



TALBOT SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SPRING NEWSLETTER

March 2004

IN THIS ISSUE

Cover Crop Spring Certification	page 1
WHIP In 2004	page 1
2004 EQIP Program Sign-Up	page 2
Conservation Buffers Still Work	page 3
Maryland Issues Quarantine	page 3
Establishing and Managing WSG	page 4
CRP in History	page 4
Talbot SCD Cooperator of the Year	page 5
Talbot Farm Wins National Award	page 5
Talbot Soil Survey Uses ArcView	page 5
Conservation Security Program	page 7



Cover Crop Spring Certification

For those of you who are participating in MDA's cover crop program we are gearing up for spring certification. Beginning March 1 farmers may begin killing down their cover crops. Within two weeks after kill-down of the cover crop has been achieved, or by June 7, the applicant must certify to the Talbot Soil Conservation office that the cover crop has been killed down.

WHIP In 2004

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has been funded for 2004. The sign-up period is currently open for various conservation practices used to improve wildlife habitat on your property. Such practices include native grass plantings, field borders, grass filter strips, riparian forest buffers, shallow water impoundments, wetland creation/restoration projects, and shoreline/streambank protection projects. The shallow impoundments can be managed as plant and flood systems. These projects are eligible for 75% cost-share reimbursement and must be maintained for a minimum of five years. A new practice involving invasive plant species control has been added this year. At this time, the components of the practice are being finalized. The deadline for the sign-up period will be Friday, April 9. Please contact Bobby Gorski or Heather Beaven at the Talbot Soil Conservation District office with any questions or to begin the application process.



Special Birthday

The Talbot Soil Conservation District was honored to celebrate with Roy Robert Scott, "Scotty", his 75th birthday in February. Scotty began his career as a Public Servant in April 1951 with the Soil Conservation Service. In 1961 the Soil Conservation Service established a dedicated office in Talbot County and Scotty transferred from Dorchester's office. After 34 years as a federal employee Scotty retired and switched to the Maryland Department of Agriculture employee that he is today. Soon to be a total of 53 years of service, Scotty's effort to keep our office as a family and team is very evident. His dedication to the service is unquestionably the highest and we are so appreciative to have him in our Talbot Soil Conservation District family.

2004 EQIP PROGRAM SIGN-UP OPEN NOW!



Come in now to sign up for EQIP eligible practices between now and April 9, 2004. As in past years the money for this program will be divided into two pools of money. One pool is a statewide competition for certain practices and the other pool is for county wide competition for practices. Some practices will have 75% cost share, some at 50% cost share and others at only 25% cost sharing. Some practices are incentives to encourage adopting certain practices. Some practices can also be co-cost shared with MACS funds. This year applications that address more than one resource concern and incorporate multiple practices will score higher in competition points. EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices to a maximum term of 10 years.

The statewide pool will include; animal waste storage, including waste storage facilities, lagoons, roof runoff and contributing watershed management (as it relates to managing animal waste), all other Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) components, heavy use area protection, composting facilities for manure if it's a component of waste storage and the CNMP, and closure of waste impoundments, when they are no longer used for their intended purpose and when they impair surface and/ or groundwater.

In our county pool we will offer cost sharing on practices relating to cropland, grazing land, forest land and irrigation/nurseries. If you have any interest or questions please contact Jack King or Teresa Kampmeyer at 410-822-1577 or just stop in the office and we will be glad to go over any questions or fill out your application. Filling out the application does not commit you

to doing the practice. You still need to go through the ranking and competition process and then a contract will be completed. We would like to have as many applications as possible. This could impact the allocation coming to Talbot County. To do an application will usually take about 15 minutes of your time. This will be done in the Talbot Soil Conservation District Office and not at FSA. The following is a partial list of eligible practices:

Up to 75% cost share may be applied to the practices considered to have the greatest environmental return and that address the greatest number of resource concerns: (Certain conditions and limits may apply)

- Pasture/Hayland Planting
- Waste Storage Facility

The remaining practices are cost-shared at a 50% rate. Certain conditions and limits may apply.

