



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Kevin M. Atticks, Secretary
Steven A. Connelly, Deputy Secretary

Maryland Agricultural Commission

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry
mda.maryland.gov

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MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Minutes

March 12th, 2025

Location: 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis MD 21401

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88941338564?pwd=0gIEkOnSPTvTP8oeUloxYGplhbwIFI.1>

Meeting ID: 889 4133 8564 Passcode: 381178

Present:

Janna Howley
Johnny Shockley
Stefanie Reiser
Kellie Hinkle
Ann Merryman
Paula Linthicum
Nikita Bocharov
Sean Hough

Kelly Lewis, Chair
Emma Jagoz
Zach Evans
Gordon Kretser
Dr. Darren Jarboe
Russel Shlagel
Dr. Marianne Bailey
Jenell Eck McHenry, YFAB

Absent:

Dr. Melissa Welsh
Frank Allnutt
Raj Kathuria
Amy Crone, Vice Chair
Chris Rhodes

Hunter Pusey
Levi Sellers
Richard Stonebreaker
Rachel Lipman

MDA Staff:

Sec. Kevin Atticks
Rachel Jones
Jessica Hackett
Hans Schmidt
Cassie Shirk
Michael Calkins

Martin Proulx
Harrison Palmer
Heather Barthel
Susan Kivioja
Kristin Hanna

Guests:

Call to Order:

The March 2025 Maryland Agricultural Commission meeting was called to order by Kelly Lewis, Chair, at 10:06 am.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the January 2025 meeting minutes was made by Zach Evans, second by Janna Howley.

Presentations:

- Kristin Hanna, Maryland's Best

Committee Reports:**Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee – Emma Jagoz, Chair:**

- The committee began discussing the Food System Resilience Council recommendations and request to the Ag Commission for consideration. Agricultural apprenticeships offer a clear intersection between profitability and the opportunity to overcome barriers for new and beginning farmers. Emma Jagoz mentioned that she is engaging in a PASA apprenticeship
- program where the apprentice is employed by the farm, and the farm is then compensated to engage in above-and-beyond experiences to help develop the apprentice for supplemental training opportunities. One of the major challenges in farm labor is that most available domestic labor is unskilled. The noticeable trend in domestic labor entering the agricultural workforce is that they are working to learn about agriculture with farm-ownership in mind. As unskilled labor enters the apprenticeship system, farmers and farm business managers must make investments into training and developing a workforce that may or may not ever return to their operation.
- The committee is particularly invested in changing the narrative for new and beginning farmers that creates a career track for skilled agricultural labor that does not include owning the farm. However, as Kelly Lewis identified, even large-scale production operations (whether it is poultry, produce or nursery) rely heavily on semi-skilled labor and are operating on tight margins and don't have an opportunity for growth up a management chain. Often, even mid-large farms do not have mid-level management positions that do not include farm ownership. Third-party skilled labor is a unique opportunity to meet the needs of farm businesses without the burden of farm ownership.
- Raj Kathuria acknowledged that there is continued pushback from local jurisdictions when it comes to agricultural innovation because it doesn't align with traditional views of farming. The committee identified several on-farm diversification opportunities for farm profitability to include seed sales, biofuels, on farm sales, agritourism, and aggregating for institutional purchasing. Flexible regulation for scalability and recognition of agriculturally adjacent businesses on the farm are necessary for the success of new and beginning farmers in the long term.

- The committee discussed the opportunities and threats that tariffs pose to profitability. While a decrease in imported food (or increased price of imported foods) could bolster local business and reliance on local food production, the inputs for farmers will increase and put strain on production capacity.

Legislative Affairs Committee – Paula Linthicum, Chair:

- Rachel Jones, Director of Government Affairs for the Maryland Department of Agriculture, gave an update on the departmental bills submitted by MDA.
- Paula Linthicum, Chair, shared concerns about the PFAS bill (HB386/SB345) that would eliminate chemicals that farmers use safely based. Emma Jagoz raised concerns about soil tests to evaluate the existence (or levels) of PFAS currently; her sentiment was followed by Paula's concern with a lack of standardized testing capabilities for PFAS.
- Emma raised concerns to Secretary Atticks regarding the definition of "Regenerative Agriculture" that was listed in the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act (HB506/SB428) as "a form of land management and stewardship approaches and practices that: 1, Draws on traditions and innovations from African, Indigenous, and original land stewards; 2, promotes culturally important food and climate justice programs and initiatives; and 3, enhances the land and ecosystem through adaptive land management practices that improve soil health and water quality, restore biodiversity, mitigate climate change impacts, and provide the greatest community benefits...includes practices such as producing food in the state for distribution within the state." She inquired about the development of the definition and highlighted the broad impacts that creating a definition would create. The Rodale Institute certifies Stefanie Reiser's farm as Certified Regenerative Organic, who brought forward additional concerns about enforcement and management of the newly proposed definition. Secretary Atticks clarified that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources is interested in encouraging tenants on state-owned land to be engaging in soil health practices and devised this definition through discussions with MDA's Healthy Soils program and DNR's Climate Justice Coordinator, intentionally incorporating broad language to allow for an array of practices to be considered. MDA will have ownership of interpretation of this law through their Healthy Soils Program, but the intention is to support these theories on properties that DNR owns and leases for agricultural production.
- Food System Resilience Council Recommendations – Paula Linthicum, Chair, asked committee members to come to the next meeting with a list of regulations that have an impact on new & beginning farmers.

