Maryland’s Third Generation Soil Surveys: 
An Assessment of Soil Survey Demands 
and Product Satisfaction¹

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Cecil County, Md., was among the first three counties in the USA to have its soils surveyed in 1899. The soil survey was published the following year in 1900. By 1922, the entire State of Maryland had been mapped and published surveys were available for all 23 counties by 1926. As concepts changed and as more data became available, all Maryland counties mapped prior to 1910 were remapped between 1925 and 1930.

Cecil County, Md., received its second published survey in 1927, and its third published survey in 1973. It was also in 1973 that Maryland held its “last acre” ceremony in St. Marys County, marking the completion of the State’s detailed, second order survey begun 35 years earlier. The St. Marys County survey was published in 1978. The Kent County soil survey, first published as a Physical Land Conditions survey in 1945, was revised and republished in the modern format in 1982; thereby, completing Maryland’s published detailed soil survey series.

Today’s vintage soil surveys are utilized quite differently from their predecessors. The earliest objective of soil surveys was to guide people in selecting soils that were responsive to farm management systems. As USDA developed its conservation programs in the late 1930’s, and into the 1950’s, soil surveys were oriented toward interpretations for technical assistance in soil conservation programs, for planning agricultural programs, and as a basis for credit (Smith, 1968).

As agricultural uses of land intensified and became more complex, land management interpretations became more sophisticated and non-agricultural interpretations increased. The increased nonagricultural interpretations began from early efforts in the 1920’s and 1930’s, where the soil classification system and soil surveys were utilized to guide high-

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