

Field trip to tour Eastern Shore farms growing perennial grasses for use as poultry bedding: A potential legacy nutrient conservation practice

April 6, 2022, on the Delmarva Peninsula

A Day Trip on the Eastern Shore to Explore a Technological Innovation in Poultry Production and Its Intersection with On-Farm Conservation Practices and Chesapeake Bay Water Quality:

There is growing excitement in the poultry industry concerning on-farm production of poultry bedding from sterile *Miscanthus x. giganteus* perennial grass as a replacement for traditional sawdust and wood chip bedding. This high-biomass perennial crop requires much less nutrient input than traditional crops like corn and soybean and can also scavenge legacy agricultural nutrients from the landscape. The sterile hybrid does not produce seeds, thus reducing risk of unintentional spread, and can produce up to 12 tons/acre of dry harvested biomass. The conversion of row crop production to *Miscanthus*, in sufficient quantity to supply local farms with bedding, should lead to substantial reduction in nutrient export from watersheds. Also, composted *Miscanthus*-based poultry litter can likely provide a high-quality soil amendment suitable for home and commercial use, with promise of significant legacy nutrient removal from agricultural watersheds. The USDA Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) has sponsored scientific assessment conducted by USDA-ARS and USGS to investigate improvements in soil and water quality and whole-farm mass balance of nutrients resulting from conversion from imported sawdust to on-farm, local *Miscanthus* production and adoption as poultry bedding. Producers have also observed improved chicken health and reduced ammonia problems with a more frequent litter refresh that is enabled by local production of *Miscanthus* bedding. The project is conducted in collaboration with two innovative growers of sterile *Miscanthus*: John Luthy and Dave Tribbett.

The field trip is free and will occur April 6th, 2022, with stops at two farms and a composting facility, with a hot lunch provided. A bus will provide transport from the [USDA George Washington Carver Center \(GWCC\)](#) in Beltsville, MD or you are welcome to arrive via your own transportation. Free Visitor parking is available at the GWCC or we can arrange car pool from the Greenbelt Metro Station to GWCC if needed. **Please RSVP (greg.mccarty@usda.gov) by March 31 if you plan to join us for a hot lunch (please indicate if a vegetarian option is needed in your RSVP) and/or wish to ride on the bus.**



Photo credit: Encyclopedia Britannica



Schedule:

- 7:30 Bus leaves GWCC Beltsville MD
- 9:30 Arrive at Luthy farm: Discussion of sterile miscanthus cultivation, use, and markets, demonstration of planting and harvest techniques.
- 11:00 Travel to lunch location, Ruthsburg Community Center, 105 Damsontown Rd. Queen Anne MD.
- 12:00 Lunch and lunchtime presentations
- 1:00 Travel to Tribbett farm location
- 1:15 Tribbett farm: Discussion of changes in water quality monitoring data, whole farm nutrient mass balance resulting from Miscanthus cultivation; discussion of USDA legacy Phosphorus Assessment
- 2:15 Travel to composting location
- 2:30 Tour Mid-Atlantic Organic Resources composting facility and discuss production of value-added quality compost from Miscanthus poultry litter.
- 3:30 Close of field day, bus leaves for Beltsville, arriving 5:00pm

The bus will leave from the USDA George Washington Carver Center (GWCC), 5601 Sunnyside Ave, Beltsville, MD 20705 at 7:30 am, April 6th and will return by 5pm.



Hosted by: USDA-ARS and NRCS CEAP (Agreement #: NRC20IRA0010495); Soil and Water Conservation Society-National Capital Chapter, Mid-Atlantic Organic Resource Company; Luthy farm; Agrowtech.

For more information and RSVP, contact: Greg McCarty, USDA-ARS, greg.mccarty@usda.gov, Cell: 301-356-3375