A Publication of Catoctin & Frederick Soil Conservation Districts

District Digest

Summer 2023

In this Issue:

Catoctin & Frederick Soil Conservation Districts

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DISTRICT MANAGERS MESSAGE

What a busy couple months it has been! The 2022-2023 Cover Crop Program finished up with Frederick County farmers planting around 30,000 acres of cover crops in the last cycle. Applications for the 2023-2024 cycle closed on July 17th with 164 applications processed by staff!

Staff have been working diligently to finish up conservation plans and designs for best management practices in time to meet federal cost share deadlines. Approximately 5.5 million dollars in Federal Cost-Share have been approved for Frederick County in support of your projects!

And we know you have all been very busy with wheat harvest, planting, and making hay. It was good to meet so many of you as you came in to sign up for cover crop. I know in office sign up wasn't super convenient, but it was good to have our doors open again!

This edition covers a bit of what's been keeping us busy at the office. I hope you enjoy it. If you have ideas for future issues we would love to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Heather Hutchinson

HAPPY RETIREMENT!

Please join us in congratulating Steve Leatherman on his retirement after 19 years of service with the Districts. He will be greatly missed!

BOARD MERGER

Did you know Frederick County is the only county in Maryland with two soil conservation districts (SCDs)?

The Catoctin SCD was formed in 1939 and was the second district in Maryland. The Catoctin SCD was the product of the efforts of Martin S. Beachley and Harvey R. Grossnickle, two progressive farmers in the Middletown Valley (Catoctin Watershed) who recognized the importance of soil conservation.

The Frederick SCD was originally part of a district representing the Monocacy watershed, along with Carroll County. In 1944, the Monocacy SCD divided creating the Frederick and Carroll SCDs. The Frederick SCD represents Frederick County with the exception of the Middletown Valley.

The districts operated independently early on. They hosted work days using volunteers to accomplish installation of best management practices. Today the federal and state governments offer cost share assistance to individual farmers to facilitate this work. The role of the SCDs expanded from primarily agricultural work to serving as the reviewing agency for sediment and erosion control plans for both Frederick County and the City of Frederick. The boards approve conservation plans, but they do not fund nor direct funding for practice implementation. Further, SCDs throughout Maryland have been tasked with meeting agricultural best management practice goals to help the state achieve the federally mandated Watershed Implementation Plan. These goals are assigned to the entire county rather than to individual districts. As the role of the SCDs has evolved, it has become mutually beneficial to align more closely both economically and administratively. Today, the SCDs share staff, income, expenses and assets.

Over the past few years, the SCD boards have engaged in discussion regarding the relevance of maintaining separate districts. They recognize the duplication of efforts required for preparing for two monthly board meetings and a third if decisions affecting both districts are needed. They considered the the expense associated with bookkeeping fees for separate ledgers, and for conducting annual financial reviews of accounts for each SCD. The boards also considered whether a merger would impact the farming community.

The reality is that agricultural work is assigned based on staff workload and skillset. Frederick county is fortunate to have many farmers who are interested in conservation and actively participate with the office. This enthusiasm creates a backlog of work which will not be affected by a merger, but rest assured, staff are working diligently to develop conservation plans and technical designs to meet your needs. After considerable discussion, both boards agreed to further investigate the process of merging the districts.

The merger process is detailed in the Code of Maryland Regulations §8-401 (COMAR). COMAR directs that the process to merge or divide districts is managed by the State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC). The first step toward merging is to assess the interest of landholders within each district in pursuing a merger. At the request of both boards, a petition to merge was developed by the SSCC and introduced in November 2022. In May of 2023, the required number of signatures (25) from each district was achieved. After the petition was submitted, the SSCC scheduled a referendum. Notice of the referendum was placed in the legal notices and on the Ag Calendar of Frederick News Post, in the Delmarva Farmer, and on the district website and Facebook page. In addition, the boards hosted a public meeting on July 6th to give Frederick County residents an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns about how a merger might affect them.

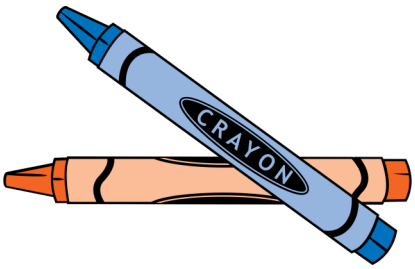
The referendum was held July 10th -14th at the SCD office and monitored by staff of the SSCC. A mail in ballot option was also provided.

