

Cover Crop Program Enrollment to Run June 22 - July 8 \$12 Million Available in Cost-Share Funds to Maryland Farmers

ANNAPOLIS, MD (May 28, 2009) - Following up on his pledge to accelerate the Chesapeake Bay cleanup, Governor Martin O'Malley has committed approximately \$12 million in cost-share funds to farmers who plant cover crops on their fields this fall to reduce nutrient runoff, control soil erosion and protect water quality in the Bay and its tributaries. Enrollment for the statewide program will take place from June 22 through July 8, 2009 at local soil conservation district offices.

"Planting cover crops is one of the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable ways to protect the Bay and all Maryland waterways from nutrient runoff," said Governor O'Malley. "Protecting and preserving our treasured Chesapeake Bay for future generations must remain a shared priority, even in tight times. Through our commitment to cover crops, we are putting our families first for a smart, green and growing future."

"This funding will allow farmers to plant nearly 290,000 acres in protective cover crops on their fields this fall," said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Buddy Hance. "That translates to an estimated annual savings of 1.5 million pounds of nitrogen and 58,000 pounds of phosphorus. We're asking farmers to be realistic about their ability to plant all the acres that they sign up so that we can allocate funds as widely as possible."

This year, farmers may use a single application to apply for MDA's Traditional Cover Crop Program, which does not allow for harvest, and the Commodity Cover Crop Program, which allows farmers to harvest their cover crops. Farmers who plant traditional cover crops this fall receive a base rate of \$40 per acre. Additional incentives allow farmers to receive up to \$85 per acre if their farm is located in a targeted watershed, they plant early, select rye as their cover crop, or follow other environmental guidelines. Farmers who harvest their cover crops will receive \$25 an acre.

Farmers may enroll up to 750 acres in this year's Cover Crop Program. Of this total, no more than 250 acres may be enrolled as commodity cover crops. Farmers may select which acres to retain for commodity in the spring. Standby acres will be accepted if funds are available after regular sign-up ends. To help offset seed costs, MDA will reimburse farmers at a rate of \$25/acre following fall certification. In addition, farmers will be able to wait until spring to determine which of their enrolled fields they will retain for harvest. To address time and labor concerns and help farmers meet planting deadlines, MDA will provide a list of contractors available to plant cover crops following harvest.

Cover crops are cereal grains that may be planted immediately following the fall harvest of corn, soybeans, sorghum, tobacco or vegetables. Barley, canola, rapeseed, kale, rye, ryegrass, spring oats, triticale, and wheat planted in the fall of 2009 are eligible. All seed used is required to meet Maryland Seed Law and Regulatory Standards and have a minimum germination rate of 80 percent.

The 2009-2010 Maryland Cover Crop Program is administered by MDA through the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program and funded largely by the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund. Applicants must be in good standing with MACS to participate and must be in compliance with the Nutrient Management Program.

Farmers should visit their local soil conservation district to enroll between June 22 and July 8, 2009. For more information, contact the MACS office at 410-841-5864.