- Closure of (abandoned animal) waste (storage) impoundments
- Constructed Wetland
- Fencing
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation
- Irrigation System, Sprinkler
- Tailwater Recovery (storage facility)
- Watering Facility (tank or trough)

Practices cost-shared at a 25% rate include:

- Pond (Restoration)

Incentives are provided for the development and implementation of selected management practices. They include:

- Cover and Green Manure Crop
- Prescribed Grazing
- Nutrient Management and Enhanced Nutrient Management
- Integrated Pest Management

There is one other issue about EQIP that we would like you to know about. If you are working with a Nutrient Management Consultant, which is now known in "Government Speak" as a Technical Service Provider (TSP), you should encourage him to contact us to inquire about registering as a TSP provider to farmers and land owners. This could make him eligible for certain cost share benefits and help reduce your cost and increase his revenue. Please give us a call about EQIP before you get real busy this spring, the deadline is **APRIL 9TH!**



**Note to Producers:
Conservation buffers still work.....
Economically & Environmentally**

In addition to providing economic benefits, buffers can help you achieve a number of important conservation objectives. When used with supporting practices, buffers can help you:

- Prevent soil erosion
- Improve water quality by removing sediment, fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants from runoff.
- Improve air quality
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat
- Control flooding
- Improve Farm Safety
- Protect buildings, roads and livestock
- Conserve energy
- Beautify the landscape

Buffers are valuable tools that can help you sustain your operation and protect the environment. That's good news for today and tomorrow.

Today, more than ever, USDA's conservation programs are complimentary, so that farmers and ranchers can combine conservation practices to do what's best for their working land. The programs are also voluntary, and most provide incentives and cost sharing.

One of America's largest private land conservation programs is the CCRP. The continuous Conservation Reserve Program, with its incentives and cost sharing, make it a wise economic choice and provide common-sense conservation at its best.

A related program available in Maryland is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. It is a federal-state-local program that addresses

specific conservation needs, primarily water quality.

You'll find that in addition to CCRP and CREP, several other programs can help you install conservation buffers and other wise conservation measures.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program- Significant increases in funding for EQIP in the 2002 Farm Bill make it an attractive program. Livestock-related natural resource concerns and other conservation priorities, including buffers, are among the practices EQIP funds. Local input helps establish local conservation priorities under EQIP.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program- WHIP is a voluntary program for landowners who want to develop and improve fish and wildlife habitat on private land.

Forest Land Enhancement Program- A new program in the 2002 Farm Bill, FLEP provides cost sharing, technical assistance and education to owners of private forest land. Planning, tree planting, fish and wildlife habitat, riparian restoration and forest improvement are among the practices that landowners may focus on with FLEP.

Contact Talbot SCD for more details.

Maryland Issues Quarantine Order

The Maryland Department of Agriculture issued official Quarantine Order #04-001. Maryland in coordination with the State of Delaware and the Delmarva Poultry Inc. formally prohibits the following activities until March 10, 2004, unless extended by the Secretary:

- The movement or transport of poultry within the restricted area unless the flock has tested negative for avian influenza and the Secretary has given permission.
- The movement or transport of poultry manure within or into the restricted area, removal of poultry manure from any poultry house inside the restricted area, and spreading of poultry manure within the restricted area.
- The sale of live birds, which was banned in an announcement on February 11.

The restricted area applies to the areas of Maryland south of the Pennsylvania State line, west of the Delaware State line, east of the Susquehanna River, and north and east of Maryland Rt. 50. Any person who violates the

requirements of this order is subject to criminal penalties.

Establishing, Maintaining, and Managing Warm Season Grasses

Right now your CRP/CREP warm season grass plantings should be providing much needed winter cover for a variety of wildlife. Once these grasses are established they do an excellent job of reducing soil erosion and sedimentation, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat. Stiff-stemmed warm season grasses trap sediment carried by water or wind. Their “bunch-like” growth provides excellent nesting and protective habitat for many species of birds, as well as a source of seeds and insects for feeding. The long tap roots developed helps to take up nitrogen in the ground water.

Warm season grasses can play an important role in conservation but much care should be considered when establishing and maintaining them. Full establishment of these grasses can take 2-3 years. Therefore careful management such as mowing and weed control must be considered a priority in the beginning. While mowing and/or weed control may initially cause somewhat of a negative impact on wildlife, the long term benefit these grasses give, once established, far out way any of this. We have seen many failures as a result of poor establishment methods and lack of weed control.

Beginning in the summer of 2003, new CRP participants are required to perform specific management activities to ensure long term plant diversity and wildlife habitat benefits. Participants can receive up to 50% cost-share after completing the management activities recommended by NRCS. For participants with older contracts (prior to signup 26) management activities are optional. Participants can request approval from FSA to add management practices to their contracts.

