



Kevin Atticks, Secretary

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2025– Annual Status Report on Climate Change

In accordance with §2-1305 of the Maryland Environment Article

December 2025

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) is a member of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC), and works collaboratively with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), other state agencies, and partners to develop and achieve plans to address climate change. Accordingly, MDA submits the information below on its programmatic efforts to advance the resilience and mitigation potential of Maryland's approximately two million acres of agricultural lands.

MDA seeks to safeguard Maryland's network of natural areas, agricultural lands, and coastal zones through its established conservation programs and practices. Land conservation offers an important mechanism for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Well managed croplands, grasslands and forests provide direct benefits in greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions and an opportunity to mitigate emissions associated with more developed areas. In addition, MDA encourages the development of innovative technologies geared toward helping the state reach its climate goals and facilitating career development.

MDA continues to pursue policies and programs that curb the conversion of agricultural lands and encourage the conservation of natural resources while also working with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), and other partners to promote the preservation and restoration of forested, grassed, and wetland areas on agricultural lands. The forthcoming revised Chesapeake Bay Agreement will provide unique opportunities for MDA to further align our climate goals on natural and working lands with the new outcomes of the Agreement.

The Department continues to make strides in its efforts to support farmers, climate-smart practices, and land preservation. Ahead of the curve, MDA has surpassed the state goal of 30x30 goal, achieving 30% of land conservation six years early , and will now strive for 40% preservation. MDA's newer programs, such as the Healthy Soils Program and the Small and Urban Farm programs, continue to see an increase in interest among farmers. MDA asserts that the farmers in the state have been enthusiastic adopters of key climate-smart practices, making significant contributions to the soil carbon sequestration and emissions reduction in the state. Non-federal expenses across MDA programming totaled \$131.6 million in FY 2025, with 98% of funding reportable for GHG reduction efforts.

I. Enhancing Sequestration Activities

Maryland farmers have made, and continue to make, significant contributions in enhancing the carbon sequestration of the state's natural working lands. Efforts regarding sequestration activities are outlined in the following section. MDA aims to build on its current efforts and programs as the need for further climate mitigation and adaptation rises. Future sequestration efforts include advancing demonstration sites and education on agroforestry practices, program development and/or support for salt water inundation and sustainable retirement of marginal working lands in climate vulnerable communities, and the development of dual-use energy generation (agrivoltaics) recommendations on agricultural land.

A. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)

The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program is MDA's flagship program for the purchase of permanent preservation easements, and is one of the most successful programs of its kind in the country. Besides maintaining prime farmland and woodland as a viable local base of food and fiber production, the protection of agricultural land reduces urban development pressures, safeguards wildlife habitat, and enhances the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Maryland has multiple land preservation goals established through legislation. In 2021, House Bill 860 was signed into law that established a goal to preserve 1,030,000 acres of productive agricultural lands by 2030 through a combination of State and County easement preservation programs.

More recently, the Maryland the Beautiful Act was enacted in 2023. This act recognizes the multiple benefits derived from protected lands throughout the state, and established ambitious land conservation goals. The act established the state goal to conserve 30% of the state by 2030 and to conserve 40% of the state by 2040. As of January 1, 2024, the first goal to conserve 30% has already been achieved - six years early! Achieving 40x40 will be much more challenging and will depend on future funding for land preservation programs, willing sellers, and continued cooperation from all state, local, and federal partners.

2025 Milestones

- Through FY 2025, 2,881 farms have been protected and land has been preserved in each of Maryland's 23 counties at a public investment of over \$1.04 billion; and
- MALPF's preserved acres total 384,927 as of June 30, 2025.

Funding

MALPF's purchases are funded by dedicated percentages of the Real Estate Transfer Tax and the Agricultural Transfer Tax, along with county allocations..

