



## News

### Talbot farmers lead state in cover crops

[Print Page](#)

By **KELLEY L. ALLEN** Staff Writer

Published: Friday, February 20, 2009 5:19 AM CST

**TALBOT COUNTY** Talbot County farmers led the state last year in the number of acres planted with cover crops, Maryland Department of Agriculture officials announced last week.

MDA officials unveiled the 2008 annual report on the water quality cost-share program last Friday. The program helps farmers with up to 87.5 percent of the costs for conservation practices, like cover crops, which are crops planted on harvested fields that absorb residual nutrients and reduce runoff.

Farmers in Talbot County got the most money in the state more than \$820,000 and planted the most acres with cover crops more than 23,000 acres.

Part of the reason the county got so much funding is because the program targets farmers in high priority watersheds, like the Choptank River Watershed. The Choptank received a D-plus for health last year, according to the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Almost half of the land in that watershed is agricultural, and there are four major wastewater treatment plants there. Too much runoff from these and other things cause problems that hinder marine life and choke the health out of local waters.

Less than half the nitrogen and phosphorus in local waters comes from agriculture, according to the Chesapeake Bay Program. And best management plans like cover crops point to conservation efforts from the region's, and the state's, farmers.

In Maryland, 98 percent of the more than 1.3 million acres of crop land are covered under a nutrient plan as of March 2008. The state's farmers who got MDA money invested more than \$1.6 million into projects that will prevent about 2.4 million pounds of nitrogen and about 138,000 pounds of phosphorus from leaching into waterways.

Talbot County farmers received about \$78,000 for 18 soil conservation projects last year, half of which helped farmers employ filter strips. Cost share for nutrient management plans in the county totaled nearly \$7,000 for five plans on almost \$2,500 acres.

The MDA program offered up to \$85 an acre for farmers in priority watersheds that planted cover crops before Oct. 1 of last year. The money comes from capital resources and from programs like the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. In addition to cover crops, there are 29 practices eligible for water quality cost-share funds.

Talbot County had 305 farms on about 109,000 acres in 2007, according to the United States Department of Agriculture census.

Copyright © 2009 - The Star-Democrat

[\[x\] Close Window](#)