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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

DATE: January 24, 2025

BILL NUMBER: SB 176/HB 140

SHORT TITLE: Agriculture – Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan – Uses of
Information

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

This legislation grants the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) the same authority as the Department of the Environment (MDE) to request a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan from a Soil Conservation District (SCD) for enforcement purposes. Under the proposed legislation, MDA's authority would be limited to nutrient management compliance measures contained within a soil and water conservation plan.

For example, investigating livestock access to streams or water bodies when an operator fails to install adequate stream exclusion. Under Maryland Nutrient Management regulations, livestock must be kept away from water bodies. The new authority is crucial in the limited situations where voluntary measures by the soil conservation district are unable to address a resource concern. A soil and water conservation plan could serve as evidence that the individual was aware of the need to implement measures to prevent livestock from entering water bodies.

The legislation would not automatically require SCDs to provide plans for ALL Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans. Rather, only upon request for specific cases in which there is a question of nutrient management compliance, just as MDE currently does.

The MDA thanks the Committee for your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 140.

If you have additional questions, please contact Rachel Jones, Director of Government Relations, at rachel.jones2@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.