Enhancement Opportunities

MDA is actively working to best align existing preservation and conservation programs in support of the state's climate goals. For example, MALPF-preserved farms are able to help the State of Maryland meet its renewable energy goals by establishing alternative/renewable energy systems on their properties for their agricultural and residential energy needs.. In addition, MALPF-preserved farms must be in compliance with state regulations for Nutrient Management, and must have an active Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan from their local Soil Conservation District. This ensures regular field visits with trained staff and a high level of conservation adoption. The Department also expects the Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF), effective July 1, 2025, to further incentivize conservation adoption for prospective MALPF preservation.

Challenges

From fiscal year 2019 through 2024, MALPF enjoyed the funding benefits of a strong real estate market, which more than doubled MALPF's budget during that period. The slow down of the real estate market the last few years, as well as other State-wide budgetary obligations, has resulted in a significant decrease to the FY 2025 budget. Due to the decreased budget, the MALPF Board decided to return to a 2-year application cycle by combining the FY 2025 and 2026 budgets into a single application cycle.

During the 2025 Legislative Session, due to the overall budget deficit for the State of Maryland, \$100 million was diverted from three State-wide land conservation programs (MALPF as well as two MD Department of Natural Resources Program - Rural Legacy Program and Program Open Space-State Side). The diversions of funds will be spread out over four fiscal years (FY26 through FY29). This results in a cumulative \$25 million reduction each fiscal year for the programs. This will ultimately result in a slow-down of easement acquisitions, even as the demand for participation in MALPF remains high.

B. Retirement of Marginal and Sensitive Farmland

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and Conservation Buffer Initiative

The state of Maryland has participated in the federal-state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) since 1997. CREP aims to target high-priority conservation concerns by offering rental payments for 10- to 15-year set-aside contracts, and other incentives to agricultural producers to protect environmentally sensitive lands, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce nutrient and sediment loss. Currently Maryland landowners can receive four types of payments: a one-time signing bonus, annual rental payments that include a per-acre incentive, cost share assistance, and a one-time practice incentive payment.

CREP goals for Maryland are to achieve 100,000 acres for water quality and wildlife benefits, including converting up to 16,000 acres of marginal land into grass, shrubs, and trees, establish 77,000 acres of grassland and forest buffers and 5,000 acres of water and wetland habitat, and restore 2,000 acres of habitat for declining, threatened, or endangered species.

To complement CREP, MDA initiated a state program known as the Conservation Buffer Initiative (CBI) in FY 2021 to advance additional riparian buffer plantings. The CBI program is designed to offer flexible management and contract terms for operators and landowners.

Both CREP and CBI allow riparian buffers to address water quality and habitat, but increasingly MDA is [promoting](#) riparian forest buffers and upland tree plantings to leverage greater carbon sequestration benefits and address the state's 5 Million Tree Goal by 2031.

2025 Milestones¹

- During FY 2025, MDA provided incentives payments for CREP enrollment (new and re-enrollment), totaling \$219,728 in payments;
- The CBI program remains a popular state alternative program for riparian buffers. The FY 2025 resulted in 25 new contracts totaling \$293,816 in payments with an increase in contracts for riparian forest buffers;
- MDA also continues to offer an upland tree planting bonus of \$2 per tree along with up to 100% cost-share to install the others plantings; and
- MDA reported planting an additional 130,996 trees during FY 2025 in support of the 5 Million Trees goal. This is a 139% increase from FY 2024!
- MDA released a Tree Planting [Outreach](#) Campaign in February 2025 with significant interest on social media and public television programs.

Funding

The federal monies toward CREP vary with authorized funding and participation levels based on USDA incentives administered through its Farm Service Agency, while the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost Share Program (MACS) offers grants, which are financed by state bond funds, to provide up to 100% of the costs to install high priority best management practices. Notably, the legislative provision allowing 100% cost-share will sunset on June 30, 2026. After that time, financial assistance could be up to 87.5% for MACS projects.

The Conservation Buffer Initiative and state signing incentive payments, administered by MDA, are funded through the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund and the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021.

