

# The Maryland Horse Council's Farm Stewardship Committee

By Katherine O. Rizzo

As the Maryland Horse Council continued to grow in its first decades of existence, its subcommittees also grew and in November 2011, MHC's Farm Stewardship Committee was created.

Its initial goals included assisting horse farm owners in reaching their land stewardship goals through providing information, community support, and access to information on financing and other incentives. In addition, the committee aimed to create more positive attention for horse farms in Maryland and bring the voice of the horse community into discussions of laws, regulations and incentive programs for agriculture and for the environment. "One of the important, untold stories of horse farms as part of Maryland agriculture and environmental management," says former MHC President, Jane Seigler, is that a well maintained horse pasture provides huge environmental benefits as both a natural filter for runoff into the bay, and a carbon sink. The MHC Farm Stewardship Committee has been an important voice in getting that message out."

## Stewardship

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "stewardship" as "the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property." Where MHC can be seen as stewards for the entire Maryland horse industry, the Farm Stewardship Committee became stewards specifically for horse farm owners.

Committee founder and chair Jane They stated, "healthy pastures are great for everyone and create a positive impact on the environment." This concept of healthy pastures creat-

ing a healthy environment became the driving force behind the Committee.

Quarterly meetings were held throughout the state at farms that were already showing good stewardship practices such as Carolyn Krome's Persimmon Tree Farm in Westminster and Robert Butts' Waredaca in Laytonsville. "We held early meetings at both places as well as Hilltop and farms on the Eastern Shore," They said.

At each meeting, the Committee would bring in experts on such topics as cost sharing, solar panels, pasture management and more. As state and county regulations changed, seminar topics changed too. "We help farmers keep up on the changing county codes and put them in touch with those that can help them adjust if needed," They added.

They also maintains the Committee's blog on MHC's website where all information from meetings, and much more, are shared digitally to the community.

## Action and Results

One of the first action plan items listed by the Committee was to increase the number of horse

farms that are certified through the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program (FSCAP). They feels that the Committee's biggest accomplishment thus far is increasing the FSCAP numbers dramatically. "When I joined MHC, Persimmon Tree was the only horse farm in the program," They stated. "Now, there are 32 horse farms protecting 3,363.6 acres in 11 counties. That's all due to this Committee's efforts." (see sidebar for current FSCAP horse farms)

Another action plan item was to link horse farm owners and man-

agers to public and private resources available to upgrade their farm stewardship practices. Due to They's and the Committee's efforts, more horse farm owners are aware of and use the county Soil Conservation Districts. "We were able to tap into the interests of horse farm owners to be more environmentally aware. It was there, we just helped to mobilize it," They added.

The Committee has also helped put farm owners in touch with the University of Maryland's various programs. UMD offers pasture rotation seminars as well as information on

*continued...*



Former MHC President Jane Seiglar, MHC Farm Stewardship Committee chair Jane They and Soil Conservation Official Travis Gorleski

### The following Maryland Farms have been accepted into the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program.

#### ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

Baywood Farms - 60 acres  
Graden - 20 acres  
Hopewell Farm - 40 acres  
Obligation Farm - 94 acres  
Reality Inn Farm - 20 acres  
Roedown Farm - 140 acres

#### CARROLL COUNTY

Cherry Valley Equestrian Center - 36 acres  
Persimmon Tree Farm - 132 acres  
Separate Peace Farm - 34 acres

#### CECIL COUNTY

Blue Waters Farm - 43 acres  
Hilltop Farm - 425 acres  
Tapeta Farm - 250 acres

#### CHARLES COUNTY

King Edwards Stable - 34 acres

#### BALTIMORE COUNTY

Sagamore Farm - 437 acres

#### FREDERICK COUNTY

Bloomsbury Forge - 119 acres  
New World Stables - 10 acres  
Reichs Ford Farm - 119 acres

#### HOWARD COUNTY

Marriottsville Ridge - 343 acres

#### MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Breezy Hill Farm - 36 acres  
Brooke Grove Farm - 203 acres  
Locks Edge - 57 acres  
Meadowbrook Stables - 10 acres

Potomac Horse Center - 32 acres

Surmont - 15 acres

Waredaca - 220 acres

Wyndham Oaks - 75 acres

#### PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Edgewood Farm - 84 acres

Jug Bay Stable - 13 acres

#### ST. MARY'S COUNTY

Roundabout Farm - 29 acres

Shamrock Arabians - 22 acres

#### WASHINGTON COUNTY

Mountain View Farm - 14 acres

#### WICOMICO COUNTY

Holly Ridge Farm - 28 acres



## The Maryland Horse Council's Farm Stewardship Committee, continued...

how to build proper dry lots and create better manure management practices.

In addition, They says that bridging the gaps between farmers and environmental groups has been a big part of the Committee. "We've been able to cross boundaries and form positive relationships with organizations such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation," she said, adding, "Pastures are great filters for the environment."

### The Next 35 Years

As MHC heads into its next 35 years, They has a few goals in mind for the Farm Stewardship Committee and top on the list is a new Green Ribbon Farm Stewardship Recognition Initiative. In short, the program would celebrate horse farms within the state that maintain good stewardship practices. Details are still in the works but you can read more in the sidebar "New Green Ribbon Program."

Second on They's new list of Committee goals is to assist horse farm owners in being a part of the State's Water Implementation Program (WIP3). Each county has different line items related to "horse pasture management" with a 2025 goal of reducing nitrogen production. "Having farms be champions of the WIP3 program is very important," They stated.

Manure management is still on the action

plan list for the Committee, as with horses, it is the one common item that all horse farms have! "In general, we all need to be better aware of how to manage manure," They said. She sees a need to be able to educate people one on one of what will work best for their individual farms.

One way to accomplish these goals is to create a volunteer network that could go from farm to farm in various regions to help with the actual work needed to bring farms up to better stewardship practices.

Ultimately, They says the Committee continues to address the need to change the public image of what horse farms are. "These aren't just a bunch of rich people riding horses," she said, "they care about their land and want to protect it."

To read more about Jane They, see page 21 of this issue.

### "Green Ribbon Farm Stewardship Recognition Initiative"

by Jane They, Farm Stewardship Committee chair



The Farm Stewardship Committee is designing a "Green Ribbon Farm Stewardship Recognition Initiative" to celebrate the environmentally-sound actions taken by horse farm owners and managers that are good for our horses and for the natural environment. We are developing a list of 10 practices in consultation with the horse community, the Soil Conservation Districts, the Maryland Departments of Agriculture and Environment and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The idea is to promote these practices across all 16,000 horse farms in Maryland for the benefit of our 100,000 horses who live on 705,000 acres across the state.

The program is in the development stages with the plan to award a green ribbon for each of 10 healthy horse farm practices. Some examples would be: healthy pastures through rotational grazing, water management through drainage systems for roof and grounds runoff, and on-farm composting system at an appropriate distance from the stable, with minimal run-off for on-farm use of composted manure as a soil amendment. The "Green Ribbon" practices to include in the program launch will be discussed over the next few months and launched later this year. Comments welcome via the Maryland Horse Council website. More information can be found on [equiery.com](http://equiery.com).

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