

Maryland losing agricultural land

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A recent study by the National Agricultural Lands Study indicates that the state of Maryland has lost an average of 78,000 acres of agricultural land to other uses between 1967 and 1977. About one-third of the land was prime farmland. The

study showed cropland in Maryland decreased from 19 million to 17 million acres over that period, pastureland increased from 457,000 to 486,000 acres while forestland decreased from 27 to 2.1 million acres.

The current acreage of prime farmland in Maryland was reported at about 1.3 million acres with about 814,000 acres currently in cropland use. The potential for new cropland is limited,

the NALS study observes, with some 145,000 acres having a high potential and 382,000 acres a medium potential for conversion back to agricultural land. These potential agricultural acres are currently in pastureland, forest land and in other uses.

If Maryland continues to lose its prime agricultural land at the current rate, it will lose an additional 575,000 acres, or 44 percent of its total by the year 2,000, less than 20 years away.

Conservation district officials in virtually every county in Maryland reported that the conversion of agricultural land in their area was "a serious problem."

Montgomery County Soil Conservation District officials estimated that some 20,000 acres of agricultural land had been lost through conversion over the last five years, and another 20,000 acres idled because of development, with 33 percent of the total being prime farmland. Loss of an additional 15,000 acres in both categories is projected over the next five years.

Baltimore County SCD estimated that 9,000 acres have been lost, 1,000

bypassed, with an additional 9,000 acres to be lost or put out of production within the next five years. Twenty percent of ag land lost was prime farmland.

Carroll County SCD officials said that the problem was "very serious." It was estimated that 15,000 acres have been lost over the past five years, with another 7,500 to be lost within the next five years. Seventy-five percent of the land lost was said to be prime farmland.

Prince George County SCD officials reported that 8,000 acres were lost with 2,000 idled over the past five years. It is estimated that 7,000 acres will be lost and 10,000 acres idled within the next five years. Fifty percent is said to be prime farmland.

Howard County SCD officials reported 10,000 acres lost and another 10,000 acres idled over the past five years. A study indicated that 71.7 percent was prime farmland. About 5,000 acres is projected to be taken out of agriculture within the next five years.

Anne Arundel County SCD officials estimated 4,500 acres lost and 5,000 idled since 1975, with 3,500 projected for conversion and 20,000 acres to be idled within the next five years.

Harford County SCD officials estimated 7,000 acres

lost and 500 idled since 1975, with 3,500 to be lost by 1985. Fifty percent of the land lost is prime farmland.

Queen Anne's SCD officials estimated 3,000 acres lost and 1,500 idled since 1975, with 6,000 acres to be lost or idled by 1985. Seventy five percent of land lost is prime farmland.

Calvert County SCD officials estimated 5,000 acres lost and 4,000 idled since 1975, with 8,000 acres to be lost or idled by 1985. Twenty percent was said to be prime farmland.

Other county estimates included: St. Mary's 6,500 lost or idled; Charles County 9,000 acres lost or idled; Talbot, 3,500 acres lost or idled; Wicomico, 1,000 acres lost or idled; Garrett, 4,000 acres lost or idled. Caroline and Dorchester counties reported the problem as slight. The Cactoctin SCD and Frederick SCD in Frederick county said the problem was slight, although the Frederick SCD estimated that up to 7,000 acres of agricultural land could be lost by 1985.

Among impacts cited by most of the local conservation districts were farms going out of business; prime farmlands being lost; increased soil erosion; increased water pollution; and cost of public services going up.

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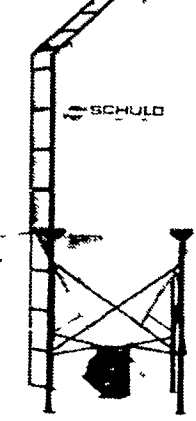
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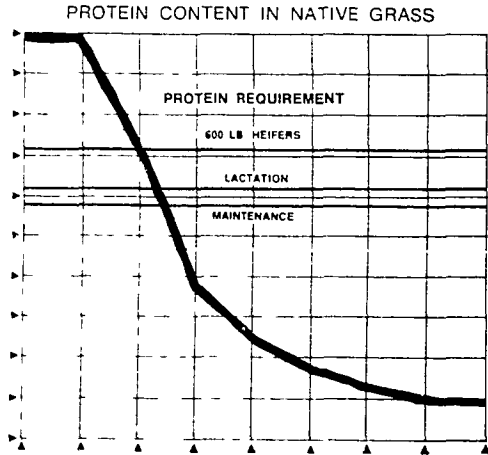
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