The SSCC will announce the results within 30 days of the close of the referendum. At the time of this printing, the results are not available. Results will be posted at the SCD office and on our Website and Facebook page when made available.

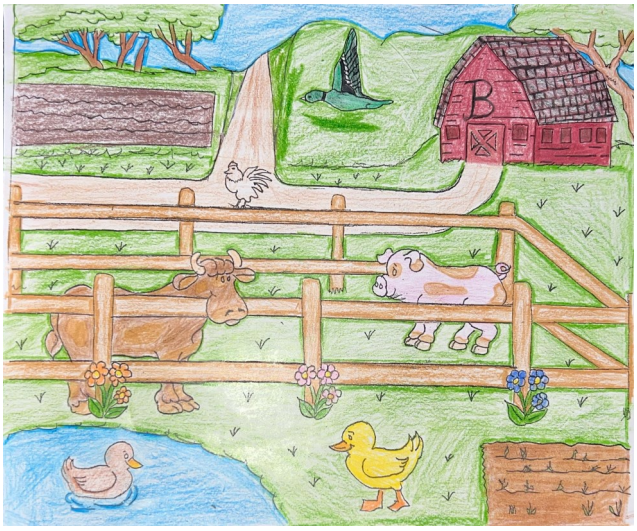
MASCD COLORING CONTEST WINNERS

Frederick County elementary school students demonstrated their artistic prowess through their submissions for the annual Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) coloring contest.
We greatly appreciate the Johnsville Ruritan for judging the entries and selecting those who will represent Frederick County at the next level.
Congratulations to the following first place entries! Their artwork will be judged against students from other Maryland counties at the annual MASCD meeting in August.

1st Place- Class A, Kindergarten & 1st Grades: Adaline H. from Woodsboro Elementary.



1st Place- Class B, 2nd & 3rd Grades: Maggie B. from Wolfsville Elementary.



1st Place- Class C, 4th & 5th Grades: Madison A. from New Midway Elementary.

SEE YOU AT THE FAIR!

The Great Frederick Fair is almost here! From September 15th through September 23rd you can stop by "City Streets and Country Roads" and visit our booth. We will have coloring books featuring Mia the Mole, soy crayons donated by the Maryland Soybean Board, and a pollinator card you can take home to plant. So put on your boots and plant some down home roots at the Great Frederick Fair! Pictured below are some of our staff helping at the booth (L-R: Matt Drury, Cassidy Marquis, and Emily Doney.) Our district's boards and staff displayed a rainfall simulator as well as an acrylic box planted with tillage radishes which allowed for viewing of the root system. The rainfall simulator was a great visual aid for children and adults to see the importance of keeping soil covered with living plants. The rainfall simulator ran for a few minutes over the surface layer of soil from two different fields; a continuous no-till field with a winter cover crop and a field that had been tilled and had not historically had cover crops. Clear containers underneath each sample collected the water and soil run off. The simulation showed that no-till fields planted in cover crops had less runoff and that runoff had less sediment than the tilled field with no cover crop.

Manure Transport Program

Maryland Department of Agriculture's Manure Transport Program helps to offset the cost of injecting and/or transporting manure to farms with low phosphorus fields.

To qualify for transport/injection assistance:

- Manure must be transported more than 1 mile from the sending source (transport requirement only).
- The soil test FIV-P on receiving fields must be less than 100 (transport requirement only).
- Legume crops (containing >25% legumes) are eligible for injection costs only.
- A current nutrient management plan is required at time of application.
- Manure may be applied after March 1st with the last day to haul of December 15th.
- *For Spring application – manure must be transported or injected by June 30th.
- Claims for payment must be received by the department's Conservation Grants Office within 30 days of the spring or fall spreading deadline.

For questions related to the Manure Transport Program and how you can apply, please contact the District for more information.* *Date changes reflected by MDA Press release on March 21,2023.*

ENVIROTHON

The Frederick County Envirothon was held on April 25th at Cunningham Falls State Park. 16 teams competed to test their knowledge in aquatics, forestry, soils, wild life, and a fifth issue that changes each year. This year's fifth issue was adapting to a changing climate. Help us in congratulating the winners:

1st Place- "Rose Mallow" from Urbana High School
2nd Place- "Blue Herons" from Brunswick High School
3rd Place- "Picasso Moths"- from Urbana High School

The state Envirothon competition was held on June 15th and 16th at the Western Maryland 4-H Park in Garrett County with 14 teams competing. First place went to Harford County. Our Frederick County team from Urbana High School placed 6th! The Harford County winning team moves on to the national competition being held this year in New Brunswick, Canada.