Value Added Agriculture Committee – Amy Crone, Chair:

- The Committee began discussing the Food System Resilience Council's recommendation to analyze barriers and regulatory challenges for new and beginning farmers. County based permitting and interpretation of statewide regulations present a challenging process full of red tape for new and beginning farmers to navigate, on top of navigating their business processes. With the mindset shift of the Maryland Department of Commerce towards supporting business
- development and growth, agriculture serves a key role within that sector. Removing the barriers and red tape for agribusinesses inherently supports economic growth. The

Maryland Department of Planning is embarking on a process to evaluate all permits and licenses in the state and navigate the process of streamlining those processes. As the Governor's Intergovernmental Commission on Agriculture continues to engage with partner agencies, they will serve as the channel to bring forward recommendations from the Value-Added Agriculture Committee and the Commission to ensure that solutions are posed. The Committee moved into discussion about the State Department of Assessment and Taxations reconsideration of agricultural businesses and reassessment as commercial entities. This continues to be a risk to new and beginning farmers, as well as to the preservation of existing agribusinesses.

- Martin Proulx, MDA Value Added Agriculture Specialist, introduced his intern, Aidan Boline from UMD College Park. Aidan was brought on to assist Martin in the development of a statewide guidance document to help agritourism businesses, regulators, and partners navigate the existing framework that value added agricultural businesses operate in. The Committee revisited conversations surrounding the pros and cons of establishing statewide definitions for agriculture and value added agriculture, acknowledging that most agricultural businesses and partners understand agriculture in its fundamental forms, but regulating authorities often don't and arbitrarily may define agriculture contrary to agriculture's definition of agriculture.

Committee on Watershed Strategies – Gordon Kretser, Chair:

- The Committee began discussing the recommendations from the Food System Resilience Council to analyze barriers to entry and regulatory challenges for new and beginning farmers as it pertains to watershed strategies and conservation. Often, the perspective and comprehension of conservation for new and beginning farmers is shaped on which partner office they start with first (FSA, Farm Credit, MARBIDCO, Soil Conservation, etc.). When new and beginning folks are getting into the industry, they don't always have the opportunity to work with a third party (bank, realtor, etc.) that understands agriculture. The development of an "Ag
- Service Providers 101" presentation or flow chart would be a beneficial resource to understand the interconnections and roles of each entity, and where a farmer can go for assistance.

Committee on Agricultural Literacy & Education – Richard Stonebraker, Chair:

- The Executive Secretary welcomed several new members to CALE and shared historical context from the 2024 strategic plan, establishment of committees, and the goals/responsibilities of the committee. He then shared the Coalition for Agricultural Education (MDFB, MAEF and MATA) presentation that they gave to CALE in November. The Committee discussed the proposal briefly, expressing some reservations about the efficacy of any party, new and existing, and their ability to collaborate with MSDE. Members will continue to review the proposal and await the consolidated goals from the Coalition to review.
- The Committee then began the discussion on the FSRC request to identify challenges and barriers for new and beginning farmers in the context of agricultural literacy and education. They highlighted

- Access to land and capital
- Agricultural education programs for new & beginning farmers exist in groups like future harvest, UME, and EcoCity Farms, but may or may not be located where the demand is.
- Literacy
 - Budgeting, planning, following regulation, engaging with groups, literacy in the context of functional agricultural knowledge
 - Dr. Everts at the Harry Hughes Center is currently seeking project proposals, could the FSRC project be an option?
- Access to centralized information for New & Beginning farmers
- How do you scale a full-sized business proposal from a hobby?
- New & beginning farmers' outlook on agriculture is often shaped by the first office they walk into – whether it is the Soil Conservation District, Farm Bureau meetings, Extension, beginning farmer training programs, USDA FSA or NRCS service centers, MARBIDCO, etc.
- Sequential courses to expose potential farmers to agriculture, challenges and risks, and teach those auxiliary skills before stepping into land access/ownership.
- How can folks foster relationships for older farmers and landowners to connect with new and beginning farmers to provide access.
- How can we structurally change the narrative of legacy farmers and their trust of young farmers and new business ventures (internally within the family or otherwise)