CRP in History

There's a lot of controversy going on right now with one of the most successful Farm Bill Programs ever authorized by the USDA. While many of the rules and provisions of this act have changed over the years, the basic intent has not. The original intent of CRP goes back to the 1985 Food Security Act (Farm Bill). The purpose of the CRP program was to offer long-term rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish permanent vegetative cover on cropland that was highly erodible (HEL-Highly Erodible Land). With this program the USDA gained certain

environmental benefits through a protective vegetative cover of grass or trees that would not only reduce soil erosion, but would also improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In 1990, the CRP program added the Chesapeake Bay as one of its “other eligible lands”. Including the Bay watershed in CRP, made way for non-HEL land in Maryland to be enrolled, without having to meet the HEL criteria. Now, water quality benefits would also be attained on land that was not just HEL. It would include land that could be contributing to a water quality problem. The CRP program came out with a list of objectives in May of 1991. They were: **(a)** Assist land users in voluntarily converting highly erodible land and environmentally sensitive cropland from the production of annual crops to less intensive uses such as permanent grass, legumes, forbs, wildlife cover or trees. **(b)** Facilitate sound resource management systems through the conversion of highly erodible and other cropland to perennial vegetation for future use as rangeland, pastureland, hayland, wildlife land or woodland. **(c)** Enhance fish and wildlife habitat **(d)** Improve and preserve water quality **(e)** Protect the nation's cropland base **(f)** Demonstrate the beauty of good stewardship and improve aesthetic quality.

Then on October 20, 1997, Maryland became the first state to jointly establish an Enhanced, Conservation Reserve Program with the USDA. The CREP was a Maryland specific enhancement of the USDA CRP program. The CREP program was established to encourage farmers to voluntarily plant permanent areas of grass and trees on land that needed protection from erosion, to reduce nutrient movement, or in places where vegetation could improve water quality or provide food and habitat for wildlife. CREP would provide bonus payments above normal rental rates for establishing riparian vegetative buffers, for retiring certain HEL land, and restoring wetlands. The goal of Maryland CREP is to enroll 100,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land statewide. We are currently just under 70,000 acres. Environmentally sensitive land includes cropland within 1000 ft. of streams or permanent water bodies, HEL land, or wetland areas capable of being restored. New CREP regulations are in the process of being authorized and should be in our next news letter. The new changes are a result of farmers loosing too much productive ground in to the program.

**Hans Asmussen & Sons Inc.
Talbot Soil Conservation District's
2003 Cooperator of the Year**



The Talbot Soil Conservation District presented Eric Asmussen, president of Hans Asmussen & Sons Inc., with our 2003 Cooperator of the Year Award at the District's Christmas lunch. Eric's grandfather started their farming operation in the 1930's. Throughout the years, Eric and others in his family have participated in a cooperative way with many of our programs. Congratulations for doing such an outstanding job for many years.

**Talbot farm wins National Small
Farm of the Year Award**



Lisa Jones-Raymond, Doug Raymond, and son Steven owners of Dogwood Farm in Sherwood were selected as the 2003 National Small Farm of the Year by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Raymonds are involved in many aspects of sustainable agriculture, from greenhouse production of micro vegetables and customized hog and beef operations, to grazing fields, and using grasses to protect the Chesapeake Bay. Congratulations on winning this prestigious award.

**Talbot Soil Survey Uses ArcView for
Computer Digital Mapping**
By Carla Baker, Soil Scientist

Keeping pace with the evolving technology available to soil scientists, NRCS installed the prevailing desktop mapping and GIS software, ArcView, in every Maryland soil survey office in 2001. Phillip King regional soil scientist, began to develop a method for updating and digitizing that would enable field soil scientists to map and edit soils accurately and efficiently on their computer.

Talbot County promptly began the first phase of the process: scanning, rubber-sheeting, and geo-referencing the old map sheets to digital photography provided by NRCS. This task was contracted to GIS specialist John Inkster of Geo-Ink-Graphics, Lewes, Delaware. Inkster converted the scanned lines and built polygons for the second phase: attributing. Charlie Hanner, soil scientist, labeled the polygons in ArcView using a customized interface designed by Inkster. Pull-down menus of mapunit symbols allowed the symbol to be selected and placed without typing, saving considerable time and effort. With the attributing complete, Inkster integrated the soil symbols into the polygons and made global edits to the attribute table according to correlation decisions previously made by the survey staff. 86,000 of the 205,000 acres, or 42 percent of the mapunits, were re-attributed instantaneously through global edits.

The third phase began when the digitized, attributed version of the old Talbot County Soil Survey was presented to the survey staff. The project includes separate themes for layers of data, such as hydrology and cultural features, with representative symbols from the legend. Special extensions and customized pull-down menus run scripts that allow themes to be edited without starting and stopping the edit mode, resulting in a more efficient procedure. While numerous other approaches to on-screen mapping are simultaneously developing in other regions, one unique feature to this procedure lies in the actual soil lines. Editing polygons in ArcView is a tricky matter due to the fact that any one boundary between soil polygons actually has two lines, one for each adjacent polygon. Moving both lines concurrently is a difficult task and frequently results in gaps and overlaps. Editing polylines however, as is done in Inkster's

projects, requires fewer steps and presents fewer opportunities for error.

