

*Conserving Soil, Water, and  
Natural Resources Since 1941...*



**PRINCE GEORGE'S**  
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## **2024 Annual Report**







PRINCE GEORGE'S  
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 2024: A Year in Review





# What to Expect...



PRINCE GEORGE'S  
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

*"15 farmer workshops & community events conducted & 12 Soil Conservation & Water Quality Plans developed"*

**Urban Agricultural Conservation Program:**  
**Page 4**

*"HARPP Preserved 5 Farms, totaling 161 Acres"*

**Agricultural Land Preservation Program:**  
**Page 5**

*"210 BMPs installed by 91 farmers, covering 4,177 acres"*

**Agricultural Conservation Program:**  
**Page 6**

*"Drones Saving the Bay in Prince George's County"*

**Spotlight Article:**  
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*"4,622 acres Approved for Urban Development Projects"*

**Urban Development Program:**  
**Page 8**

*"51 Outreach events coordinated in 2024, reaching thousands of County Residents"*

**Education & Outreach:**  
**Pages 9 & 10**



Front Cover Photo: PGSCD Cover Crop Workshop

Credit: Colleen Kiefer



Through its Urban Agricultural Conservation (UAC) Program, the District provides and connects urban farmers and partners engaged in urban agricultural activities with the tools, services and potential financial assistance needed to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to conserve soil, water and other natural resources. Typically, urban soils have been manipulated in some form and may be contaminated. District staff can help identify climate-smart solutions to improve the health and productivity of urban soils for growing food and mitigating stormwater runoff. Urban soils are important to protect because they are found in watersheds which provide drinking water, food, waste utilization, and natural resources to communities. The Program is supported by staff from the District, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), and the Maryland Department of Agriculture.



## 2024 UAC Program Highlights

The UAC Program played a leadership role in a variety of initiatives related to urban ag, conservation, and food security. Over the course of 2024, staff have:

- Provided CTA to 40 new urban farm cooperators (worked with 60 farmers total) and 42 collaborators
- Assisted with planning the 2024 Prince George's County Community Garden Summit and the District's annual Seedling Giveaway
- Served as advisors for conservation related grants received by ECO City Farms and University of MD Extension
- Served on the Prince George's County Food Equity Council, Metro Washington Council of Governments Regional Ag Workgroup, PGC Public Schools Environment, Ag & Natural Resources Program Advisory Committee, and the Urban Farm Incubator Steering Committee
- Lead 2 urban farm tours and conducted 15 trainings including 6 Bloomin' PGC Open Mic Nights on urban ag conservation topics
- Received a National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Technical Assistance Grant and hired Prince George's County native, Jason Sierra, as a Conservation Planner for the UAC Program and Climate-Smart Commodities Pilot Program
- Received the 2024 Maryland Civil Rights Award from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's MD Civil Rights Advisory Committee

### Author:

Kim Rush Lynch  
Urban Ag Conservation Program Manager  
karlynch@co.pg.md.us | www.pgscd.org



5301 Marlboro Race Track Road,  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
301-574-5162 ext. 3



Agriculture is a significant part of Prince George's County, both as an industry and as a contributor to the County's character. It is a goal of the Prince George's Soil Conservation District to preserve agricultural land from development. These properties will produce local commodities, protect scenic vistas and enhance environmentally sensitive areas. In order to achieve this goal, the District administers several programs that preserve land through perpetual easements while allowing landowners to retain their private property rights.

Land preservation programs administered by the District include the Historic Agricultural Resource Preservation Program (HARPP), Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) and the Rural Legacy Program (RLP). As Administrator for Prince George's County, the District has preserved 82 properties on about 7,463 acres, utilizing \$52M of land preservation funds.



