

# Chester River Association hires a planner with roots in farming

By Peter Heck  
Staff writer

CHESTERTOWN — Local farmers have a new friend, with the Chester River Association's hiring of Paul Spies as a full-time conservation planner for Queen Anne's County.

Spies (rhymes with trees) is a native of Talbot County who grew up on a 1,000-acre farm owned by his family. He graduated from University of Maryland with a degree in agricultural economics and agronomy, and went to work for a liquid fertilizer company in Frederick. He then spent four years with Perdue AgriRecycle selling organic fertilizer before applying to the CRA.

"I enjoyed working with the farmers," he said on Oct. 11, and added that he began to miss contact with them after a promotion to an office job in Atlanta. He applied to CRA in part because the job would get him back outdoors, and in part because it would return him to his home area.

"What really got me hooked on the job was (CRA director) Bob Parks' agriculture-based approach to the environment," said Spies. The CRA actively promotes healthy farming practices as "the most important use of our land... in the best interest of our community and our river," according to a brochure on the CRA agriculture program.

Spies' job is to communicate to the farming community the availability of programs to help them implement those healthy practices. "There are so many programs that farmers don't have time to research them all," he said.



SPIES

Use of cover crops is especially important, Spies said. "It's a win-win; it improves the environment and the productivity of your land both at the same time." That's especially true after a drought season, when farmers fertilized their fields expecting large yields of corn but harvested only a fraction of the norm.

"Cover crops can absorb the excess nutrients," said Spies. He also said, "Mother Nature usually pays back," following a period of dry weather with enough rain to restore the balance. The use of cover crops can help minimize erosion.

The CRA office at 100 Cross St. in Chestertown offers information on a number of programs that offer grants, cost-share assistance, or technical assistance to farmers interested in adopting conservation practices that benefit the watershed. Spies, and his colleague Virgil Turner, CRA conservation planner for Kent County, are available to help farmers discover which programs fit their needs. Farmers can usually get a high percentage of their costs shared, said Spies.

Farmers can also get information on available programs to encourage environmentally sound practices from their local conservation district, said Spies.

The CRA is a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring the Chester River. For more information on the CRA and its programs, go to: [www.chester-riverassociation.com](http://www.chester-riverassociation.com) or call 410-810-7556.