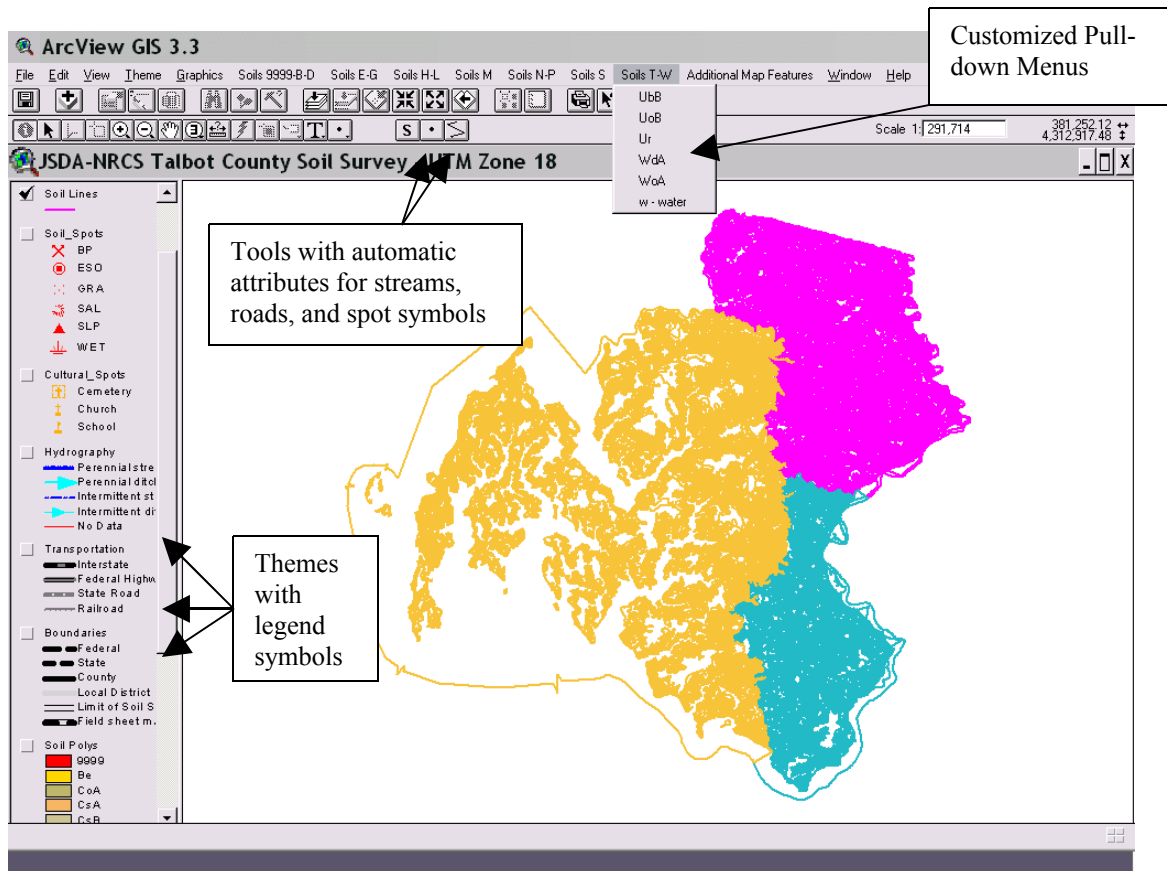
Supplemental layers of data, like contours, higher resolution photos, or geology maps, can be instantly turned on/off or left open in an additional view. Another noteworthy feature of ArcView is the ability to query old mapunits, displaying trends that aid in correlation decisions and attributing. Talbot County Soil Survey Project Leader, Jim Brewer and his staff are currently in the editing phase of the project. Once complete, Inkster will perform several quality control procedures. A CDROM with the complete project will be forwarded to a national map digitizing center in preparation for certification.

Other Delmarva counties have adopted a similar approach of updating and digitizing, while some counties choose only to digitize. Somerset County is in the editing phase, and Caroline and Kent Counties are scheduled to be digitized next. An additional benefit to digitizing initially and

then updating is that a digitized version of the old survey is available to conservationists and planners to utilize in Toolkit until the editing and map finishing is completed.