Commodity Reports:

Ag Education- Dr. Melissa Welsh:

- AGNR Dean's search: Provost has set 3 days for in person interviews.
 - **OPEN FORUMS:**
 - **All forums are hybrid and will be held in 0201 ESJ from 10:30 - 11:30 am.**
 - **Tuesday, March 25** <https://umd.zoom.us/j/97401946923>
 - **Friday, April 4** <https://umd.zoom.us/j/91650646746>
 - **Tuesday, April 8** <https://umd.zoom.us/j/97859183190>
- 100th AG Day on Saturday April 26th. Opening ceremony 9:30am
- June 24 is Eat Drink and be Maryland with the Fermentation Science Major on campus from 5-7pm
- A multitude of 4-H Animal Science knowledge-based competitive events are held each spring for youth interested in animal agriculture. The events provide an opportunity for hundreds of youth to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge and understanding of animal science and management and animal agriculture industries.
 - Here are a few of these events:
 - *February 22 - Maryland 4-H Dog Skillathon Contest, Animal Science Bldg, UMD Campus

- *March 1 - Maryland 4-H Livestock Skillathon Contest, Montgomery County Fairgrounds
 - *March 8 - Maryland 4-H Horse Bowl Contest, Plant Science Bldg, UMD Campus
 - *March 22 - Maryland 4-H Dairy Skillathon, Carroll County Extension Office
 - *March 23 - Maryland 4-H Livestock Skillathon State Team Selection, Maryland 4-H Center, UMD Campus
 - *April 5 - Maryland 4-H Horse Communications Contest, Maryland 4-H Center, UMD Campus
 - *April 12 - Maryland 4-H Dairy Bowl Contest, Animal Science Bldg, UMD Campus
- Maryland FFA chapters have been busy visiting the state capital, their state representatives and testifying on issues important to agriculture and their future.
- Regional Leadership Development Events are being held across the state. Region 3 would love a few more volunteers to help judge this Saturday- email Leasa Gudderra: leasa.gudderra@pgcps.org or call 660-651-4097. Fun starts at 9am-2pm at Gwenn Park High School
- Various stakeholders in Ag Ed have been working to identify and provide supportive letters for Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs)- nationally some are focused on Industry Valued Credentials. Ideally an individual with the credential would have their resume/CV move to the top of the applicant pile.
- The federal legislation that funds career and technical education (CTE), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, (reauthorized in 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education Act for the 21st Century), suggests states use industry certifications to measure career-readiness among CTE students. There are very few ag industry certification options for MD students. The following are hosted on iCEV and are recently **approved**:
 - [BASF Plant Science Certification](#)
 - [Elanco Fundamentals of Animal Science Certification](#)
 - [Elanco Veterinary Medical Applications Certification](#)
 - [NRCS Fundamentals of Conservation & Sustainability in Agriculture Certification](#)
 - [EETC Principles of Small Engine Technology Certification](#)
- **The certifications under review with MD Dept of Ed currently are:**
 - [Ducks Unlimited Ecology Conservation & Management Certification](#)
 - [NCLCA Principles of Livestock Selection & Evaluation Certification](#)
 - [NHJTCA Equine Management & Evaluation Certification](#)
 - [SFMA Turfgrass Science Certification](#)
 - [Southwest Airlines Professional Communications Certification](#)
- When you click on any cert, you'll see

- The “industry standards” are what the exam tests cover
 - The certification blueprint outlines the learning objectives of the certification’s preparation materials
 - Other letters of support that have been collected for the certification, nationally
- **Maryland Department of Education is asking for written support for these certifications that are under review.**
 - The state department of education wants to know that Maryland employers want to hire people with proven knowledge and skills, which is what these certifications show. These letters prove a certification's value. It's hard to argue that a student graduating high school with proof of career-readiness is a bad thing! All of these certifications can live on someone’s resume forever, whereas the classes they take in high school will likely come off of their resume shortly after graduation.
- **If you're willing to support these efforts to expand ag educational opportunities for MD students, you can either use this [template](#) to draft a letter(s) of support, or you can fill out this [survey](#), and Kelli Hughes’ team will send you draft letters that you can edit, sign, and add letterhead to. (Kelli.Hughes@icevonline.com)**
 - ICEV hosts exams for 19 different businesses/organizations. Most certifications they host are for preparation of ag industry careers. About 65,000 young people across the nation earned certifications they hosted last year alone. Certifications ICEV hosts are on 33 other state-approved lists. ICEV has about [1,000 letters of support](#) for these 19 certifications and have collected letters from several other state ag departments.

This Goat Rocks... and It Could Be Yours!
Forget air guitars—how about a rocking goat to steal the show? MAEF’s Rocking Goat Raffle is your chance to win a one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted wooden rocking goat that’s utterly amazing!