Pictured above: 1st Place Team, "Rose Mallow" from Urbana High School.

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT CHANGES

On June 1st, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) announced changes to their agreement with the University of Maryland that would impact the nutrient management plan writing service offered through local extension offices. The announcement was followed by listening sessions held throughout the state to hear concerns from farmers about the nutrient management planning process. On July 17th, MDA hosted a nutrient management summit to outline a path forward based on the feedback received at the listening sessions.
The following objectives were presented at the meeting and were provided in a July 17th press release from MDA:

- Evolving the nutrient management plan model through industry input to adapt to modern farming practices and operations;
- Improving the plan writing process through cost-free plans available to farmers;
- Grow and support plan writers by increasing the emphasis on Farmer Training Certification (FTC) Program;
- Incentivize individuals and organizations to offer plan writing services throughout the state;
- UME will remain engaged in this program by continuing to offer free nutrient management plan support as in the past.

To view the complete press release, visit https://news.maryland.gov/mda/press-release/2023/07/17/maryland-department-of-agriculture-announces-new-strategy-at-nutrient-management-summit/

For a current list of for hire Certified Nutrient Management Consultants, visit https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/counties/NM_CONSULTANT_FOR_HIRE_DIRECTORY.pdf.

UMD Extension Crop Report

Mark Townsend, Agriculture Agent Associate
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This year, agriculture agents in Frederick, Howard, and Montgomery Counties have offered free crop scouting services for growers in Central Maryland. Agents provide growers with summaries of each scouted field, offering a field-scale report of the observations and recommendations to address any potential concerns. These reports are compiled and summarized to provide a weekly overview of observed trends.

Crops in our area have been on a rollercoaster ride stemming from this season's turbulent weather.

According to state weather data, from January through April we experienced the warmest average temperature in 129 years at 47.1 degrees F compared to a seasonal average at 40.5 degrees F average. No less, the same period only yielded 9.9" of total precipitation, placing us below the 10th percentile of accumulated precipitation entering the growing season. The month of May offered a reprieve from the heat, as nighttime temperatures held in the 40s for a good many evenings. Yet, the drought pattern continued through May and into June with an observed total precipitation of 4.32" at a NOAA weather station in Thurmont, placing these months below the 5th percentile of accumulated precipitation and ranking this time period within the top-ten driest across 129 years of data.

Though these statistics appear foreboding, field crops have proven especially resilient thus far. Small grain yields this year have been nothing short of outstanding. Barley in particular has been the real winner as growers have reported top end yields, shattering personal bests and offering a much needed lift. A few growers saw yield-monitors top out around 160 bu/ac in some regions, with field averages ranging between 110-130 bu/ac. No less, grain quality has remained incredibly high thanks to our drier than usual spring.

Current reports from wheat harvest tell a similar tale with yields holding in the 90-100 bu/ac average and others reporting higher still. However, much of this year's wheat crop had shown symptoms of Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus (BYDV) during the growing season. Most notably, the crop height appears uneven as advanced infections result in smaller stature wheat, as well as a purple and yellow discoloration of flag-leaves. This disease is relatively uncommon for our region. Though because this disease is transmitted by a few species of aphids, our dry and mild winter offered an incredible proliferation of aphids. In this, there are few in-season management options to address BYDV. However, planting date, seed treatments, and thoughtful insecticide applications to control disease-vectoring aphids are considered best practices. If our weather conditions continue to remain mild into the fall, it may prove valuable to evaluate these options to limit BYDV infections next year.

Staying in cool season grasses, the hay crop has also proven noteworthy. The limited spring rains have been a bit of a double-edged sword: bales are generally on the lighter side, however the quality of first cutting hay is remarkable. Barring one incidence of Stagonospora leaf-blotch in an orchardgrass crop, incredibly low disease pressure in the hay crop was observed. Moving forward into second cutting, concentrate scouting on insect pressure as well as foliar diseases like anthracnose and summer blight in cool-season forages.

The queen of the forages, aka Alfalfa, has been slightly mixed. Earlier this year, a few outbreaks of alfalfa weevils were reported and observed before first cutting. Drier patterns and frequent cuttings have slowed this pest while exacerbating others like potato leaf-hopper and grasshoppers. Nevertheless, the overall quality of even the higher pest pressure fields has remained notably high given the limited disease infection opportunities.