Enhancement Opportunities

MDA continues to engage with state agencies and federal partners to advance buffer and upland plantings. The Maryland CBI program is popular and offers flexibility that can complement CREP enrollments. Likewise, the agency is partnering with the University of Maryland and University of Delaware on two grant opportunities to work with farm operators and landowners affected by sea level rise and saltwater inundation. The projects, Options for Adapting to Rising Seas (OARS) and Resilience Implementation for Salt Intruded Geographies (RISING) are novel partnerships to bridge science and policy as the state develops program

¹ As of December 2025, CREP enrollment acreage in Maryland was unavailable due to the federal government shutdown.

options for these sensitive lands. The pace of these changes are requiring adaptation measures to support transitioning growers as the lands become unproductive.

Beyond buffer plantings in marginal lands, MDA is also seeing increased interest in agroforestry projects that would add and/or diversify working landscapes with tree crop plantings. MDA funding secured through the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) will advance public demonstration projects, as well as increase technical assistance to interested producers on private lands.

Challenges

CREP enrollment remains a challenge since a peak enrollment of ~74,500 acres in 2008. While many factors influence participation, the perception is many farm operators are less willing to enter into the lengthy contracts typical of CREP. Further hindering enrollment is the continued delay of a new federal Farm Bill with authority for new CREP enrollments, i.e. no new CREP contracts can be executed. MDA will continue the Conservation Buffer Initiative to address demands for buffer plantings.

MDA sees strong opportunities with working lands through agroforestry to increase tree plantings. Further alignment of popular plantings with the eligible (currently, natives only) planting list for the 5 Million Tree goal would benefit the state.

C. Healthy Soils Program

The 2017 Healthy Soils Act charged MDA with the development of a Healthy Soils Program to improve the health, yield, and profitability of Maryland's soils and promote the further adoption of conservation practices that foster soil health while increasing sequestration capacity. In support of this initiative, MDA initially collaborated with stakeholders from the Healthy Soils Consortium to complete a comprehensive scientific literature review to identify those practices that are most effective at improving soil health and building soil carbon stocks. Information from this literature review was used to create a menu of Maryland-specific conservation practices that advance soil health.

Subsequently, in 2019, the Soil Health Advisory Committee was formed to serve as a more formal advisory body to MDA. Starting from the menu of Maryland-specific conservation practices, the Advisory Committee developed further recommendations on how conservation practices and programs would advance the objectives of the Healthy Soils Program. Recommendations were submitted to MDA leadership in January 2022, and resulted in the roll out the [Cover Crop Plus](#) program in summer 2022, to leverage the success of cover cropping in the state and encourage earlier planting, later termination, and multi-year planning for soil health. A second program, [the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund](#), was launched in winter 2023 to encourage innovative soil health management. Both programs capitalize on co-benefits for air and water quality and carbon sequestration that build upon Maryland's nationally recognized progressive farming practices and programs.

In addition to programmatic goals, MDA is focused on method(s) to best quantify outcomes from the Healthy Soils Program, with an intent to address farmer inquiries but also improve the state's GHG inventory by better reporting of the state's natural carbon sinks. Interest in both programs and practices are steadily increasing.

2025 Milestones

- The *Cover Crop Plus* program paused enrollments in FY 2025 in order to re-evaluate the program under MDA's Healthy Soils Program. The intent is to facilitate new interest and greater enrollment. MDA anticipates *Cover Crop Plus* being administered by the Healthy Soils Program Administrator beginning in FY 2026.
- The FY 2025 Healthy Soils Competitive Fund resulted in 55 applications of which 14 awardees were selected for an obligation of approximately \$590,000;
- Soil health evaluations on participating farms in the Healthy Soils Program are continuing to develop metric(s) to best quantify soil health outcomes; and

Funding

The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 specifies an appropriation of \$500,000 in the governor's budget from FYs 2024-2028 for the MDA Healthy Soils Program. For FY 2025, funding from the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund was also utilized for the program.

