

R. Garrett & Sons Farm 2023 Cooperator of the Year

Richard Garrett grew up on the family farm with his mother (Daisy) and stepfather (Billy) raising tobacco, corn, soybeans, small grain, and hay. Richard credits his love for farming to the years he spent working part-time on the farm while running a full-time business away from the farm. When he sold his business, he began farming full-time. Billy's grain operation had grown to over 500 acres and over time, Richard purchased the equipment and fully took over the operation.

In the early 1990's, working with former District Conservationist, Jim Cary, the farm operation began adopting conservation tillage and planting practices. The first pieces of conservation equipment were a no-till corn planter and a no-till drill for soybeans, small grains, and hay.

Several incentive programs offered by USDA-NRCS and the Maryland tax subtraction modification program for conservation equipment assisted with the transition from conventional tillage to conservation reduced tillage.

Soil conservation and soil health best management practices that are implemented by R. Garrett & Sons Farm include no-till planting, crop rotation, multi-species winter and summer cover crops, grassed filter strips, nutrient management, a structure for water control. Richard and his wife, Renee, and their sons (Carson, Blake, Ryan & Dawson) farm over 800 acres. They manage 18 farms in Prince George's County and 3 farms in Anne Arundel County.

Folks are surprised to learn they farm in Bowie and surrounding areas. Farming in those areas come with a few added logistical challenges. Moving equipment around safely in congested traffic areas, losing tillable acres to housing developments and solar facilities, and maintaining long term leases are all part of modern-day farming in the more suburban landscape. Those challenges are on top of typical farm challenges such as wildlife crop damage, increased fuel, pesticide and fertilizer costs, depressed grain prices, and the challenge with unpredictable weather.

As Richard says, "you put six figures into the soil every season and hope for a positive return.... if it was easy everyone would be doing it, so I try to work smarter not harder". While the challenges of making a living from the farm exist, Richard and Renee know their boys may pursue other careers and that's ok. They always have a place to come home to on the farm. "I would rather be remembered as a good father than a good farmer, Richard says".

Working closely with the Conservation Partnership staff at the Upper Marlboro Service Center, Richard has taken advantage of available programs for implementing conservation including USDA-NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and MDA's Maryland Agriculture Cost-Share (MACS) program.

Richard believes in being involved. He is the newest member of the local USDA-FSA committee. Being plugged in with other local farmers and studying how other producers are excelling nationwide has been helpful because Richard feels there is always more to learn to make him a better steward of the land. He knows that one action is connected to multiple other actions and outcomes that improve the soil health resulting in fewer inputs with improved yields.

Because of their exemplary achievements we are pleased to announce R. Garrett and Sons Farm as:
"Prince George's Soil Conservation District 2023 Cooperator of the Year"