Tickets are just \$35 in honor of 35 years of MAEF, and every ticket helps us keep ag education growing across Maryland! [Get yours here](#)



Opportunities are blooming at MAEF! Whether you’re an educator, student, or passionate about agriculture, there are so many ways to grow with us. From Ag Literacy Week and hands-on learning resources to grants, scholarships, and more, now is the perfect time to get involved. Don’t miss your chance to plant the seeds for the future on our website: MAEFonline.com

Susanne
Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation

Many of our supporters give stocks, grants from Donor Advised funds, or make a Qualified Charitable Distribution, which are more “tax-smart” than giving cash. Such forms of donations are not only clever but may be beneficial to your personal funds as well. [Explore the possibilities here](#)



Applications are open for the 2025 MAEF Academic & Seibel Scholarships!

Are you pursuing a career in agricultural or Extension education? The MAEF Academic Scholarship offers \$1,500 to support your educational journey.

The Seibel Scholarship, honoring Dr. Ronald J. Seibel’s legacy and passion for agricultural education, is available for students studying agriculture or agriculture education at qualifying institutions.

Applications are due by March 25, 2025! Don’t miss this opportunity to grow your future in agriculture. [Apply here!](#)

Book the Amazing MD Ag Showcase for your next event!

Bring the Amazing Maryland Agriculture Showcase to your next event for a fun, hands-on learning experience! This interactive exhibit highlights Maryland’s diverse agricultural commodities and engages visitors with exciting activities led by knowledgeable attendants.

Book the Showcase today and let your guests explore the world of agriculture in an unforgettable way! Dates are filling up for the 2025 event season. Reach out to the [Ben Brown](#) with any questions or to book the showcase and visit [here](#) from more info!



Spring is a season of growth—and at MAEF, opportunities for agricultural education are in full bloom! Whether you’re an educator looking for engaging resources, a student seeking scholarships, or a supporter of ag literacy, there’s something fresh and exciting for you. From hands-on learning experiences to grants and special events, we’re planting the seeds for success—keep reading to see what’s sprouting this season!



Ag Literacy Week connects volunteers with local classrooms to help young students discover the importance of agriculture in their daily lives. Volunteers read an agriculturally themed book, lead a hands-on activity, and share their personal experiences, making learning fun and engaging. The book is then donated to the classroom library, and teachers receive additional lessons to continue the conversation. It’s a meaningful way for individuals and groups to be the face of agriculture while inspiring K-3 students across Maryland. Join us in planting the seeds of agricultural literacy in young minds!

LET’S GRO Together!
Educators and community leaders—here’s your chance to make agriculture come alive for your students! MAEF is offering grants of up to \$500 to support hands-on projects that inspire and engage young learners in agriculture.

These grants are perfect for initiatives that immerse students in:

- Growing, harvesting, and preparing fresh foods
- Exploring botany and nutrition
- Promoting environmental stewardship
- Applying engineering practices

Applications are due by March 25, 2025—don’t miss out! Learn more and [apply here](#).





From teacher awards and student scholarships to impactful grants and career opportunities, there are so many ways to learn, grow, and make a difference with MAEF! Whether you're an educator, student, or passionate about agricultural education, there's something for you.



Do you love science? Love agriculture? Love making an impact? Join our team as the Mobile Science Lab Coordinator and help bring hands-on science and agriculture education to schools across Maryland!

What You'll Do:

- Coordinate Mobile Science Lab visits to schools.
- Manage supplies and make sure labs run smoothly.
- Help inspire science and agricultural leaders!
- To apply send a cover letter and resume to Tonya Wible, TWible@maefonline.com

Do you know a teacher who inspires students by bringing agriculture into their classroom in innovative and impactful ways? Or are YOU that teacher? Here's your chance to shine!

Nominate yourself or a fellow educator for the Velma Clark Excellence in Teaching Award Agriculture Award. This prestigious award celebrates educators who creatively use agriculture to enhance learning and inspire future generations. [More info here!](#)



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Opportunities are sprouting at MAEF! Whether you're an educator, student, or ag enthusiast, there's a way to grow with us—from awards and scholarships to grants and job openings! Don't miss your chance to plant your future with MAEF.

