

Winter Cover Crop Program

Progress Update

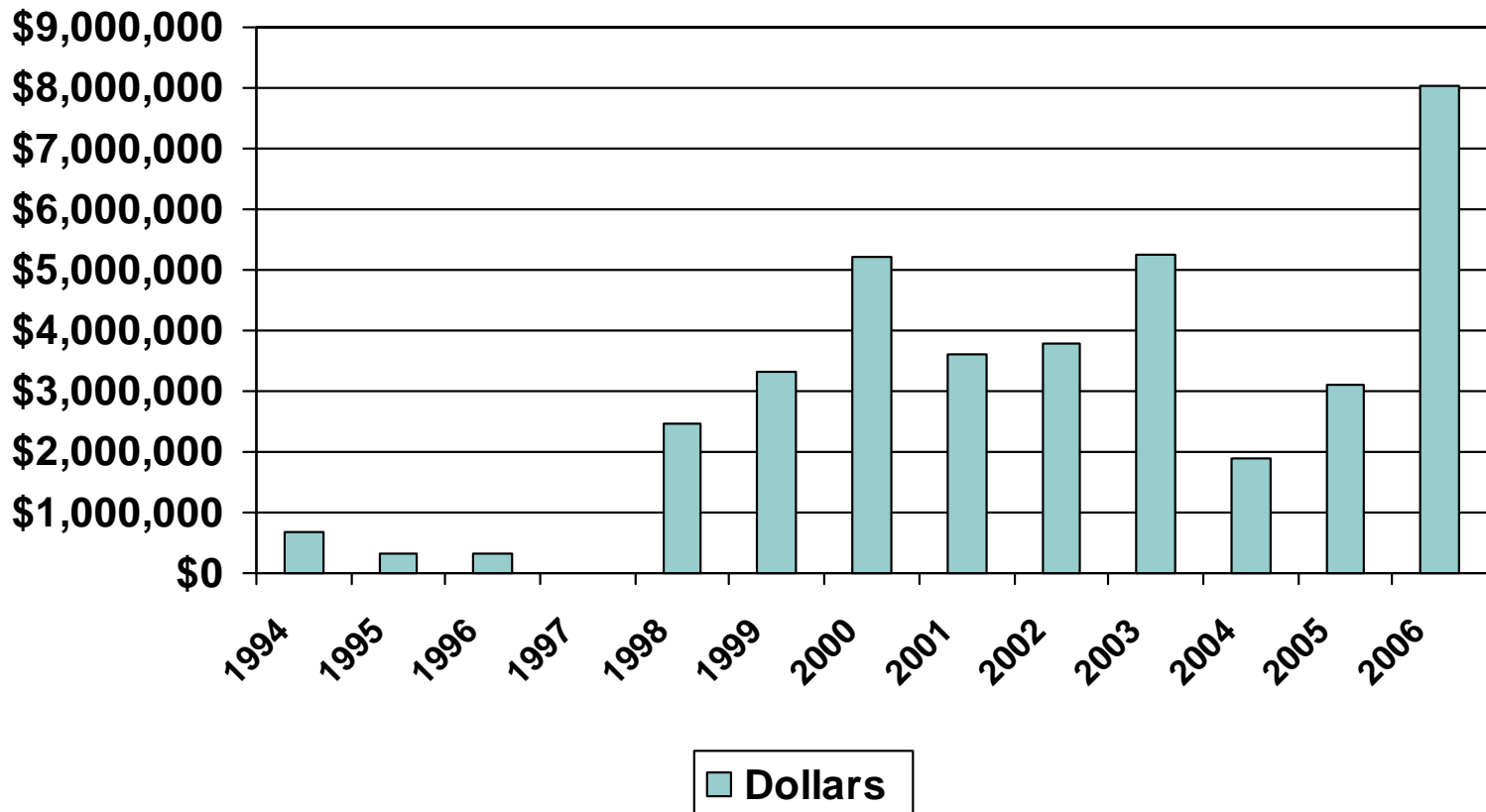
Bay Restoration Fund
August 31, 2005

Doug Scott, Assistant Secretary
MD Department of Agriculture



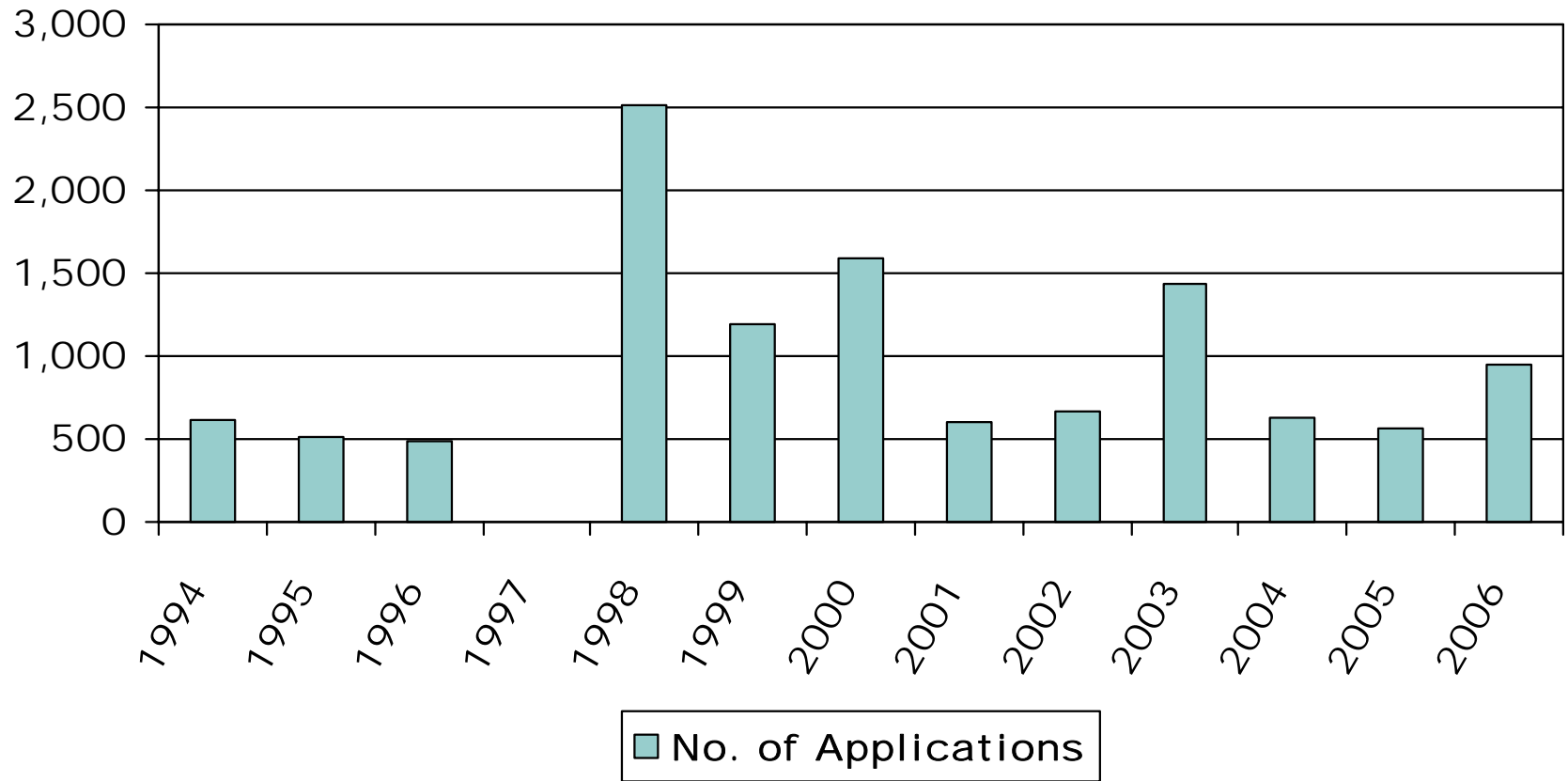
12 Years of Cover Crop

Dollars of Applications Received



12 Years of Cover Crop

Number of Applications Received



Program History

- Eastern Shore Cover Crop Program started in 1984
- FY1994: Funding increased
- No Program in FY1997 due to lack of funding
- FY1998 & FY2000: statewide Emergency CC and Small Grain Enhancement Program to offset drought conditions
- Grants provided in FY2002 for Cover Crops in Carroll, Frederick, Montgomery and Washington Counties
- Legislative initiative increased program Statewide in FY2003
 - Harvest allowed due to drought

