



## Big Dreams for Your Horse Farm? Do Your Homework First!

**BEFORE YOU PURCHASE LAND OR BEGIN IMPROVEMENTS ON AN EXISTING PROPERTY, VISIT *YOUR LOCAL SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT OFFICE.***

*The visit could save you time and money!!*

The professional staff at your local Soil Conservation District office can help you understand the limitations of your property before you spend a lot of time and money. They can develop a conservation farm plan that will help you achieve your goals and work with the natural resources on your property.

### **Know Your Soils**

Selecting the right locations for exercise areas, buildings and pastures can be made easier by reviewing the **soil survey** available at your local Soil Conservation District office. The **slope, texture and drainage characteristics** of the soils on your property have already been determined by soil scientists and are detailed in your county's soil survey. This information is critical in the proper planning of land use activities.

### **Avoid Wet/Muddy Areas That Harbor Mosquitoes And Increase The Risk of Spreading West Nile Virus**

**Drainage and Engineering Characteristics** of the soils on your farm are documented in the soil survey. Various tables describe critical topics such as the depth to water table, permeability, suitability for crop production and limitations for grading, etc. These characteristics can assist you in choosing the best location for riding areas, barns, and manure storage areas, as well as pastures and hay fields.

### **Want To Reduce Your Feed Costs by Grazing Your Horses on Pasture Longer**

Stop wasting time and money purchasing seed for pasture planting that is not suited for your area. Many factors impact the growth of grass and not all species are adapted for all climates or all soil types. The **Soil Conservation District** office can interpret **climatic data**, identify the **soil texture** of your soils, and explain the detailed **soil descriptions** of each soil series. Information such as the **depth to water table** and other useful **engineering interpretations** found in the **soil survey** tell you how well suited your soil is for producing various crops. Your local **soil conservationist** can help you choose the best grass species and specific varieties adapted to your farm.

Pastures require specific **management techniques** to remain productive. Soils that are considered "heavy" with a lot of clay, may require mechanical treatment to aerate and loosen them for improved water infiltration and drainage. Sandy soils that are loose and low in organic matter dry out quickly

during hot, dry summer months and may benefit from the addition of soil amendments to improve moisture holding capabilities and overall soil fertility.

### **Want to Create Riding Areas on Your Property?**

The soil survey will give you an indication of areas that are not well suited for riding such as areas that are **seasonally flooded** and have the potential to form gullies and wash manure and soil into streams, the Chesapeake Bay, or your neighbor's property.

**All the information listed above and a whole lot more is available from the soil survey and the trained professionals at your county Soil Conservation District and Maryland Extension offices.**

### **Get an Approved Soil and Water Conservation Plan (SCWQP)**

#### **What is a Soil and Water Conservation Plan (SCWQP)?**

A collection of documents that consists of recommendations and landowner decisions that guide the landowner in the protection, conservation and enhancement of natural resources (soil, water, air, plants and animals) on his property. This plan does not replace a nutrient management plan.

#### **Am I required to have a SCWQP?**

Conservation plans in most counties are voluntary, however, if a landowner participates in USDA sponsored programs, an approved conservation plan may be required. Nutrient management plans are required if you have eight or more horses.

#### **Why do I need a SCWQP plan?**

- ◆A properly structured and implemented plan on your farm can reduce cost/labor, increase production, and improve the aesthetics of your property.
- ◆May assist with compliance issues that arise with regulatory agencies.
- ◆May streamline the development of a nutrient management plan.
- ◆Protecting and conserving natural resources benefits everyone.

#### **What is contained in a SCWQP?**

- ◆Aerial photograph of the farm showing:
  - Property boundaries
  - Fields with land use and acres
  - Other resources such as rivers, streams, wetlands, etc.
  - Landmarks including highways, railroads, power transmission lines, etc.
- ◆Written plan narrative specifying:
  - Planned best management practices (BMPs) to reduce soil erosion and address water quality issues
  - Implementation schedule of planned BMPs
- ◆Soil map showing soil types located on the farm
- ◆User-friendly soils description of each soil on the farm
- ◆Other technical information specifically tailored for your operation

#### **Who makes the decisions?**

- ◆A conservation plan is based on the needs and objectives of the landowner/user.
- ◆Proposed BMP implementation is a combined effort between the landowner/user and the soil conservation planner.
- ◆Final decisions are made by the landowner.
- ◆The plan is “flexible” and may be altered by the landowner/user as needs and objectives change.

### **How do I get a SCWQP plan?**

Contact your local Soil Conservation District office.

### **Understanding Agricultural Assessment, Zoning and Permits**

In each county, every piece of land is subject to zoning laws that determine how the land can be used and what public facilities and amenities are needed to provide service to the community.

Depending on the zoning of the property some agricultural practices may require permits. Contact your local Soil Conservation District office for advice and for a copy of **A Farmer’s Guide to Environmental Permits**. This guide explains most federal and state permits. It does not contain information on individual county permits that may be required. Your county planning and zoning offices can provide this information.

The zoning ordinance, which is part of the county code, determines the height and size of buildings, parking, the number of units per acre that can be constructed. It also determines whether the use is agricultural, residential, industrial, or commercial. The Zoning Ordinance affects the landowner by determining how the property is going to be developed and used. The county government also approves changes in zoning ordinances.

**Zoning** laws permit certain uses of land. Some buildings may be permitted while others may be prohibited. Lawns and other open spaces, lot areas, building height limits and other requirements are established.

**Assessment** is the value of the real property given by the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT). This value is used to calculate real property taxes. The assessment affects the land owner in a monetary manner. To receive and maintain the agricultural assessment from SDAT, the property must be actively used for agricultural or farm purposes.

**If you are interested in filling and draining wet spots, tree removal, ponds, and working in streams your first stop is your Soil Conservation District office.**

For more information on horse manure management and other soil conservation and water quality practices, contact your local Soil Conservation District. For more information contact your local Soil Conservation District/ Natural Resources Conservation Service/ (SCD/ NRCS) office or county Maryland Cooperative Extension (MCE) office. Addresses and phone numbers can be found at [http://www.mda.state.md.us/resource\\_conservation/technical\\_assistance/index.php](http://www.mda.state.md.us/resource_conservation/technical_assistance/index.php) , <http://www.md.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory> or <http://extension.umd.edu> or check the listing County Government for SCD/MCE or US Government, Department of Agriculture for NRCS of the phone book blue pages. The Horse Outreach Workgroup was established to provide information to horse owners on pasture and manure management issues. Technical assistance is available from local county Soil Conservation Districts/Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Maryland Cooperative Extension office. The workgroup consists of representatives from local Soil Conservation Districts, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland, the Equiery, and the Maryland Horse Council. The Maryland Department of Agriculture’s Office of Resource Conservation provides coordination for the workgroup. January 2005, revised January 2007