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Susanne
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Agribusiness- Vacant:

Agritourism – Janna Howley:

- The lack of a broad agricultural definition from the Department of Agriculture is impacting the State Department of Assessments evaluation of commercial versus agricultural in the eyes of tax assessment and impacting value added agricultural businesses.
- There is a proposed business-to-business tax being considered in the Maryland State Legislature currently, affecting every service provider across the state (SB1045/HB1554).
 - **The Commission discussed the impact that the 2.5% B2B tax will have on agriculture.**
 - **Emma Jagoz made a motion that the Maryland Agricultural Commission submit a letter of concern to the Senate and House committees that will hear SB1045/HB1554 regarding the impacts it will have on the agricultural industry, Janna Howley second the motion, all were in favor.**
- March is Maryland Wine Month – encouraging Marylanders to visit wineries as an agritourism venture.
- There is a drive in the state to promote economic development and grow the economy, agriculture and value-added/agritourism operations play a major role in that and will need to showcase their impact.
- Appreciate the role that MDA is taking in working on the county agritourism regulation matrix.

Aquaculture - Johnny Shockley:

- No report.

At-Large Agricultural Services – Frank Allnutt:

- No report.

At-Large Agricultural Services – Stefanie Reiser:

- No report.

Bio-Fuel - Rajneesh Kathuria:

- No report.

Consumer – Kellie Hinkle:

- No report.

Dairy I – Vacant:

Dairy II- Vacant:

Direct Farm Market - Amy Crone:

- No report.

Equine (Horse Breeding) - Ann Merryman:

- Plans are proceeding to rebuild Pimlico
- MTROA (the nonprofit authority managing racing) has finalized plans for Shamrock Farm in Carrol County to be the training center to compliment Pimlico
- Reconstruction of Pimlico will start immediately after the running of the 150th Preakness
- Baltimore city is planning to incorporate a week-long festival around the Preakness

Farm Bureau - Paula Linthicum:

- **HB1036/SB0931 Solar Siting OPPOSED**
 - Bill has potential to negatively impact farmland by allowing state government to override local and county zoning to build solar projects.
- Maryland's Department of Legislative Services Proposed Funding Cuts OPPOSED
Recommendations to cut funding to key agricultural programs like Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), ag cost share programs and SMADC will negatively impact Maryland agriculture.
- **HB1554/SB1045 Sales and Use Tax – Taxable Business Services – Alterations OPPOSED**
 - By altering the definitions of "taxable price" and "taxable service" the proposed a NEW 2.5% business services tax would tax service sectors utilized by businesses throughout the state including agriculture. Sectors include accounting, payroll and bookkeeping, office administrative support, IT, data processing and web hosting, consulting, scientific and development, photography, design and printing,

marketing and PR, landscaping and property maintenance, repair (electronics, machinery and vehicles), financial planning and tax preparation, and appraisal (non-real estate).

- **Maryland Farm Bureau Old Line Farmer Radio Podcast**

- Stay informed of the latest happenings in Maryland agriculture, commodity prices across the state, and apprised on important policy discussions that affect farmers' bottom lines as stakeholders, policymakers and producers engage in productive conversation.

- ***Agriculture Education:***

- Committee Chair Barb Glenn glennbarb6@gmail.com & MDFB Staff member Kendall Abruzzese kabruzzo@marylandfb.org
- **The committee held their Q1 meeting on February 20.**
 - We are pleased that MDFB members voted at Convention last December on agricultural education as once again one of our top three policy priorities in 2025! Farmers care about educating future leaders in ag, whether they are farmers, agribusiness leaders, policy people, or ag scientists. Our goal is to advise the Board and lead representing ag education and extension for Farm Bureau. We work collaboratively to assure that ag education is sustainable with the emerging Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a landmark legislation that changes many things about education, costs \$40 BN up to 2030, and right now, the counties are bearing the burden of cost and implementation. We have worked for three years in an "Ag Ed Coalition" that includes the united voice of MDFB, Maryland Ag Education Foundation (MAEF), and Maryland Ag Teachers Association (MATA). Three years ago we developed a proposal for the leadership structure for ag education in Maryland, while in alignment with the Blueprint. Our proposal has been presented to many ag education supporters, legislators, and government officials, including at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Ag Education Summit in 2024.
 - We are excited that Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks is taking on a leadership role on ag education. We are involved in discussions regarding his expectation to hire an Ag Education Specialist and with his new advisory committee. Harrison Palmer, executive secretary to the Maryland Ag Commission, recently spoke to us about the Maryland Ag Commission Committee on Ag Literacy and Education Committee (CALE), and more. We look forward to working with CALE in the future.
 - We have advocated for SB563/HB650: Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund - which identifies a pathway to fund MD State Fair, MD Ag Fair Board, and MAEF. We supported the Nationwide MDFB FFA Golden Owl Award and the recent announcement of regional Ag Educator winners. As an information-sharing platform, every committee meeting includes members sharing news of county events,

initiatives and actions that successfully highlight ag awareness, including new Ag Awareness Days.

- If you would like to get involved in this committee, contact Barb Glenn, chair and Howard County Farm Bureau, or Kendall Abruzzese, Western MD Regional Field Manager. Or please sign up in December as the Board of Directors will be assigning new committee leadership and members for a new 2-year term to serve from January 2026 to December, 2027. – Barb Glenn, glennbarb6@gmail.com

Field Crops – Chris Rhodes:

- No report.

