



TALBOT SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

WINTER NEWSLETTER

January 2005



Paul received a Length of Service Award from NRCS for 37 years of dedicated Service.

TSCD bids farewell to Paul E. Biddle

After 37 years with the federal government Paul Biddle decided to retire on January 3, 2005. Paul began his career with the Soil Conservation Service in November of 1967. He worked in the "Watershed Projects" in Caroline and Queen Anne counties. Paul helped with the survey, layout and construction of public and private drainage systems. Then in January of 1983 to February of 1987 he worked with the Tri State Water Resources and Planning Staff for Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey. When the 1985 farm bill came out it was decided that the agencies shouldn't drain any more land. Therefore Paul was offered a job working in the Talbot Soil Conservation District office as a Civil Engineering Technician. Paul worked for the District for 18 years surveying and laying out conservation practices (and yes, helping to restore some of the acres of wetlands he helped drain in the late 60's, 70's and early 80's). Paul we miss you, your sense of humor and your zest for life. Thanks for the memories Paul, and best wishes to you and your family.

WINTER COVER CROP PROGRAM

We are in the middle season of one of the most successful cover crop programs. The emphasis on earlier planting with the extended fall and moderate winter weather to date, have given cover crops a great opportunity to "do their job." Nutrient removal and soil stability should be near an all time high for the cover crop planted last fall. Here are a couple of "heads up" reminders as we get nearer to next spring. **March 1st** is the kill down or suppression date which is the earliest date you can till down or chemically spray down your cover crop. This may not be the ideal time to destroy the cover crop but it is the earliest date you can do this and still be eligible for payments. Also, as a reminder, no nutrients may be applied before **March 1st**. **June 6th** is the next date to mark on your calendar. Between March 1st and June 6th you can come to our office and certify what acres you killed and/or suppressed for cover crop. Call Levin, Heather or Bobby if you have any questions about the rules etc. for cover crop at 410-822-1577.

WHIP SIGN-UP

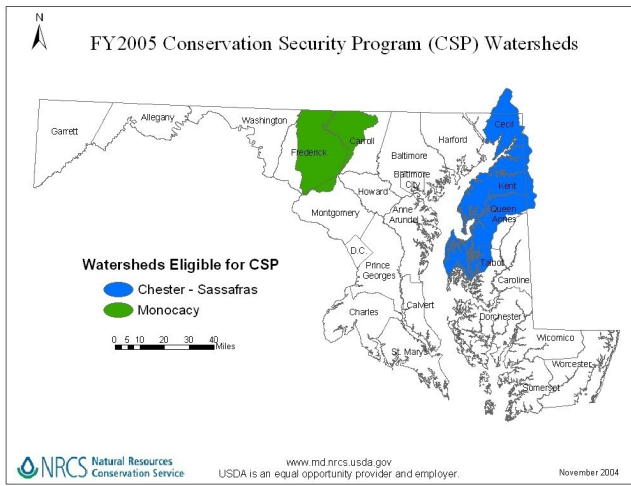
WHIP, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program is now open for sign-ups for 2005 and will end on January 28th. Maryland has \$248,600 available in this federally funded cost share program. Talbot County has always been a traditional high sign-up county for this program. One feature unique to WHIP is that you don't need Agriculture Land to participate. Many of the federally funded programs require that Ag Land be used to participate. Not so in WHIP! If you are "Johnny Home Owner" and have a few extra acres available that you would like to use to enhance wildlife habitat then WHIP could be the program for your backyard conservation program. Public School Land is also eligible and this feature has been used often in Talbot County as a great teaching tool for conservation. This program is voluntary and has an average cost share rate of 75%, but does not have any land payments associated with it such as CRP or CREP. A very popular practice with WHIP has been plant and flood projects for wildlife ponds. It is important to note that this is the only program we have now that cost shares for this practice. It is not available in CREP. Other practices available in WHIP are Filter Strips, Riparian Forest Buffer, Stream bank and Shoreline Protection, Wetland Creation/Restoration, Controlling Invasive Plant Species (site will be restored to native vegetation through planting and natural regeneration). Contact our office and ask for Heather or Bobby for more details at 410-822-1577.