HARPP preserved  
**5 Farms,**  
Totaling  
**161 acres**

**82 Farms**  
Preserved  
Since 2008,  
Totaling  
**7463 Acres**

## 2024 Ag Land Preservation Program Highlights

In 2024, five landowners submitted applications for land preservation, and those applications had been vetted through the Historic Agricultural Resource Preservation Program. The 161 acres submitted totaled an overall fiscal investment of \$1.45 million. It is anticipated that these properties will settle in early 2025, continuing Prince George's Soil Conservation Districts commitment to agricultural preservation in Prince George's County.

### Author:

Jeanine Nutter  
Land Preservation Administrator  
Jeanine.Nutter@md.nacdnet.net | [www.pgscd.org](http://www.pgscd.org)

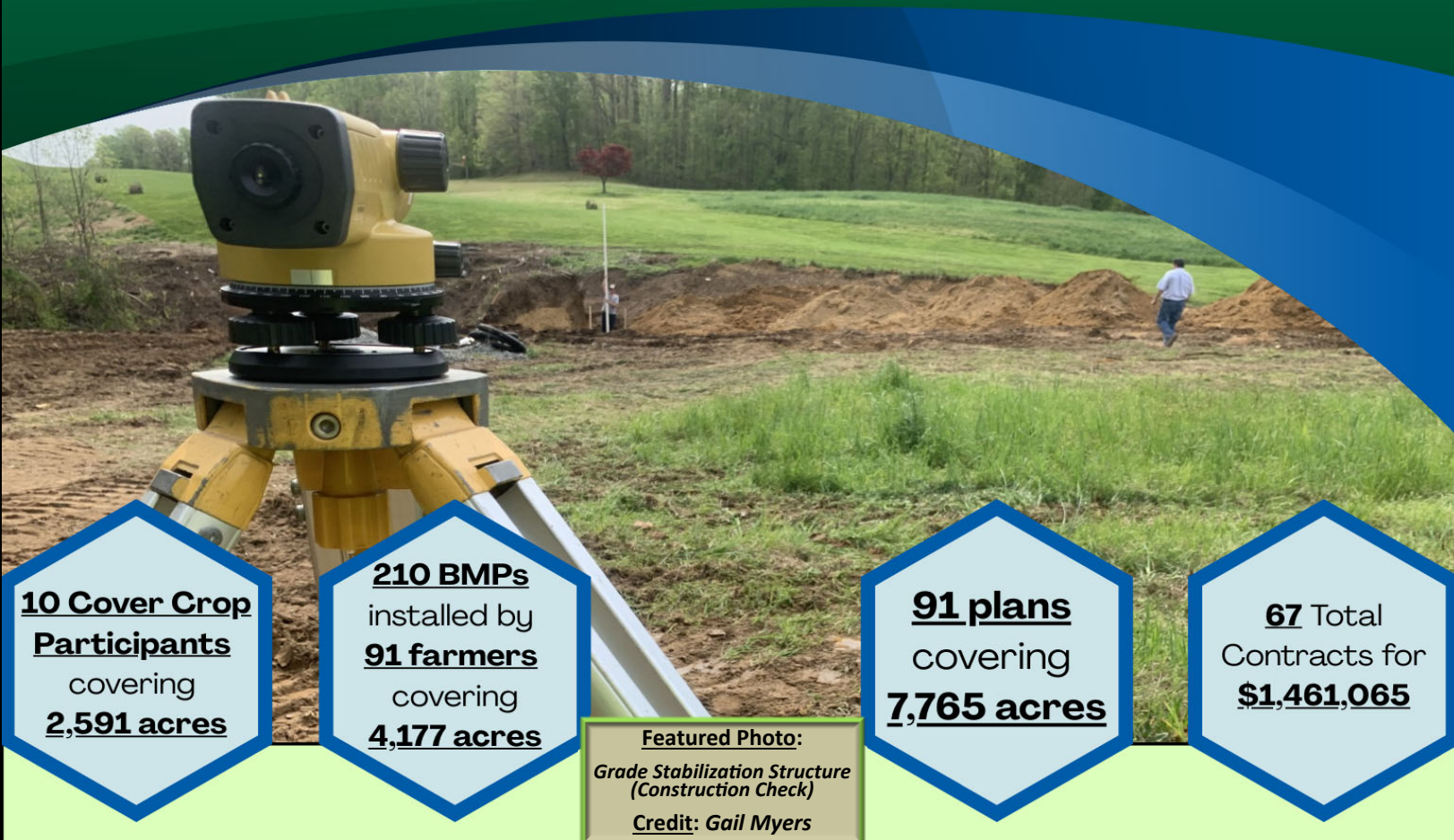


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Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
301-574-5162 ext. 3



The Agricultural Conservation Program through the District provides farmers and stakeholders engaged in agricultural activities with the technical assistance and potential funding needed to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to conserve soil and water resources.

Cooperators receive technical services free of charge. Planners and technicians will assist in the preparation of soil conservation and water quality plans on farms and appropriate BMPs and engineering designs as needed. Staff can also assist with programs and applications with the landowner if eligible for State or Federal cost-share.



**10 Cover Crop  
Participants**  
covering  
**2,591 acres**

**210 BMPs**  
installed by  
**91 farmers**  
covering  
**4,177 acres**

**91 plans**  
covering  
**7,765 acres**

**67 Total**  
Contracts for  
**\$1,461,065**

**Featured Photo:**  
*Grade Stabilization Structure  
(Construction Check)*  
**Credit: Gail Myers**

## 2024 Agricultural Conservation Program Highlights

2024 was another busy year of fielding new landowner requests, current landowner designs, contracts, best management practice (BMP) implementation and maintaining operation of our rental equipment program. This is the final year to meet 2025 Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) goals and staff has been working diligently to update expired plans while managing a hefty current workload. The partnership with USDA/NRCS has been a tremendous asset to the office and to our cooperators with 64 