Food Processing – Nikita Bocharov:

- Farmers Market attendance and investment is higher than ever.
 - For the first time in a long time, local eggs are less expensive than wholesale eggs at the grocery store – reigniting an interest in local ag.
 - The DC-Baltimore corridor is one of the strongest locations to support farmer's markets.
 - The more that agriculture can be embedded into consumers lives, the stronger the industry can be.

Forestry – Hunter Pusey:

- Today is Forestry Day in Annapolis
- **Senate Bill 203/House Bill 225 (Vehicle Laws – Exceptional Hauling Permit – Farm Products):**
 - Forestry and agriculture tagged team with the Moore Administration in advancing legislation to, among other things, increase truck weight limits while hauling from the fields to the processors...*2 years in the making*. IN SHORT, trucks carrying farm products (including timber) will be able to carry 88,000 pounds on 5 axles upon enactment. The Senate passed SB 203 on January 26, 2025, and the House will likely do the same one-day next week. Enactment will be an historic achievement.
 - <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0203T.pdf>
- **Senate Bill 946/House Bill 894 (Endangered & Threatened Species – Incidental Taking – Bats):**
 - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reclassified the northern long-eared bat (NLEB) as endangered on November 29, 2022, and the rule became effective on January 30, 2023. The bat was previously listed as threatened in 2015. Why the reclassification? Two-fold: (1) The bat faces extinction due to white-nose syndrome, a deadly disease that affects hibernating bats; and (2) White-nose syndrome is caused by an invasive fungal pathogen that has caused population declines of more than 90% in at least three bat species. MLEB are found throughout Maryland.

- Legislation has been introduced in 2025 mirroring Chapter 117 of 2010, aka endangered Puritan Tiger Beetle. Simply put, when FWS designates any species as “endangered” those entities “taking” the bats – like cutting down trees and killing the bats – steps must be taken by impacted entities to “minimize” and “mitigate” the “taking”. IN SHORT, the 1973 federal Endangered Species Act – though allowing the “taking” of “endangered” species – requires approval of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that proves to both State and federal regulators that requisite steps will be taken to avoid inadvertent “taking”. The proposed legislation will help facilitate the development of an HCP for NLEB under the purview of both FWS and DNR. Most HCPs take about 12 years to develop...in the meantime, the forest industry will be at the mercy of the FWS and DNR relevant to timbering. *NOTE: AFI spent 10 years developing an HCP for the endangered Delmarva Fox Squirrel @ a cost of over \$100,000...helped lead to its delisting in 2015 which negated AFI from having to adopt the HCP along with attendant spending.*
 - <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0946F.pdf>
- **Funding for the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund (WIF):**
 - The main funding source for DNR’s Forest Services is WIF. The 2024 General Assembly reduced the mandated \$1 million annual appropriation by 50%. AFI is doing its best this Session to protect the remaining \$500,000 statutory mandate from being reduced again; but, with State lawmakers facing a \$3 billion + structural deficit, few existing funds are deemed fiscally sacrosanct.

Hemp- Matthew ‘Levi’ Sellers:

- No Report.

Horticulture – Vacant:

Livestock- Sean Hough:

- Calving season is ongoing
- Hog farrowing season is coming to a close
- Beef & pork industry are seeing high prices still – tariffs may have a major impact over time.

Nursery I- J. Kelly Lewis:

- Spotted lantern fly infestation is more of a problem this year than in past. Most nurseries have egg masses this year. Spotting and destroying them prior to shipping is challenging and time consuming. Because egg masses are normally laid high up in tree canopy, it is difficult to destroy them until trees are harvested. We have seen good help and support from MDA.
- Membership of Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association are following and strongly oppose HB1554/SB1045 which would put a 2.5% business to business tax on most of the service required to run a business. As well as for landscape and non-residential building or property maintenance.

- The feeling of membership is as follows:
 - This bill creates an untenable administrative burden.
 - This bill creates a competitive disadvantage for Maryland based companies when we are so close to surrounding states that do not charge some of these service fees. Customers will very likely be lost to out-of-state businesses.
 - This bill creates a negative, cumulative business impact not only from the customer acquisition perspective but also cost-of-doing-business. Businesses will now have to pay 2.5% on their bookkeeping, human relations, software/IT, accounting/tax preparation, office management services, etc. This makes Maryland less business friendly than it already is (Maryland is ranked 47 out of 50 states, with 50 being the least friendly towards businesses)

Nursery II- John Murphy:

- No report.