CREP ABOUT TO REOPEN

The latest version of the very successful CREP Program will be available for sign up and approval in early February. The new program will feature some changes that reflect the many discussions and critiques of the past programs by incorporating what are deemed to be improvements. Separate rules will apply to the Eastern Shore (Cecil County South) from the remainder of the state. In general, the new rules permit shorter buffer widths while providing larger bonuses for the first 50 ft. adjacent to streams, other water bodies, and wetlands. The most notable difference is that channelized intermittent streams and constructed drainage ditches can now only be buffered out to 35 feet with grass plantings only. Riparian Forested Buffers are not permitted on these ditches. Marginal pasture land is now eligible for wildlife habitat and wetland buffers. A new category or practice which is not fully described yet is CP 25 and is designed to create habitat for declining species of wildlife. In general you can say that rates are higher, widths are shorter, and eligibility is tighter in some cases and more available in others. Two other conditions need to be met to qualify and they are that the land must be owned for one year prior to enrollment, and it must have a recorded crop history for 4 out of 6 year's from 1996 to 2001. Please inquire at FSA for program details and more specifics. The following web site is available to get details on the upcoming program: http://www.md.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/crp_crep/crp_crep.html.

EQIP 2005 SIGN-UP

EQIP sign up will be held earlier this year than in recent past years so don't let the sign up period pass you by. The opening date has not been announced yet but will be around the last week of January and will run until about the middle of March. As in the past, the state funds will be split into two pools. A state wide pool will include all animal waste storage practices, lagoons, roof runoff, contributing watershed management if part of a CNMP, CNMP components, Heavy Use Area when planned with waste storage, composting facility if part of CNMP, closure of impoundments when no longer used for intended purpose. A local or county wide pool will fund the remainder of the practices. The final list of practices that will be eligible for cost share this year is still under review at this time but it will look very similar to years past. Some pasture related practices will be enhanced as the USDA NRCS is pushing for greater involvement in this resource area. Irrigation practices are going to have a bigger piece of the action in this year's EQIP program. If you are involved in irrigation and especially if your equipment has some age on it, you should be talking to us at sign up time. We may be able to help you get some updates if it improves water use efficiency. If you have a need for cost sharing conservation practices that might be included in the EQIP program please call us and discuss them. This is the program that can do the most for you by addressing environmental issues on your land. With the largest funding ever in this program, NRCS can do more to help address your farms' needs. **To be eligible to qualify for EQIP funds you must sign up during the sign up period.** Each application will be evaluated in either the state wide pool or the local county pool. If your application scores high enough in these pools then your project can be funded. Last year over 5 million dollars were awarded to Maryland farmers and land owners. Call Teresa or Jack if you have any questions about our EQIP program at 410-822-1577.



CSP Program hits Talbot County

The Conservation Security Program (CSP), part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was first introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. Maryland did not have any watersheds selected for the 2004 sign-up. The 2005 CSP sign-up marks the first opportunity for farmers from every state to participate through selected watersheds in their state. About one eighth of the Nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year, over an eight-year period, until all eligible watersheds have participated in CSP. Maryland's two eligible watersheds are the:

- Chester-Sassafras Watershed- which includes all or part of Talbot, Queen Anne, Kent and Cecil counties.
- Monocacy Watershed- which includes parts of Frederick, Carroll, and Montgomery counties

CSP represents a whole new direction in conservation and agricultural policy and programs. Payments will be rewarded for demonstrable long-term stewardship to those who implemented conservation practices on their own initiative and care for the resources we all share. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life. Participants may be enrolled in one of three tiers in the CSP, depending on the extent of the conservation treatment in place on their farm or ranch. Payments will be based on existing conservation treatment as well as the landowner's willingness to undertake additional environmental enhancements. NRCS will host local workshops in each of the selected watersheds to more fully explain the program to interested participants. Operators located in the CSP watershed will be notified of these workshops in separate mailings. Signup is expected to start in February and run for two months. **To determine if you may be eligible to participate in the new CSP program see if you can answer yes to the following questions that apply to your farm:**

CSP Questionnaire:

1. Do you have cropland, hay land, pastureland, vineyards and/or orchards that are located within a watershed announced to be in the program for this year?
2. Do you share in the risk of producing the crop or livestock on this land, and have control of some or all of the land you intend to enroll for at least 5 years? *Note: Landlords who receive only cash payments for renting the land are not currently eligible to apply for CSP on that acreage. The operator (or renter) of that land may apply, however but only if he/she has control of the land for the life of the contract (5-10years).*
3. Are your cropland and pasture fields free from active gullies?
4. Do you have a nutrient management plan, and do you keep written records of your nutrient management activities for each field including yields, soil tests, nutrient recommendations, and nutrients applied (including animal waste)?
5. Do you keep written records or documentation of your pesticide application and pest control methods for each field (as required by federal law)?
6. Do you use and follow a grazing plan, allowing for periods of complete rest during the growing season, and feed hay or grain or other forage replacements before pastures get short or when not growing?
7. Do livestock have limited or no access to streams and ponds?

If you have answered yes to all of these questions for all or part of your operation, you may wish to consider attending the CSP information meetings to find out what opportunities you may have in CSP.