federal contracts obligated totaling \$1,365,799! MDA has also been consistently helpful with our cover crop program, 3 capital projects totaling \$95,266 and backfilling our **MDA Technician** position, welcoming **Vern Crocker** to his new role/transition from RC&D. Our office also welcomes new staff/transitions for NRCS (**Miya Felder, Soil Conservationist** and **Mike Montillo, Area Civil Engineering Technician**) and RC&D (**Chase Kolstrom, Forester** and **Ben Stewart, Grazing Specialist**). All of this couldn't be possible without all the hard work our farmers do, so special shout out to all our cooperators for your hard work helping get conservation on the ground!

### Author:

Gail C. Myers, P.E.  
Ag Conservation Program Manager  
gail.myers@md.nacdnet.net | www.pgscd.org



5301 Marlboro Race Track Road,  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
301-574-5162 ext. 3



### **Spotlight:**

## Drones Saving the Bay in Prince George's County

Farmers in Prince George's County have been participating in the Maryland Cover Crop Program for many years, but this year brought a new technology to help make the cover crop more successful.

Getting a cover crop planted early is important especially during drought years because there are often higher levels of nutrients remaining in the soil that the summer crop couldn't use. Aerial seeding is a quick and efficient way to get cover crop planted and, in some counties, there are companies providing this service. A small plane will fly over the field and spread the seed into whatever summer commodity crop is there. In Prince George's County, the challenge is smaller fields with a variety of topography. This makes it impossible for a plane to accomplish this type of seeding.



One farmer, **the 2019 Soil Conservation Farmer of the Year, Randy DeVughn** (*featured right*), was able to hire a drone (*featured left*) to aerial seed some of his cover crop into his standing corn. He was curious about how it would turn out and took a gamble of giving it a try. It ultimately turned out very well!



The drone doesn't hold as much seed as a typical seeder but doesn't seem to create any problems. There is also the challenge of the "no fly zone" near Washington DC, but through careful Unmanned-Aerial-Vehicle (UAV) path planning, these areas are easily avoided. The drone is relatively quiet and can seamlessly access fields that may have limiting obstacles.

