CCA provides perspective on using the Nutrient Tracking Tool

By USDA Staff

Bob Ensor is a CCA/CPAg from Maryland. He is the District Manager of the Howard County Soil and Water Conservation District, a position he has held since 2007. Previously he worked for the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. USDA staff recently interviewed him to get his perspective on using the Nutrient Tracking Tool (NTT).

Q: How long have you been using NTT/ MD Tool?

A: Since its inception, which has been about seven years ago. Maryland originally was planning on using the tool developed by the World Resources Institute (WRI), but it needed a stronger backbone. Through my suggestion and efforts, WRI began working with Tarleton State in Texas to link their trading tool to NTT. WRI and Tarleton State worked together to refine the WRI front-end data entry and parameterize NTT for the Chesapeake Bay so that it is a scientifically defensible and solid program that consultants can use with their clients.

Q: How did you learn to use it?

A: Initially trial and error, but now there is excellent guidance and a user’s manual for the program. Once you work through a few farms and see what available information is required, it becomes fairly intuitive.

Q: How many farms/plans have you developed? Where?

A: About 100 farms have been evaluated in my home county. We have also completed about 25 on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, another 20 in Virginia, and about 100 in Pennsylvania though private entities. In addition, we have provided training and oversight to three Soil Conservation Districts in Virginia that have completed another 100. These have all been completed by trained personnel and verified by independent verifiers.

Q: Who has paid for the service?

A: The local county government paid for the initial 100 because they wanted to know if local farms would indeed meet the Chesapeake Bay Program nutrient loss baseline, or if more work (and funding) was needed, or if there could be nutrient credits generated to offset the overall need. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation received a CIG grant that provided funding for much of the training and the farm evalu-