Recently it was announced the Atlantic Conservation Coalition, a multi-state partnership including Maryland, was established to focus on leveraging the carbon sequestration power of each state's natural working lands. The coalition is funded by the US EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG). As a subrecipient of the CPRG, MDA received approximately \$5 million in order to implement 1,000 acres of additional agroforestry practices on farms. Adoption of agroforestry practices on farming operations remains low; data from the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture indicates that only about 3.8% of farming operations in Maryland report implementing agroforestry practices. CPRG funding will be applied towards the further expansion of the department's Healthy Soils program and the implementation of agroforestry.

Enhancement Opportunities and Challenges

Programming is designed to be adaptive to producer needs, while pursuing the best metrics and tools to quantify soil health outcomes such that future state programs and policies may reward the ecosystem services being provided by Maryland farmers. The state continues to collect and analyze soil health data evaluation data to improve quantification of soil health outcomes across diverse production systems to demonstrate agronomic and environmental benefits. Additional funding for the data collection and analysis needs to be identified. The Department also expects the LEEF program, effective July 1, 2025, to advance soil health practices.

D. Cover Crops

Recognized as one of the most cost-effective practices to mitigate residual nutrient leaching following the harvest of commodity crops, research has shown that the planting of cereal grain cover crops, such as rye, wheat, and barley, not only provide residual nutrient uptake benefits, but also provide winter ground cover to reduce soil erosion and promote healthy soils.

First introduced in the summer of 1997 in response to nutrient leaching concerns, the Maryland Cover Crop Program has evolved significantly over the past three decades. The program is nationally recognized for the significant acres planted annually, as planting the greatest percentage of available acres among all U.S. states. Importantly, the program is re-evaluated each year to ensure payment rates and incentive structures are appropriate. Increasingly, MDA is expanding its cover crop programs to meet all farmer needs.

Cover Crop Plus is a multi-year program to encourage earlier planting, later termination, and multi-year crop rotation planning for soil health along with conservation tillage to maximize co-benefits.

The Small Acreage Cover Crop [Program](#) was created to provide financial assistance to urban and small-scale producers who do not qualify for traditional cover crop programs. Growers that plant less than ten (10) acres of qualifying cover crops—including cereal grains or cover crop seed mixes—can apply for grants up to \$1,500 per grower, per year.

2025 Milestones

- The traditional cover crop program set **a new record in FY 2025** with more than 490,000 acres fall planted in the 2024-2025 season across 1322 agreements, totaling \$32 million in financial assistance;
- The Small Acreage Cover Crop program completed FY 2025 with 25 agreements, totalling 115 acres planted and \$20,000 in financial assistance.

Funding

Funding for cover crop programs are annually allocated from the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund and the Bay Restoration Fund. To-date, MDA has had sufficient funding to cover the breadth of programs available to cover crop implementation, but anticipates budget constraints in FY 2026 due to the strong participation during FY 2025.

Enhancement Opportunities

For the traditional cover crop program, MDA annually convenes a meeting of its key partners - Soil Conservation Districts and academia - to consider enhancements to the programs that 1) make the programs more efficient to administer and/or 2) refine payment incentives based on new research. MDA also works closely with technical partners to use satellite and remote sensing to add additional verification of the spring biomass produced by cover crops. These partnerships have resulted in important, novel science to quantify the outcomes of the program, as well as, financial and administrative savings through remote sensing for field verification.

Challenges

Much of the state funding dedicated to cover crop implementation is based on nutrient reductions estimated by the Chesapeake Bay Program to achieve the mandated Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) goals. As such, the nutrient effectiveness for cover crops varies widely based on species, planting method, and planting date. Translating this effectiveness to also properly credit soil health benefits (i.e. carbon benefits) remains a need for the Chesapeake Bay Program. MDA will continue to collaborate with the Chesapeake Bay Program and monitor additional research, as it becomes available, to further refine incentive payments to ensure program funding is applied in the most cost effective manner and achieves nutrient reduction, soil health, and climate change goals.

Additionally, MDA anticipates budget constraints in FY 2026 due to the strong participation during FY 2025 in the cover crop program.