Farm records showing conservation practices, cropping rotations, pesticides used, nutrient application rates etc. will be required as part of the application process.

CSP will be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows. For more information on CSP and other NRCS programs log on to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.

Note: Portions of your farm or operation currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program or Grassland Reserve Program are not eligible acres for the CSP program.

USDA, NRCS, EXTENSION, AND YOUR LOCAL SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT PRESENT: EVENING TALKS ON PASTURE MANAGEMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT

Featuring

Les Vough, Extension Forage Agronomist
Ron Ritter, Extension Weed Control Specialist
Elmer Dengler, NRCS Grazing Specialist
Local Grazers, explaining why it works for them

Explanations of enhancements to USDA financial assistance in EQIP and AMA that will provide an affordable way to enhance pastures and improve environmental quality concerns such as those relating to nutrient management issues. **Cost-share** may cover amendments, seeding, fencing, watering systems, trails, and brush management.

EQIP AND AMA SIGN-UP PERIODS ARE COMING SOON!

DEVELOPING A GRAZING PLAN – \$500 INCENTIVE PAYMENT

MANAGING PASTURES – CUT FEEDING COSTS BY 50%

INSTALLING CONSERVATION PRACTICES – COST-SHARE UP TO 75%

DEVELOPING A CERTIFIED NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN – \$1,000 INCENTIVE PAYMENT FOR THOSE THAT QUALIFY

DESIGN OF PASTURE/HAY GRAZING SYSTEMS

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Nutrient management continuing education credits will be available for those who attend.

Call for Registration

Jan 31 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Eastern Shore, Caroline County 4-H Park

410-479-1202





John Swaine III, Chairman, Teresa Kampmeyer, District Conservationist, Holly Foster, Eric Foster, Jack King, Soil Conservationist

2004 COOPERATORS OF THE YEAR FOR THE TALBOT COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

This year we would like to honor Holly and Eric Foster. This young couple has made a tremendous statement about their faith in tomorrow as they have forged ahead to develop a grazing dairy farm. Developing a sustainable agriculture enterprise that would encompass family participation, make a profit, and develop a lifestyle that had more time at home for everyone were some of the goals that Eric and Holly wanted to encompass in their enterprise. There is no doubt that milking cows twice a day will help keep you home. Their ultimate goal is to manufacture their own cheese products and ice cream from their herd of grazing Jerseys and Holsteins. Holly has already made a variety of cheese products on a small scale as they started milking just one Jersey in their garage several months ago to give some of their ideas a trial run. After discussing their ideas and dreams with our staff they signed up into the EQIP Program for cost share on Waste Storage, and Heavy Use Area Protection for their feed area, travel lanes, and holding pen. To enhance their rotational grazing system, Fencing, Watering Facility, and Pasture Planting practices are being added. The Roof Run Off practice is also being installed. This project got off to a fast start last June and hasn't taken too long to completely change the landscape at this farm. They are now up and running, milking around 42 Jerseys, with about 40 more Holsteins and Jersey heifers to calve and enter the milking herd next spring. This farm is the first farm in Talbot County to have a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan developed for its operation. This is a requirement by NRCS to receive cost sharing on the waste storage system installed. CNMP's are designed to address all resources on the farm and take into account any pollution or environmental issues that may be present or might possibly arise. The management scheme for this farm is to do rotational grazing on the entire farm. High quality forages are being planted and a fencing and watering system are being developed to allow this herd grazing for up to 8 months each year. Grazing systems lower feed cost up to 50% and offer a more environmentally friendly system for handling cows. The real key to Eric and Holly's success will be the adoption of their "value added" concept of selling cheese and ice cream made at the farm. They are among a growing number of farmers now trying to capture a higher percent of the food dollars spent in our country. They hope to turn the growing, affluent, population into an asset instead of a problem for farming. A lot of work still remains to be done but much has been accomplished already. We congratulate you and wish you the very best. We look forward to continuously working with you in what has become a rewarding project for our District Staff.

TALBOT SOIL SURVEY UPDATE, CLOSER TO COMPLETION

The update of the old soil survey report issued in 1970 and written by William Reybold III, is near its completion. The old lines have been put into the computer (digitized) and the data base, from which the map unit descriptions and soil interpretation tables are created, is almost completed. Jim Brewer and Charlie Hanner, NRCS soil scientists, are working toward completing an interim report sometime this year. Project Leader Brewer stated "We've been working on many different projects across the State of Maryland, but Talbot County's soil survey update has always been a priority." Hanner has recently completed revisions, in the computer, to all the soil lines that encompass the county shorelines and floodplain areas. "This has been a significant task", says Hanner, "because these areas have under gone many changes in the last thirty-five years due to erosion and sea level rise." Many revisions were also required because of the acquisition of newer and better aerial photography. This enabled the soil scientists to see clearer distinctions between upland, floodplain and open water areas. The next step with the soil lines will be minor revisions in the other areas of the county. "Because Mr. Reybold did such a good job in mapping the soils for the original soil survey, only a few lines will need to be revised," stated Brewer. Most of these will be in the larger tracts of woodland where the newer photography has helped in seeing wetter areas and with steep sloped areas along drainageways.