Organic Farming – Emma Jagoz:

- Resources
 - [“A Black-led Agricultural Community Takes Shape in Maryland”](#)
 - [Sludge applications](#) - even in small amounts - are strongly linked to PFAS and “forever chemicals” are causing “human health risks exceeding the EPA’s agency’s acceptable thresholds for cancer and non-cancer effects.” While its research found the risks vary based on many factors including the climate and geology of a farm, farm practices, and how often sludge is spread, the agency found safety risks after even a single application of the contaminated material in some scenarios.
 - [USDA hosts a free webinar on Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\), pastures + livestock for conservation](#)
 - [Ohio row-crop farmer makes organic work on 2500 acres](#)
- Opportunities
 - [Climate Smart Farming + Marketing Program](#) through Pasa - lots of financial opportunities here (probably)
 - American Farmland Trust’s [Climate Smart Beef](#) is an opportunity for beef farmers
 - [Advanced Soil Health Training](#) opportunities
 - Grant: [Healthy Soils Competitive Fund](#), due March 7
 - [Conservation Buffer Initiative](#): get \$1000/acre signing bonus for tree plantings! Due Mar 31, 2025
 - [Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference](#); February 20-22, 2025, La Crosse, Wisconsin
 - [Dairy Farm Improvement + Modernization Grant](#) - Open now until Feb 20
- Challenges
 - [Uncertainty with grant + loan funding](#)
 - Uncertainty for Direct to Consumer operations on whether or not their customers will be able to afford local + organic with MD having such high percentage of federal workers + contractors
- Organic Farmer Feedback

- Cleo Braver from Cottingham Farm (Eastern Shore):
 - (1) lack of USDA animal processing for meat (in my case pork)
 - (2) nutrient management AIR framework's lack of acknowledgement of organic vs synthetic inputs (or of implementation of buffers, animal rotation, etc)
 - (3) failure to comply with pesticide disclosure law established years ago
 - (4) disparity in assistance provided re animal waste (manure transport and manure storage sheds for CAFO ops but no transport of organic compost)
 - (5) still haven't adequately supported the establishment in many Maryland counties of food hubs to aggregate and distribute sustainably produced foods of small diverse farms. (Congrats Moon Valley for your success!)
 - (6) when those food hubs are established they must from the inception be able to accommodate organic producers as an organic handler
 - (7) would be helpful if under the cover drop program organic seed is reimbursed at a higher rate that reflects higher organic prices.
 - (8) would be helpful for MDA to play a role in advancing organic ag in the state (they could share with producers info on organic alternatives (eg, when chlorpyrifos was banned in state, it did not inform producers or distribute data re alternatives for growing crops without; re potential PFAS ban, scientists just released a great resource of 500 alts)
 - (9) would be helpful for MDA to be more forthcoming about impact of pesticides on our farmland (eg MDA representing that new biosolids applications would be screened for PFAS when I understand that as much as 90% are NOT screened bcs it is not a first time app on land by a first time by a first time applicator. We need to advance our state of knowledge about uncomfortable things and make conscious choices about where we want to go.)
 - (10) there should be guidance from MDA to county planning and zoning boards about the types of improvements that should be recognized as allowable ancillary structures on our farms beyond grain silos (veggie processing areas, root storage cellar, walk-in with concrete pad, concrete footers under movable greenhouses, high tunnels without electric, high tunnels with electric, worker/guest bathrooms, intern/worker housing, on-farm market, etc).
- Nick Maravell from Nick's Organic Farm (Central MD)
 - I have an issue regarding the proposed Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act legislation now being considered by the legislature in Annapolis. This bill, [SB428](#), was introduced at the request of the Administration and has the support of the MD Farm Bureau. In general it is a fine bill that, among other things, provides incentives for MD farmers to engage in more environmental friendly soil conservation practices. We should support those incentives.
 - **The specific point of contention I have with the bill is the use of the word "regenerative" agriculture.** The bill gives the term a vague definition along with soil health. Unfortunately, the legislative definition does not contain any specific standards or materials or a requirement to

formulate specific standards such as we have in USDA certified organic (NOP) or the Real Organic Project (ROP). This bill is probably going to be voted on in the next few weeks.