II. Emissions Reductions

Estimates of emissions from the agricultural sector, as included in the state greenhouse gas inventory, represent a small portion of Maryland's cumulative emissions (4%) and rely largely on data provided by the EPA State Inventory Tool (SIT). The state's GHG Reduction Plan estimates the sector's greatest reduction potential comes through improved enteric fermentation and manure management. It is MDA's intention to work with MDE and the ag sector in the coming years to improve the estimate and quantification methods that would draw on more locally available data and refine the reduction estimates. An updated estimate would be provided in future reports.

Further, MDA plans to initiate partnerships with research and/or higher education institutions in order to better qualify methane (CH₄) outcomes. This will allow for conservation investments in enhanced manure and fertilizer management. Interest in legacy phosphorus and the restoration/upgrade of agricultural ditches and infrastructure along the Eastern Shore are also under discussion. MDA will continue to expand its existing emissions reduction programs and activities, and pledges to work with partners to monitor and quantify reductions at the farm-scale.

A. Animal Waste Technology Fund

The Animal Waste Technology Fund (AWTF) was established in 2013, aiming to provide monetary assistance to individuals, vendors, and businesses showcasing innovative technologies towards managing animal waste. Animal waste is defined as any waste stream generated by on-farm animals or through an animal production process involving Maryland livestock. This includes, but is not limited to, dairy wastewater, carcasses, or poultry processing waste. For projects to be eligible, they must enhance public and environmental health and offer alternative waste management solutions for the agricultural sector. Research and development proposals are not eligible for funding.

The AWTF is a competitive funding grant with a primary goal of protecting our water resources from excess loads of nutrients, while still remaining profitable, and adding value to the traditional farm business model in the state. Many of the projects go hand in hand with the state's climate change goals – many of the awarded technologies can also produce a [qualifying](#) renewable energy source that can support the state's goal to achieve 50% renewable energy production by 2030, as well as, a carbon rich soil amendment by-product that can be land applied to increase soil health and carbon sequestration.

To accomplish the goals of the AWTF, MDA is supported by a multi-partner Technical Evaluation Team (MDA, MDE, DNR, MEA, UM Extension, and USDA) as well as a large Advisory Committee of local, state, and industry partners. In addition, third-party monitoring of AWTF awarded projects provides value insight to the technology performance and environmental outcomes (e.g. Life Cycle Assessment) at the project scale.

2025 Milestones

- MDA continues to partner and benefit from the University of Maryland Extension's commissioned report, *Maryland Animal Waste Technology Assessment and Strategy*

Planning, completed in 2023 with additional outreach and community [engagement](#) underway;

- Legislation passed in 2024 ([SB 808](#)) charged MDA to lead a State Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Workgroup to more effectively engage and coordinate the adoption of AD systems in the state. The committee continues to meet and actively works to expand public engagement and inform local decision makers on technology systems, climate, and community benefits.
- The State AD Workgroup is in the development phase of a guidance document for on-farm systems, with anticipated completion in FY 2026, and will be expanded to include additional AD system scenarios.
- The AWTF Funding cycle for FY 2026 opened in September 2025 and accepted Letters of Intent from interested vendors, businesses, and individuals until October 17th, 2025. Five proposals were received and two invitations to apply for second round applications were selected.

Funding

The AWTF has approximately \$750,000 available to invest in innovating technologies during the fiscal year. Funding is supported by the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund.

Enhancement Opportunities and Challenges

MDA continues to pursue recommendations from the University of Maryland report, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, to more fully incorporate climate change and environmental justice metrics that can be integrated into the project selections. Greater emphasis on the climate and community benefits of the program are key to future success.

In the interim, existing projects have provided several lessons learned about the viability and financial feasibility of the technologies at the farm and regional scale. The state would benefit from greater recognition of animal waste technologies to serve as a climate solution for the state and as a source of sustained farm revenue. The newly created AD Workgroup serves to better align the review and permitting process, catalog the available project incentives, as well as improve collaboration with the utility providers that enter net metering agreements with the property. It will also be critical to leverage Maryland's Animal Waste Technology [Fund](#) to best achieve emission reduction goals and advocate for technology retention within the state's Tier I renewable energy portfolio.