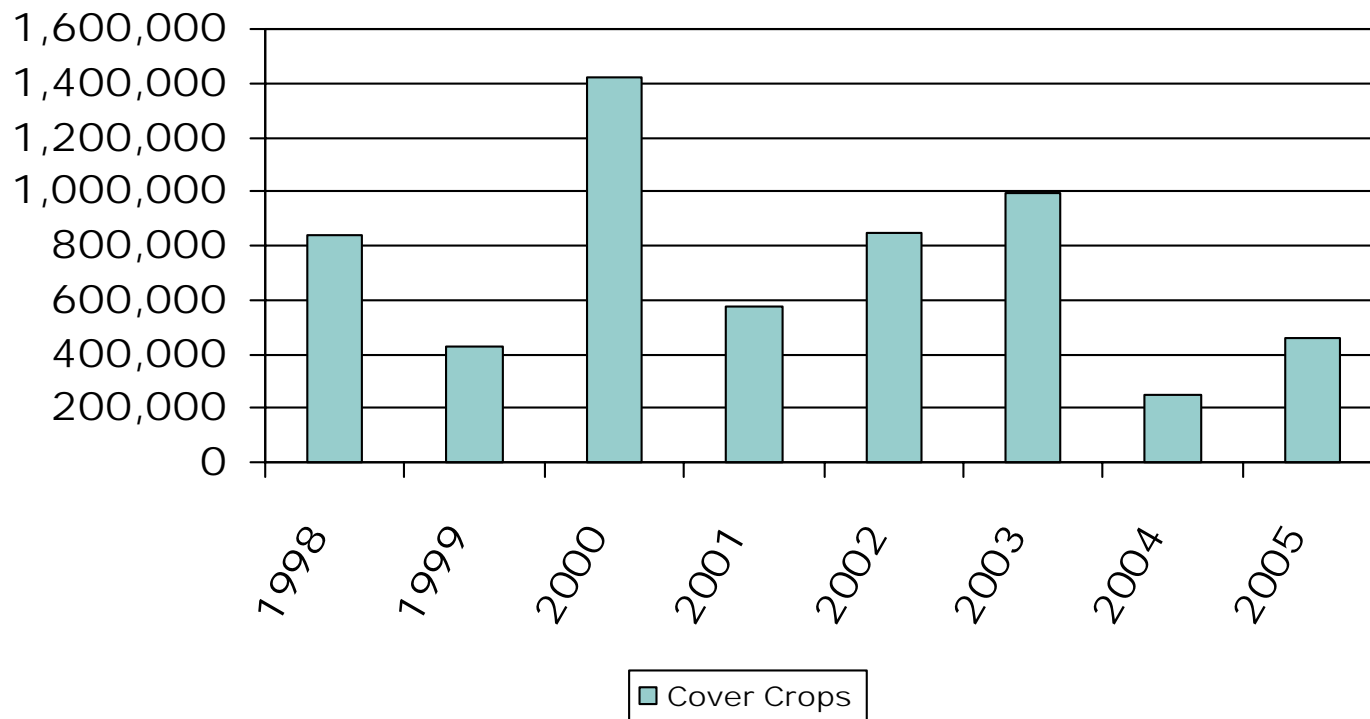
Why are cover crops beneficial?

- Research results showed 80% reduction in nitrate leaching when rye cover crops are planted immediately after grain harvest.
- In field scale watersheds, groundwater nitrate conc. decreased > 60% during a nine year period while using rye. Long term results!
- Earlier planting shows greater nitrate reduction.
- On average, cover crops reduce nitrogen load by 8.5 pounds/acre.

Cost-effectiveness of Cover Crops

Cover Crops are the first line of defense in agricultural systems

Nitrogen Reduction in Cover Crops



2005 Survey: How can we increase participation?

- Four Focus groups throughout the state
- 3,000 surveys mailed out; 650 returned plus lots of phone calls
- Results used to improve the 2005/2006 Program

The survey results told us that these are the biggest problems with the program:

- Planting deadlines
- Not enough time to plant cover crops
- Application date inconvenient/applicant unaware of program
- Paperwork/Verification process too time consuming
- Cost-share rate for cover crops is insufficient

How much does it cost the farmer to plant cover crops?

- Plant and disk: \$24.33/ac
- Plant and Chop: \$24.70/ac
- No till Drill: \$28.95/ac
- Aerial seeding: \$34.10/ac
- On average, the farmer pays \$28.02/acre to plant cover crops.

*based on 2004 figures

Changes to the Cover Crop Program (results from focus groups & survey)

- Sign up extended from two weeks to four weeks (June 13 to July 15)
- Application information available on the MDA website for applicants to fax to the SCD
- Increase in payment rate
 - \$25/acre with possible bonus of \$15/acre from MACS (by October 15) and \$10/acre from EQIP (by October 1)

Changes to the Cover Crop Program (cont'd)

- **Optional Split payment**
 - 50% of base payment available in the Fall
 - Remainder paid after Spring kill down
- **Extended statewide planting dates for Rye, Wheat and Triticale to November 5**
- **Manure application allowed under certain provisions**

Publicity and Outreach

- Brochures developed and delivered to SCD's
- News Articles in local papers
- Direct phone calls made to over 3,000 farmers

SCD's roles and processes

- On the ground knowledge of farm operations
- Assist farmers in signing up acreage
- Verify acres planted at Fall Certification
 - Spot check EVERY application: minimum of one field and a maximum of 20%.

Results of the 2005 Sign-up

- Received 944 applications on 205,089 acres for \$8M (including stand by)
- Appropriations:
 - from BRF = \$3.6M (\$3.0M available)
 - Leftover funds from FY2005 = \$1.0M
 - Total = \$4.0M
- Historically, the program has dropouts resulting in ~67% implementation rate.

The future of cover crop?

- $\$4.8\text{M} \div \$35/\text{acre} = 137,000$ ac planted
 - Need a 205,000 acre sign-up to meet goal
- 1 million potential acres of cover crops
- $\$35/\text{acre} \times 600,000$ ac = \$21M program
 - To meet tributary strategies 600,000 acre goal
all 1 million acres need to be signed up.

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...to protect and conserve natural resources and promote Maryland agriculture by providing leadership, resources and support to the agricultural community for the benefit of all Maryland citizens.

