael Baker

Soil Conservationist, NRCS

In February, NRCS Soil Conservationist Michael Baker moved to the NRCS MD State Office as the State Planning Specialist. Michael was a passionate conservationist, hard worker, and a team member who was always happy and ready to assist all our customers and partners.

We will miss Michael, and wish him all the best in his new career endeavors!

... AND WELCOME!

BY DONNELL RICHARDSON



Cieandra Stephens
Administrative Aide, PGSCD

We are happy to have Cieandra Stephens join PGSCD as our new Administrative Aide. Cieandra will be apart of our front office team to assist staff and customers with her enthusiastic and friendly demeanor.

Cieandra loves to go hiking on the weekends; she's also a big herbal tea drinker and has a green thumb. We're glad to welcome her to the team!



Fiona Thampi
Urban Engineer, PGSCD

We are proud to announce Fiona Thampi has joined PGSCD as a new Urban Engineer. Fiona will work in our Urban Conservation Section to review sediment and erosion control plans.

Fiona has lived in Prince George's County for two years after moving from India. In her spare time, she loves to read and do arts and crafts. We're so excited to have her on board!



Heather Zdobysz
Agricultural Resource Conservation Specialist,
MDA

We are proud to announce Heather Zdobysz has joined PGSCD as an Agriculture Resource Conservation Specialist through MDA. Heather will work with Prince George's County farmers in developing soil conservation and water quality plans.

Heather enjoys gardening, raising chickens, and volunteering with different organizations including the Port Tobacco River Conservancy, Second Hope Dog Rescue, and Waldorf Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary. We're excited to have her join the team!

DISTRICT STAFF

Steven E. Darcey , CPESC, District Manager
John Tarr, P.E., District Engineer
Joe Bonanno, P.E., Urban Engineer
Julie Miller, Urban Engineer
Kebede Shihamit, Urban Engineer
Eugene Whitehead, Urban Engineer
Fiona Thampi, Urban Engineer
Gail Myers, P.E., Conservation Engineer
Wade Hampton, District Planner
Jeanine Nutter, Ag Land Preservation Administrator
Kim Rush Lynch, Urban Ag Conservation Planner
Kimberly Summers, Administrative Assistant
Terry Hampton, Office Manager
Rita Jones, Administrative Aide
Donnell Richardson, Administrative Aide/Editor
Ciandra Stephens, Administrative Aide
Joseph Haamid, Soil Conservation Grant Planner

MDA

Diana Lagunes, Soil Conservation Planner
Harrison Palmer, Soil Conservation Associate
Heather Zdobysz, Agricultural Resource
Conservation Specialist
Eileen Beard, Soil Conservation Planner/Equine
Outreach Specialist

*"We might say that the earth has the spirit of growth; that
its flesh is the soil."*

- Leonardo da Vinci

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Patrick Goode, County Executive Director
Anna Kitzmiller, Program Technician

SOUTHERN MARYLAND RC&D

Valinda Clark, Program Support Specialist



PRINCE GEORGE'S SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Headquarters

5301 Marlboro Race Track Rd, Suite 100
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
301-574-5162 ext. 3

Largo Office

9400 Peppercorn Place, Suite 219
Largo, MD 20774
301-883-3265