Public and elected officials would also benefit from additional understanding of animal waste technologies. The technology is often novel and can be met with skepticism until additional education is provided. Proactively engaging multiple local governments can be difficult and time consuming, as well as targeted public outreach. Both MDA and the AD workgroup are actively working towards the creation of a series of permitting guides for farmers or potential operators. These guides may also be used to steer community considerations and best practices. MDA continues working with partners, like the University of Maryland Extension, to develop communication materials to support needs.

B. Maryland Food System Resiliency and Agricultural Development

MDA serves as co-vice chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) established in 2021. The FSRC aims to address food insecurity while also advancing a vibrant, local food system within the state. Many of the Council's [recommendations](#) recognize the

climate and equity benefits of creating a resilient food system. In 2024, MDA secured USDA funding to develop the [MDA Resilient Food System Infrastructure](#) (RFSI) program with a primary aim to build resilience in our food supply chain. RFSI awards have been approved in 2025 to support increased access to more and better markets for small farm and food businesses, the development of value-added products, encouraging equal and fair wages and prices, and helping establish new training and employment opportunities. The program will include selection criteria to promote “climate-resilient landscapes” consistent with USDA priorities. The Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program (MFARM) is another mechanism to support food insecure communities and individuals by creating access to necessary food, and providing a market for farmers. This program allows food banks and charitable providers in the state to request funds to purchase products that are listed in the [Certified Local Farm and Fish Program](#) and deliver them to Maryland families.

In supporting the farms and producers integral to a successful food systems, the MDA recently published a *Statewide Guidance and Analysis Document* intended to establish a baseline understanding of the complexities in regulating agricultural enterprises as they expand into consumer-facing and value-added processing functions. This 2025 publication addresses existing policy, language, and processes at various regulatory levels, identifying challenges and opportunities for the growth of these industries throughout Maryland.

Milestones

- Staff are actively collaborating across units to position MDA programs to address multiple goals for food insecurity, farmer profitability, and build greater resilience into the food system;
- MDA continues to engage legislators and partners on the recommendations of the FSRC;
- MDA drafted and finalized a State implementation plan for program scopes specific to the State's specific RFSI needs; and
- Published a *Statewide Guidance and Analysis Document for Value-Added Agriculture* in October 2025

Funding

Funding for RFSI programs is through a \$3.8 million dollar cooperative agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture. Still awaiting USDA final approval, MDA has recommended funding to 25 projects across the State.

Enhancement Opportunities

The RFSI program, viewed as a one time funding opportunity, is viewed as a significant contribution to the expansion and growth of Maryland's capacity for food system resiliency and production. Maryland Department of Agriculture's approved State implementation plan aligned to the 2021 Maryland Climate Adaptation and Resilience [Framework](#) among its goals.

Challenges

Being a national program, the RFSI Program has experienced significant delays in processing and approving final recommendations. What was once projected as fall 2024, has extended to winter 2025 for project awards.

III. Environmental Justice

Maryland aims to be a national and global leader in fighting climate change. In order to do so, the state must address issues and concerns that place all communities at risk, equally. [State law defines](#) environmental justice (EJ) as “equal protection from environmental and public health hazards for all people regardless of race, income, culture, and social status.”

MDA is committed to working in collaboration with our state department counterparts, scientists, and our producers to address conditions that disproportionately affect our overburdened and underserved communities. MDA's EJ program and policy is currently in progress, as we work to define key socioeconomic criteria and identify communities and projects.

MDA and the Soil Conservation Districts provide free technical and financial assistance to all Maryland farms, but state programs are increasingly intentional to account for our work in EJ communities. Figure 1 provides a visual representation for a portion of MDA programs - conservation planning and the Healthy Soils Program - for high priority census tracts based on the MDE Enviroscreen.