The Talbot County survey staff agrees digital mapping has significant advantages over light table compilation. Line transfer by hand, which previously took months, can now be completed in weeks (depending on the contractor). Gingerly erasing on mylar is replaced by clicking and dragging with a mouse. While this may seem tedious at times, the digital data requires fewer steps to meet certification standards in the long run. Naturally, the degree of improvement over traditional compilation techniques depends highly on the quality of the old survey lines, quality of the new digital imagery, and the capabilities of your computer. As project member Charlie Hanner states, "You're always going to want better imagery and a faster computer, that's the way it will always be."

Customized Pull-down Menu



Sample view of ArcView project showing themes set up for editing and pull-down menus for attributing.

Conservation Security Program

What does this really mean? It means that the USDA is about to embark on a new structure for Ag programs for the American farmer and land owners. In the coming years farmers will be rewarded with financial payments for practicing conservation on their farms that address our natural resource concerns. In the past, USDA has focused its resources on helping farmers correct problems. By adopting new and existing technology farmers can now address environmental concerns by the farming practices they choose to adopt in operating their farms. In the future, USDA will reward farmers financially for using those improved and proven practices and will no longer pay for correcting a problem caused by poor farming practices. We have been farming for a long while under the rule of meeting “T” as an acceptable level of performance. In the future, farming will need to be focused on farming for “C” or carbon. Defining “C” refers to building organic matter in our soils as we farm. There is a long list of benefits that relate to increasing the carbon content or organic matter in our soils. Keeping soil in place was the focus for managing for “T” since the days of the dust bowl and high erosion events from the 1920’s and 30’s which created the birth of the USDA’s Soil Conservation Service. “T” arose from that scenario to create a tool that would recognize a tolerable loss of soil that would still allow for productivity. With the greater understanding of organic matters’ role and the evolution of better production practices incorporating newer science based technology we are about to embark on a new approach to sustaining and increasing productivity while preserving our environment in a way never approached before.

A logical question is, “what does carbon have to do with all of this discussion about USDA government payments and soil erosion”. Carbon is looked at as almost synonymous with organic matter in the soil Carbon compounds are the product of photosynthesis from plant growth. Where does the carbon come from? A lot of it comes right out of the atmosphere from the action of plant growth and this is what is very

important to environmentalist as they look for ways to reduce “green house gases” or the effects of fossil fuel burning. Soil organic matter affects several critical soil functions, it can be manipulated by land management practices, and is important in most agricultural settings across the country. Because organic matter enhances water and nutrient holding capacity and improves soil structure, managing for soil carbon can enhance productivity and environmental quality, and can reduce the severity and costs of natural phenomena, such as drought, flood, and disease.

By addressing conservation issues from the perspective of soil organic matter instead of erosion, we will focus on enhancing the soil as opposed to managing for tolerable degradation. We will exploit the full potential of cover crops, crop rotations, and reduced tillage to address conservation concerns. What do we know about this new program at this point? The proposal is for a 3 tiered approach with higher payment levels for each tier and each level bringing a greater level of conservation to the land. The funding for the initial stages will not be great enough to apply to the entire nation so selected watersheds will be chosen to do the initial work. This is supposed to address areas of the greatest need for environmental help; however, as we all know politics will probably have a big role in where this program starts. The watersheds chosen are not likely to be as big as the Chesapeake Bay but rather sub-water shed such as the Choptank river watershed. The program was authorized with an unspecified annual funding level from FY2003 through FY2007, with an overall spending cap of \$3.77 billion as of January 4, 2004. Adoption of this new approach will be historic in the history of farming in America. Being aggressive in the application of conservation practices and bringing your whole farming operation to address the highest level of resource concerns will place you in a good position to take advantage of what is coming down the road. Applying no-till systems and minimum tillage systems, abandoning clean tillage, applying nutrient management and manure management, utilizing crop rotations that produce high amounts of residual carbon, optimizing and managing cover crops, changing land usage

such as changing row crop land to intensively managed pasture land are all practices that will get you to where this is leading.

We will have articles in future newsletters helping all of us better understand what the future holds for us in this new approach to farm programs from USDA.



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215 Bay Street
Easton, MD 21613

Phone: 410-822-1577
Fax: 410-820-8919
www.talbotscd.com

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Talbot Soil Conservation District

Field Office Staff

Teresa Kampmeyer, District Conservationist
Craig Zinter, District Manager
L. Dale Vanzant, Secretary
Roy R. Scott, Soil Conservation Associate
Paul Biddle, Civil Engineering Technician
Levin Schwaninger, Soil Conservation Planner
Bobby Gorski, Soil Conservation Planner
Jack King, Soil Conservationist
Heather Beaven, 319 Grant Planner
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