Brewer has been working on the National Soil Information System (NASIS) for the county. This system is a depository for all of the soils data in the Nation. At the county level, NASIS provides all the reports and tables which are used in the final manuscript of the soil survey report. This is a fairly new system which has significantly changed the way soil surveys are done. The focus of the National Cooperative Soil Survey is shifting from producing static printed soil survey reports to providing a dynamic resource of soils information for a wide range of needs. The National Soil Information System (NASIS) is the core component of this vision and is designed to manage and maintain soil data from collection to dissemination. Basically, fewer hard copy reports of soil surveys across the nation will be published. All of the soil survey information will be available on the internet, at the local field offices, and on CD ROMs. The recently completed updates for Dorchester, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, Anne Arundel, Worcester, Frederick and Washington Counties are all available on the internet. "Having the soils data available on the internet will allow people to download the latest information into Geographical Information Systems (GIS), data bases or spread sheets. This will enable users to create custom soil interpretation maps with the most recent aerial photography available," says Brewer.

Hanner has recently completed two brochures for NRCS. The first, titled The Soil Survey Update Process, explains why the updates are necessary, the differences between the original and updated report, any special studies conducted, and a summary of the activities conducted in updating a soil survey report. The second one is titled Soil Data Mart (Official NRCS Soils Data Set Online). This brochure explains what information is contained at the site, how to download the soil information, how to create reports online, and what other web sites are available that contain soils information. Both brochures are available at the Service Center Field Office. They will soon be available on the Maryland NRCS web site at: <http://www.md.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils.html>

NORTHERN BOBWHITE QUAIL: HABITAT BASICS

Despite being one of the most popular and most-studied species of wildlife, the northern bobwhite quail population has been in a downward spiral for the past 30 years. Experts say it comes down to habitat and changing land use patterns. Knowing their habitat basics can help turn quail numbers around.

Food preferences. For the first six weeks of their life, quail chicks eat small beetles, bees, spiders, wasps, flies and other insects almost exclusively. They then gradually switch to grass and weed seeds and green plant leaves. The grass and fruit seeds along field margins are eaten in summer. Legume seeds as well as ragweed seeds and oak and pine mast are strong fall and winter foods. Waste corn, soybeans and wheat are also eaten in fall and winter. Other important food plants for quail include lespedeza, partridge pea, clovers, dogwoods, honeysuckle, crab grass and beggarweeds. Since chicks need insects and grass and weed seeds, “early successional” plants are key to their habitat. That’s also why disturbance of vegetation by disking or burning is an important component in habitat development. Prescribed burning is an underused but valuable tool

Nesting and brood cover. Nests are built on the ground, typically within 20 yards of a field opening such as a disked strip or road. Quail will move their brood from moderately dense nesting cover to more open “bugging” areas, where bare ground is interspersed with upright plants, including native “bunch” grass and forb mixtures. Overhead cover protects quail from avian predators above; open pathways underneath allow a running escape. Known as an “edge” species, quail like field borders and any other gradual edge between crop fields and woodlands, haylands, pastures or abandoned lands. The absence of edge cover can, by itself, make an area unsuitable to quail.

Winter cover. Quail like small fields surrounded by brushy draws, dense brushy cover or wood lots. In winter, look for them in a thicket of trees, brush and vines. Warm season grasses at least 8 inches high offer winter cover, too, as do uncut hay fields and moderately grazed grass/brush rangeland.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) in partnership with NRCS recently released the details on USDA’s Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative. Cost share is now available through the continuous CRP sign-up for **Habitat Buffers For Upland Birds**. This practice is targeted for areas of the state that provide the best opportunity to increase currently low quail populations – the Eastern Shore counties of Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester, and the Southern Maryland counties of Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary’s. Contact the Talbot Soil Conservation District at 410-822-1577 ext. 3 for program details.

ATTENTION CRP AND CREP PARTICIPANTS

To stay in compliance with program guidelines we recommend that buffer edges be permanently marked for the life of the contract. This will prevent encroachment into the buffer strips. Recommended markers include 5-foot white fiberglass rod posts, heavy duty metal “T” or “U” fence posts, and PVC pipe.

The Talbot Soil Conservation District has 5-foot coated fiberglass posts available for \$2 a piece.

Talbot Soil Conservation District

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