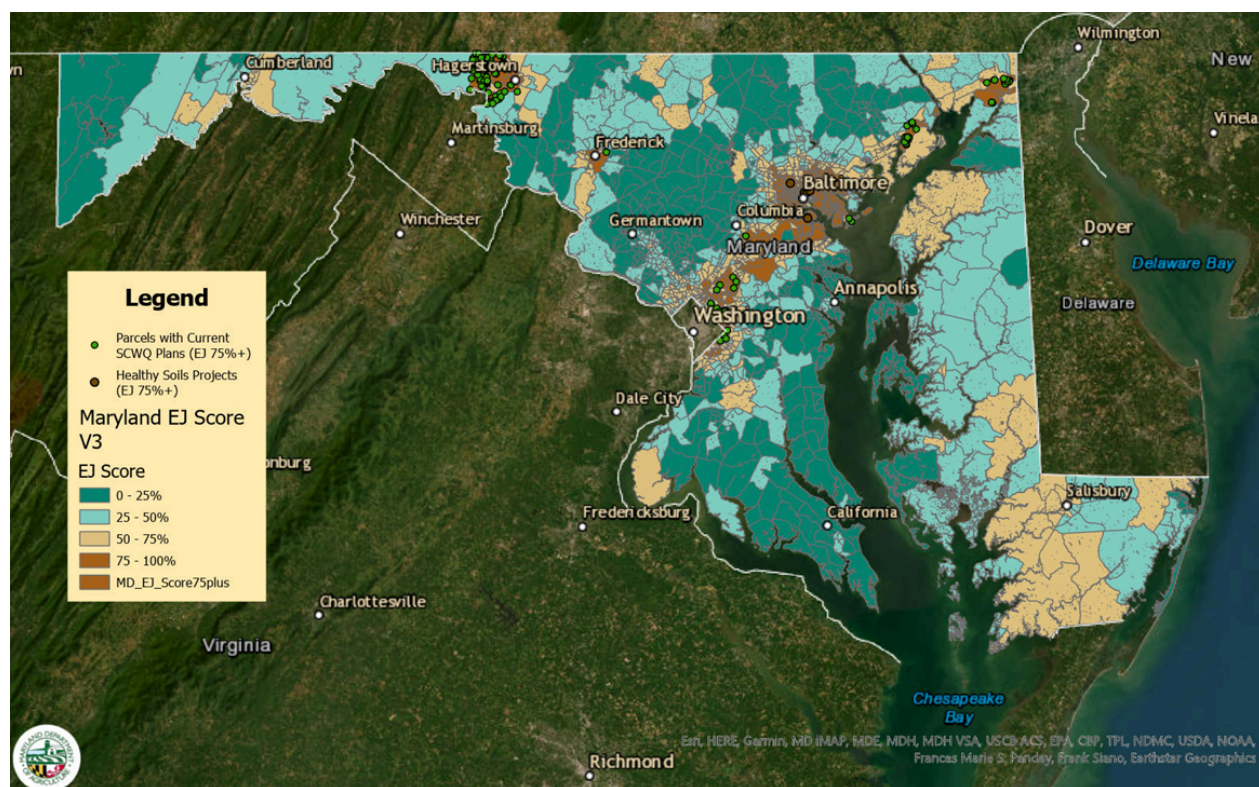


Figure 1: MDE Enviroscreen map overlaid with partial MDA data, showing census tracts marked at 75th percentile with current Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans (SCWQP) and Healthy Soil Program farm sites.

2025 Milestones

As part of the department's overall aim to provide producers with the support they need and to help build a resilient future for agriculture for all Marylanders, MDA's Resource Conservation unit seeks to