When the summer commodity crop was harvested, the cover crop was already up and growing. This cover crop will work hard all winter providing a protective cover against erosion and nutrient runoff and leaching. It will also help build up the soil organic matter that will be helpful to the crops in the following years. Hopefully, in the foreseeable future, more farmers will be able to adopt this new way of planting cover crops! #

*(Photos Taken By: Randy & Jennifer Devughn)*



The Prince George's Soil Conservation District's Urban Development and Conservation team members review Erosion and Sediment Control (ESC) plans for the sake of conformance with the Maryland Standards and Specifications for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control, as well as the Prince George's Soil Conservation District Soil ESC Pond Safety Reference Manual. The Grading, Erosion and Sediment Control plans are reviewed and approved for residential, commercial, forest harvest, stream maintenance, surface mining, fill sites, landfills and county or municipal projects. The District is regarded as being very responsive to the needs of the development community and the private engineering sector for reviewing and approving plans in a timely manner.



**4,622 acres**

approved for Urban  
Development  
projects

**Reviews:**

**44.6%**

within 5 business days

**97.8%**

within 10 business days

**Featured Photo:**

***National Capital Business Park***

**Credit: John Tarr**

**MDE Delegated  
Inspections**

**Authorities Supported:**

**4**

(Prince George's County,  
Laurel, Greenbelt,  
Bowie)

**156 Hours +**

of one-on-one  
client consultations  
and  
collaborations

## **2024 Urban Development Program Highlights**

Improving customer experience, programmatic efficiencies, and reducing application timelines were the main headers in 2024 for developments proposed within the urban sphere. Proactive and constructive feedback from the industry—specifically, the Maryland Building Industry Association (MBIA), consultants, builders, and developers—over several roundtable engagement sessions provided for a targeted approach and prioritization of efforts. Several bulletins and clarifications were issued for the purpose of improving the consistency and predictability of applications, as well as reducing submission iterations. An increased emphasis on earlier interventions, where needed, and client engagements have resulted in better communication, and alignment of expectations and deliverables. 2025 will be—and has been thus far—a resilient continuation of these efforts.