On the other hand, the corn crop certainly suffered in the dry spell. The recent rains we received in the latter-half of June rejuvenated the crop in the short run as the curled and twisted leaves from moisture stress observed from just a few weeks past are harder and harder to find. Yet as we well know, we're not out of the woods yet; we'll need a few more timely rains as we move into pollination to keep this crop healthy. In this, we have lost some of our top-end yield potential, though much of the scouted corn thus far still has a very solid yield potential. This topic on perceived yield loss was discussed in a previous scouting report (Week ending 6/19/2023) in more detail. Briefly, the yield loss associated with drought conditions

in early season corn (VE-V8) is less pronounced as it is in later season corn (V8-Reproduction). That being said, keep on doing the rain-dance as we move into pollination!

A good friend of mine once said "the only drought resistant corn is a soybean", and no truer observation could have been made this year. Though much of the soybean crop was slow to emerge given the limited soil moisture, the crop has performed well given the conditions. Very few scouted fields showed symptoms of significant moisture stress as the deep, tap-rooting behavior of the plant scavenges deeper in the soil profile for moisture. Early planted fields saw some slug pressure in the high pressure spots including field margins and low-lying areas, though the damage has been relatively localized and minimal this year relative to years past.

Insect pest pressure has also been low, though the Japanese beetle population has emerged earlier this year. Additionally, a few fields had a small population of soybean aphids–please keep an eye out for these moving forward as well as refer to previous and upcoming scouting reports on IPM action threshold values.

All things considered, we are still in good shape. Field crops appear in solid condition as we move into the critical developmental time frame. Fair weather will certainly keep us in good condition, though a watchful eye will ensure we can do everything possible. To enroll in the scouting program or to review the reports, please visit the Frederick County Agriculture Extension webpage at https://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/agriculture-and-food-systems

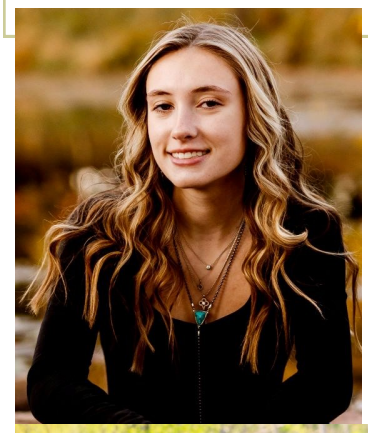
2023 GEORGE A. NICHOLSON SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The Frederick Soil Conservation District would like to congratulate the winners of the 2023 George A. Nicholson, Sr. Scholarship. This year, the district was able to offer three scholarships, one to each of the following individuals:

Megan Downing, Middletown High School

Micayla Linkous, Middletown High School

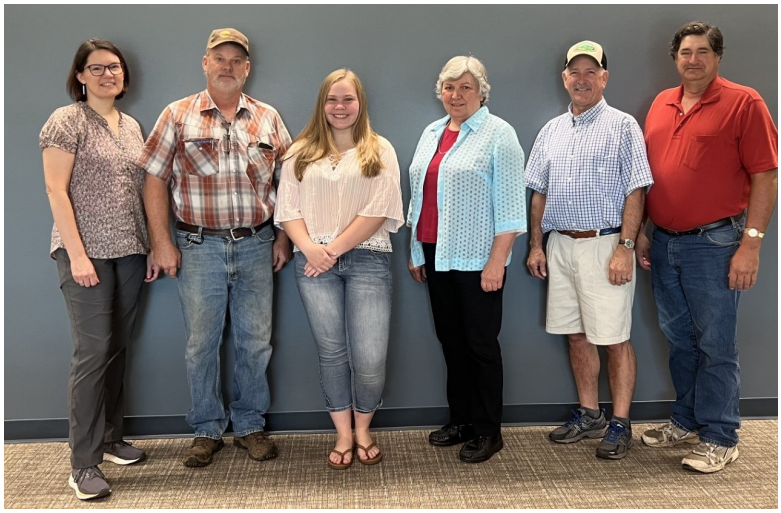
Abigail Beckman, Linganore High School Graduate, current VA Tech Student



Left Top: Megan Downing, Middletown High School, a 2023 George A. Nicholson Sr. Scholarship winner.

Left Bottom: Micayla Linkous , Middletown High School, a 2023 George A. Nicholson Sr. Scholarship winner.

Right Bottom: L-R, Heather Hutchinson, Scott Hipkins, Scholarship winner– Abigail Beckman, Diane Flickinger, Barry Burch, and Robert Myers. Board member Robert Black is missing from photo.



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