



# PRESS RELEASE

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TO: Local Media  
FROM: Worcester County Commissioners  
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TOPIC: New conservation easement protects land, waterways in Newport Bay Watershed  
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## New conservation easement protects land, waterways in Newport Bay Watershed

SNOW HILL, Md. (January 13, 2026): Queponco Farms, a 186-acre mix of cropland and woodland off Basket Switch Road, is the latest agricultural easement purchased through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) in Worcester County, and the first project to be completed in Newport Bay watershed since establishment of the Partnership for Newport Bay.

The Partnership includes Worcester County, Maryland Coastal Bays Program, the Lower Shore Land Trust, Assateague Coastal Trust, and the Town of Berlin. This unique partnership of local government and non-profit organizations will manage a \$20 million grant through the Whole Watershed Act for water quality improvement projects in the Newport Bay watershed over the next five years.

“Protecting this property, owned by Queponco Farms, is important because it is a large property, with extensive road frontage, contains over 80% prime agricultural soils and is adjacent to a block of already protected forest,” Katherine Munson, planner for Worcester County Government, said. “Land protection has lagged in the Newport Bay watershed compared to other areas of the county, so we are thrilled to work with this landowner and MALPF to protect this property.”

The easement will prevent subdivision and non-agricultural uses in perpetuity, increasing a contiguous block of permanently protected land to over 747 acres. A tributary of Marshall Creek runs through the property. Its woodland provides a riparian buffer, habitat, and water quality benefits for the Newport Bay watershed.

“By placing an easement on our farm, we’ve not only protected our land but also contributed to the larger ecosystem of our watershed,” Mike Sirman, Queponco Farms owner, said. “As landowners in this watershed, we have a unique opportunity to influence the future of our region. I encourage fellow farmers and landowners to consider the benefits of MALPF and similar programs. These initiatives offer financial incentives and technical support, making it easier to protect our agricultural heritage. By working together, we can foster a community that prioritizes sustainable practices and conservation.”

With this purchase, over 11,000 acres of farmland and forest countywide are now permanently protected by MALPF easements. MALPF aims to protect agricultural land, curb urban sprawl, and conserve open space, wildlife habitat, and improve water quality in Maryland. Landowners who sell an easement to MALPF continue to own and farm their land but are restricted from future development, though they may retain some limited development rights.

The Whole Watershed Fund pools resources from multiple state sources, including the Maryland Cost Share Program (MACS), Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), the Bay Restoration Fund, the Clean Water Commerce Act, the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, and the Waterway Improvement Fund.

The Whole Watershed Act provides implementation grants for up to 50% of the program cost, and each watershed program has been asked to secure additional funding from other state, federal, local, and private sources.

The funding will support long-term environmental restoration efforts in Newport Bay, where water quality and habitat conditions have declined in recent years. Working alongside local communities, the Partnership for Newport Bay will lead projects aimed at improving water quality, restoring natural habitats, and strengthening the overall health of the watershed for the future.

Properties with subdivision potential, over 50 acres and at least 50% prime agricultural soils are eligible to apply to sell an easement to MALPF. Applications will be accepted starting in January 2026. Contact Katherine Munson 410-632-1220 ext. 1302 for details.

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