### **Author:**

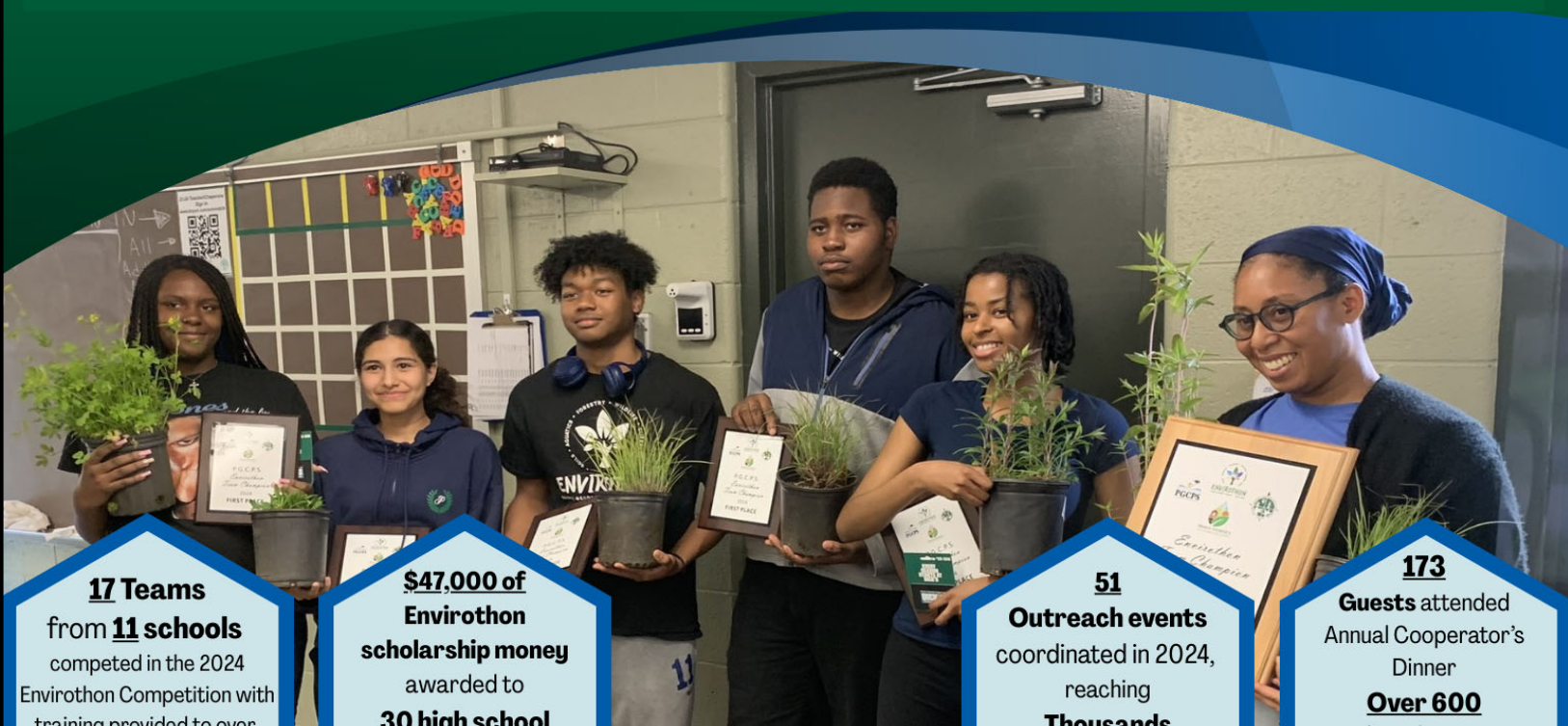
John Tarr, P.E.  
Chief Engineer/Program Manager  
jtarr@co.pg.md.us | www.pgscd.org



5301 Marlboro Race Track Road,  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
301-574-5162 ext. 3



At Prince George's Soil Conservation District we strive to make an impact through our educational efforts and outreach programs. Our District has worked in various capacities to improve the education and knowledge of our citizens, honor those who have made a difference in their own communities, and promote new ways of learning to empower students for a better future (and planet). A few of the outreach and education programs we are involved with include: Envirothon; County Fair; Beautification Committee; Summer Youth Enrichment Program (SYEP); Annual Cooperator's Dinner; PGCPs - Environment, Agriculture, Natural Resources; District Coloring Contest; Community Garden Summit; PGC Bloomin' Open Mic Nights; Spring Seedling Giveaway and Vendor Fair; Earth Day Plant Giveaways; Arbor Day Tree Planting; and Community Farmer's Markets.



**17 Teams**  
from **11 schools**  
competed in the 2024  
Envirothon Competition with  
training provided to over  
**135 students**

**\$47,000 of**  
**Envirothon**  
**scholarship money**  
awarded to  
**30 high school**  
**students**  
since 2013

**Featured Photo:**  
**2024 Envirothon Winners—**  
**Laurel High School**

**51**  
**Outreach events**  
coordinated in 2024,  
reaching  
**Thousands**  
**of County residents**

**173**  
**Guests** attended  
Annual Cooperator's  
Dinner  
**Over 600**  
**Copies of the 2023**  
**Annual Report**  
distributed

## 2024 Envirothon Competition



The Envirothon is a natural resources competition for high school students. Five-member teams study provided reference material and participate in hands-on training in soils, aquatics, wildlife, forestry, and a fifth environmental issue that changes from year to year. The winning team earns the right to compete at the next level, be it the state or national event. The Envirothon provides a fun and exciting way for high school students to learn about natural resources, make informed decisions about the environment, and earn scholarship money for college. The event is a problem-solving competition that challenges students to work collaboratively to answer questions and conduct hands-on projects focusing on natural resource issues. The goal is to increase students' environmental knowledge and understanding, while also motivating young people to care for the environment by practicing stewardship in their homes, schools, and communities. We are proud to announce that Laurel High School won first-place honors at the 2024 Prince George's County Envirothon for the third year in a row and went on to compete at the state level.

