

Maryland Healthy Soils Program Update

Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Work Group (MWG)

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Kevin Antoszewski
Healthy Soils Program Coordinator
Maryland Department of Agriculture



How Does This Align with MWG Goals?

- ▶ Healthy Soils are a key part of MDA's strategy to reduce GHG emissions as described in the GGRA plan
- ▶ Carbon Sequestration
 - ▶ Priority conservation practices, set by Advisory Committee, align with GGRA and have carbon sequestration potential
 - ▶ Inventory method(s) discussion underway to better account for soil carbon from ag practices. COMET-Planner and the EPA SIT tool are being compared
- ▶ MDA currently updating farm evaluation tool for nutrients and carbon
- ▶ Expect future updates to MWG on Healthy Soils Program and associated tools



Healthy Soils Refresher - 2017 Legislation

- ▶ Improve the ability of the soil to function as a biological system
- ▶ Increase soil organic matter
- ▶ Improve soil structure and water and nutrient holding capacity
- ▶ Sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- ▶ Do all of this in a way that improves the health, yield, and profitability of soils in the state



Healthy Soils Committee: Priority Conservation Practices

- ▶ Cover crops (340)*
- ▶ Reduced till (345) and No-till (329)
- ▶ Prescribed grazing (528)*
- ▶ Forage and biomass planting (512)*
- ▶ Conservation cover (327)*
- ▶ Critical area planting (342)*
- ▶ Nutrient management (590)
- ▶ Conservation crop rotation (328)
- ▶ Integrated pest management (595)
- ▶ Agroforestry: Alley Cropping (311)
- ▶ Agroforestry: Hedgerow planting (422)*
- ▶ Agroforestry: Windbreak/shelterbelt establishment (380)*
- ▶ Agroforestry: Silvopasture (381)*
- ▶ Agroforestry: Tree/shrub establishment (612)*

*Conservation practiced directly or indirectly supported by current MACS programming



Healthy Soils Committee: Incentive Concepts

Most recent discussions - review incentive concepts that could be applied to the priority conservation practices

Included MDA's initial self-evaluation of each opportunity

MDA willingness to pursue any concept, but not concurrently

Incentive Concept	Brief description	Evaluation Metrics*		
		MDA capacity	Funding	Producer Experience
1) Traditional Cost-share	Use the expanded authority of the MACS program to cost-share for practice adoption	●	●	●
2) Bundled practice cost-share	Establish 2-3 practice suite implemented over contract duration	●	●	●
3) Conservation Buffer Initiative	Expand FY21 pilot program to address additional marginal lands with focus on saltwater impacted lands	●	●	●
4) Cover Crops	Expand traditional program based on SHAC recommendations (mixes, planting season, etc.)	●	●	●
5) Equipment financing	Promote LILAC opportunity and/or expand Income Tax Subtraction of conservation equipment to include roller crimper, small operation equipment needs, etc.	●	●	●
6) State certification program	Create branded farmer certification program to advance greater market opportunity (e.g. supply premiums) or other appealing outcomes (e.g. NM audits, priority program access, etc.)	●	●	●
7) Technical Assistance support	Support state's Soil Health Management Plan (SHMP) capacity via Technical Service Provider network. The SHMP is enabling document for holistic mindset, inclusive of soil health evaluations	●	●	●
8) Competitive grant fund	Create competitive grant program to fund practice adoption. Evaluation and ranking criteria could be developed with SHAC.	●	●	●
9) Small farm conservation	Establish dedicated assistance and protocol for small farm operations to complement existing programs	●	●	●

* **Definitions:** **MDA capacity** (Office of Resource Conservation) rates our current infrastructure and staffing capacity to deliver the incentive concept; **Funding** rates current (or likely) funding available to MDA for the incentive concept; and **Producer Experience** rates perceived interest or experience among producers with the incentive concept.

- = weak
- = moderate
- = strong



Healthy Soils Committee: Next Steps

- ▶ Incentives will include focus on shifting producers towards systems-level thinking about soil health and carbon storage
- ▶ Any outcomes-based payments will need to address permanence more directly if used as part of a market or inventory - state policy discussion
- ▶ Advisory Committee will meet again August 30 to resume discussions on incentives
- ▶ Goal to mostly finalize recommendations with the Advisory Committee over the next ~6 months

