



Maryland Honors Farm Conservation Practices

Two farms receive recognition as part of Maryland's new Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program.

August 31, 2010

Courtesy Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts

Farmers Steve Ernst (left) and J.D. Rinehart (right) accepted honors from Buddy Hance (middle), Maryland's agriculture secretary for being good stewards of their farmland.

This summer, members of Maryland's agricultural and environmental community launched the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program, which recognizes farmers who are good stewards of their natural resources and are using appropriate best-management practices to protect the Chesapeake Bay.

Two Maryland farms were officially certified in the new program as part of the launch spearheaded by the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts: Ernst Grain and Livestock in Clear Spring and Rinehart Orchard in Smithburg.

The purpose of the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program is to recognize farmers who are using best-management practices on their farm to eliminate significant erosion or nutrient loss, says Don Spickler, Maryland's Washington County district supervisor. The farms undergo a regulatory inspection of their nutrient-management plan by the Maryland Department of Agriculture to ensure compliance with the state's Water Quality Improvement Act.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service supplies technical support within the FSCAP core partnership team and assist in the development of the Agricultural Conservation Stewardship Certification Standard.

"For 75 years, NRCS has worked with private landowners across the country to help design and implement conservation practices that meet sound technical standards," says Jon Hall, Maryland's NRCS state conservationist. "We welcome the opportunity to showcase farmers who have installed conservation practices to address natural resource concerns on their ag land."

Speaking on behalf of the 30,000 farm and rural family members of Maryland Farm Bureau, Valerie Connelly, the bureau's director of governmental relations, welcomed the new conservation program as a way for farmers to showcase the conservation efforts they have accomplished.

"Maryland farmers have worked diligently over the years to install best-management practices on their farms to manage farm nutrients and minimize any soil loss. This program provides a tool for farmers to be recognized for their past efforts," Connelly says. "As we move into the next stage of Bay restoration activities, it is important that these past efforts be recognized and that farmers are assisted in determining if there are other opportunities for advancing conservation activities on their land."

Farmers who become certified under the FSCAP programs will only undergo inspections every three years by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, as long as they submit farm reports on a regular basis, according to Buddy Hance, Maryland's secretary of agriculture.

Recipients of the certificate Carlton Ernst and his son, Steve raise grain, hog and sheep at the 500-acre Ernst Grain and Livestock Farm. They have incorporated a variety of techniques on their farm to manage nutrients and minimize sediment loss, including the implementation of an animal-waste storage structure, filter strips, cover crops, crop rotation, residue management no-till, prescribed grazing and riparian forest buffers.

John Rinehart and his son, J.D., of Rinehart Orchard also received certification as part of the launch. They grow 200 acres of peaches and 300 acres of apples in their orchards. Among the best-management practices carried out on the Rinehart farm are an agrichemical handling facility, pest management, nutrient management and conservation crop rotation.