- In mid-2023, MDA Office of Resource Conservation appointed a senior advisor, whose focus is integrating climate change and environmental justice initiatives into the department's existing and emerging programs. The advisor works closely with the Assistant Secretary and program managers to support development and implementation of our conservation programs;
- Further development of producer recognition programs, such as Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF), that aim to recognize the value of environmentally engaged farming and holistic community benefits;
- Expansion of Maryland Healthy Soils, originally defined in [HB1063](#), to include 'Regenerative Traditions and Practices' that may draw on cultural traditions and practices;
 - Both LEEF and the updated definition of Maryland Healthy Soils may be found in [HB0506](#), more colloquially known as the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act.
- Identify and create applicable tools to scale, in order to achieve MDA equity goals across programming and policy. This includes the use of MDE's EnviroScreen, and the creation of an MDA specific guidance manual. The guidance manual is intended to establish a baseline knowledge of EJ, equity considerations, and tools as it relates to MDA programming; and
- Continue to facilitate advisory committees to reflect demographics and the communities in which they are intended to serve, such as:
 - Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee
 - Soil Health Advisory Committee
 - Anaerobic Digestion Workgroup
 - Animal Waste Technology Fund Advisory Committee
 - Nutrient Management Advisory Committee.

Funding

The target geography and intent of the MDA Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program aligns to the state's EJ goals. Funding for the Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program comes from the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund. The program currently offers two grant programs to provide financial assistance to producers that qualify. Small Acreage Cover Crops Grants (spring and fall), and Urban Agriculture Water and Power Grants. The Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program is actively seeking and pursuing new sources of funding, as interest in education and in the program grows.

Enhancement Opportunities and Challenges

At MDA, we work with our conservation partners at federal, state, and local levels in order to remain a leader in agricultural conservation. It is imperative that we pursue diversity, acceptance, and seek to provide equitable access to our services, programs, and education. As our program begins to take shape and develop, we are working to integrate EJ into our

regulatory, education, and technical and financial assistance programs to ensure that small, urban, minority, and underserved communities can benefit from Maryland's healthy natural resources.

Executive Order 01.01.2025.17, otherwise known as Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity (VOICE), was signed into action in July 2025. Following this, MDA aims to create a comprehensive Environmental Justice Strategic Plan for the department and its programs. As a part of its creation, and MDA's commitment to equity in its mission, this may also include both internal materials and public facing content.

IV. Climate Implementation Plan (CIP) Progress Report for FY 2025

In June of 2024, Governor Moore signed [Executive Order 01.01.2024.19](#) - Leadership by State Government: Implementing Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan². The Executive Order required executive branch agencies, such as MDA, to develop agency specific Climate Implementation Plans (CIPs). Agency specific CIPs serve as immediate priority and action identification for each department in order to further implementation of Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

The summary table below details progress on MDA's identified priority measures for FY2025.

Action	Progress Highlight
Leveraging MDA's Animal Waste Technology Fund	MDA continues to leverage the Animal Waste Technology Fund (AWTF) to achieve Maryland's emission reduction goals with a continued focus on technology education, adoption, and retention within the state's Tier I renewable energy portfolio. Throughout FY 2025, the state Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Workgroup began developing guidance for on-farm systems to expand public engagement and inform local decision makers on innovative technology systems, and climate and community benefits. The guidance document is expected to be finalized in FY 2026, and will be expanded to other AD scenarios.
Carbon Sequestration through Agricultural Land Preservation	Working hand in hand with the state's 40x40 land preservation goals, MDA works to enhance carbon sequestration through the permanent preservation of agricultural lands. As of June 30, 2025, the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation has preserved 384,927 acres of farmland across all 23 Maryland counties.
Expansion and Adoption of Climate Smart Practices	Through MDA's Conservation Grants and Healthy Soils Program, climate smart agricultural programs advance

² <https://governor.maryland.gov/Lists/ExecutiveOrders/Attachments/52/EO%2001.01.2024.19%20Leader>

	<p>efforts to adopt key practices. Examples include <i>Cover Crop Plus</i>, Small and Urban Farms, and Agroforestry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Cover Crop Plus</i> program is currently being re-evaluated to facilitate new interest and enrollment, and will be administered by the Healthy Soils Program administrator beginning in FY 2026. • During FY 2025 Healthy Soils Competitive Fund, 14 grantees were awarded nearly \$590,000 in grant funds. • Funding was secured under the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, as part of a multi-state coalition, to expand Agroforestry Adoption. Interviews have been conducted to onboard an Agroforestry Specialist. • The Small and Urban Farms program provided financial assistance to 39 projects totaling almost \$331,000 in FY 2025.
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