### Author:

Kimberly Summers,  
Administrative Assistant  
kmsummers@co.pg.md.us | [www.pgscd.org](http://www.pgscd.org)



5301 Marlboro Race Track Road,  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
301-574-5162 ext. 3



Every year, the Prince George's Soil Conservation District thoughtfully chooses a Cooperator of the Year, hosting an annual dinner to honor their work and promote the District and Prince George's County. These dinners are a significant opportunity for the farming community and those associated with the District to come together and celebrate each other.

On Friday, April 19th, 2024—with a turnout of 173 attendees, we'd honored **R. Garrett & Sons Farm**! These dinners will continue to be a staple of the District's community engagements!

**Featured Photo:** *The Garret Family with their Cooperator of the Year Plaque*



The Prince George's Soil Conservation District and the Upper Marlboro Community Center have always had a close relationship with each other and the local community, having collaborated to host a variety of outreach events. On October 31st, 2024, they came together to host an indoors Trick-or-Treat event geared toward getting Preschoolers into the Autumn season. Between staff and children alike, the turnout was spectacular, and the District will continue to coact with the community at large for years to come!

**Featured Photo:** *PGSCD and Upper Marlboro Community Center Staff In-Costume for the Trick-or-Treaters*



For the **tenth** year, PGSCD was proud to participate in the local Toys for Tots Drive! Organized 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 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 **three boxes** of toys for the Toys for Tots Drive!

**Featured Photo:** *PGSCD District Manager, Steven Darcey (middle) and Pickup Crew after loading the boxes onto the truck*





## **DISTRICT STAFF**

**Steven E. Darcey, CPESC, District Manager**

**John Tarr, P.E., MBA, District Engineer**

**Joe Bonanno, P.E., Urban Engineer**

**Gail Myers, P.E., Conservation Engineer/Program Manager**

**Julie Miller, Urban Engineer**

**Kebede Shihamit, EIT, Urban Engineer**

**Eugene Whitehead, Urban Engineer**

**Fiona Thampi, CPESC, Urban Engineer**

**Wade Hampton, District Planner**

**Jeanine Nutter, Ag Land Preservation Administrator**

**Kim Rush Lynch, Urban Ag Conservation Planner / Program Manager**

**Jason Sierra, Urban Ag Conservation Planner**

**Kimberly Summers, Administrative Assistant**

**Terry Hampton, Office Manager**

**Rita Jones, Administrative Aide**

**Kayla Rawlings, Administrative Aide**

**Cedrick Coles, Administrative Aide, Editor**



**Diana Lagunes, Soil Conservation Planner**

**Heather Zdobysz, Soil Conservation Planner**

**Vern Crocker, MDA Technician**



**United States Department of Agriculture**  
**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

**Colleen Kiefer, District Conservationist**

**Brian Brookhart, NRCS Southern MD Regional Engineer**

**Jake Kiessling, NRCS Conservation Engineering Technician**

**Mike Montillo, Area Civil Engineering Technician**

**Nya Segears, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

**John Knowles-Kellett, RC&D Program Support Specialist**

**Shana Burke, RC&D Technician**

**Isaiah Nance, NRCS Technician**

**Lauren Hawkins, NRCS Agricultural Engineer**

**Chase Kolstrom, RC&D Forester**

**Miya Felder, NRCS Soil Conservationist**

**Ben Stewart, RC&D Grazing Specialist**

### **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**



**Patrick Goode, County Executive Director**

**Brian Wathen, Program Analyst**



**@pgscd**



**@pgscd**



**@pgscd**



**@pgscd**





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