

SUPPORT HB 687/SB597: Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vincent Matanoski, and my wife and I own Ladybrook Farm in Monkton, Maryland. I began farming several years ago after serving 31 years as a Judge Advocate General in the United States Navy. Ladybrook Farm is a diversified farm on 80 acres in Baltimore County, and borders the Little Gunpowder Falls. When we took over the land it was in row crops – corn and soybeans – and was eroding badly. The farm is now covered with pastures, hayfields, trees, and wildflowers, and the soil is anchored and teeming with life. This transformation was only made possible with federal and NGO assistance, who helped with perimeter fencing, water troughs, and tree planting. The State of Maryland played no part, blocked by statutory limitations.

I want to particularly focus on the importance of trees in the overall conservation of our land. With the assistance of Chesapeake Bay Foundation, we planted trees not only along the riparian areas of our farm, but also up slopes, along swales, and in areas where the soil was particularly fragile and badly eroded. The trees shield these vulnerable spots, and lock vital soil in place. They provide additional habitat for animals and plants, forage for pollinators, and biodiversity, while sponging up carbon from the air.

Without question it is vital to protect streambanks. But it is equally vital to protect the land surrounding our waterways. Rain does not exclusively fall on streams and rivers. It lashes the hills and land surrounding those waterways, and without pastures and trees to help absorb, slow, and impound that water, tons of soil sloshes right past the riparian buffers, leaving scoured hillsides and clogged streams. Maryland's current funding restriction, which limits assistance to riparian tree planting, needs to be lifted.

While we were fortunate to get federal and NGO assistance to begin the regeneration of our land, others have not fared as well. Maryland should not leave the fate of its soils and waterways entirely to the whim of federal policy prerogatives or the vagaries of private funding. The health and beauty of our State are too important to gamble. Thank you.

Vince Matanoski