- This bill would permit under the definition of regenerative agriculture: 1) **unlimited use of GMOs and their attendant synthetic pesticides and herbicides and runoff, and 2) the use of synthetic fertilizers with the problems of water pollution.** All of these synthetics threaten our soils and water and would eventually end up washing into the Chesapeake Bay.
- The problem is the large agricultural interests relying on GMOs and petrochemicals for managing their crops will take over the term “regenerative” to appeal to our customers, who probably envision regenerative meaning something similar to NOP or ROP organic. We do not want to weaken the current consumer support for organic farmers if consumers were to think “regenerative” is really the same thing as organic.
- We saw this phenomenon with the terms IPM (Integrated Pest Management) and Sustainable Agriculture. (Remember Monsanto’s advertising that they were a sustainable agriculture company?) Agribusiness’s adoption of the IPM and sustainable agriculture terminology did not result in less synthetic pesticides or fertilizer or improved soil or water quality. To be effective regenerative agriculture needs a set of acceptable standards and materials—not an advertising blitz.
- By the way, my simplistic suggestion is to make a two-word change: rename of the definition from “regenerative” agriculture to “Chesapeake Legacy” agriculture. After all, the title of the bill is the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act.
- David Paulk, Sassafras Creek Farm (Southern MD)
 - NRCS. Still recovering from two years of drought. NRCS irrigation management practice on hold indefinitely due to staff terminations and EQIP funding freeze
 - Water. Farm ponds remain a priority to reduce the need of using aquifer water - more limited every season.
 - Labor. H-2A costs are increasing to the point that farms are beginning to stop production of labor intensive crops in favor of lower production ones. Resulting in fewer choices for buyers. H-2A program needs reform to reflect accurate hourly rates and establish multi year visa programs with viable pathways to US citizenship.
 - Buyers. Lots of concerns among direct market farms what impact will DOGE have on customers income to support local MD farms.
 - How will the governor's budget shortfall impact MDA and MD farmers? MDA needs to communicate the details ASAP.

Poultry I- Zach Evans:

- Expressed thanks to MDA – no region has handled the HPAI outbreaks better than the Delmarva region. All cases on the peninsula were identified through epidemiology reports as transferred by migratory birds. This highlights that the biosecurity efforts embodied by

the industry, MDA, and farmers have been successful at preventing the transfer of HPAI within MD.

- Control zones on the Delmarva average 32 days which is one of the fastest responses in the country.
- Egg prices, poultry meat, and the impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza:
 - When a broiler flock is lost due to HPAI, it takes appx. 60 days to get a new flock in. When a layer flock is lost due to HPAI, it takes nearly 1 year for replenishment of the flock to get to peak production.
 - The majority of domestic eggs are for domestic consumption, whereas appx. 30% of the U.S. broiler industry product is shipped internationally.
 - This year, 8.79% of the U.S. commercial layer flock was lost due to HPAI (in 2024, almost 11% was lost). In contrast, only 0.03% of U.S. domestic layer flock has been lost
 - Infertile broiler eggs from the hatchery used to be sent to the egg-breaker market (table egg market represents whole-egg purchased by the consumer, egg-breaker market represents liquefied eggs used in commercial baking etc.)
 - The broiler industry still is producing broken eggs – but they are not being incorporated at scale to support the lowered domestic egg supply. Table eggs are being diverted from the marketplace and sent to support the breaker market and are not taking advantage of the supply potential of the broiler industry.

Poultry II- Vacant:

State Grange- Richard Stonebreaker:

- No report.

Tobacco – Vacant:

Turf- Gordon Kretser:

- No report.

University of Maryland – Dean Craig Beyrouty | Dr. Darren Jarboe:

- The University of Maryland Extension strategic planning process has entered the next phase, which is data analysis and interpretation. The Strategic Planning Committee met March 6th to review the draft materials. A final report is expected in the April to May timeframe.
- AgFS Extension programming was offered for biosecurity in poultry production. Many years of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) prevention work through collaborations with institutions of higher education, Delmarva Chicken Association, the Delaware and Maryland Departments of Agriculture, USDA, and other partners prepare growers to protect their flocks.
- There was an error distributing 1099-G forms for cover crop payments to farmers. UME raised awareness of the issue and offered resources to the more than 6,000 farmers affected.
- For FY 2025, the Agricultural Nutrient Management Program has received requests for 752 plans that have complete information and 668 plans are completed.
- Jenny Rhodes, AgFS Extension Educator in Queen Anne's County, was elected to a three-

year term on the AgFirst Farm Credit Bank board of directors. The bank serves 15 states and Puerto Rico.

- The AgFS Program initiated the newsletter AgFS Connection. The first issue is available at <https://go.umd.edu/agfs-connection>. To subscribe, visit <https://go.umd.edu/subscribe-agfsconnection>.
- The update for AgFS Program positions is below:
 - *AgFS Extension*
 - AgFS IPM specialist, ornamental horticulture has posted on the UMD jobs website. The job announcement is at <https://umd.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/UMCP/details/Agent--Extension-Specialist---Entomology-in-Ornamental-Horticulture-IPM-JR100929>. The best consideration date is March 17.
 - AgFS local foods and entrepreneurship specialist position applicants are being reviewed.
 - AgFS county educator, Prince George's County: The position is being evaluated
 - *Agricultural Nutrient Management Program*
 - Administrative assistant: Mahdia Haque has been hired. She started February 24
 - Program director and faculty specialist: The position description will be revised and reposted in early spring
 - Nutrient management advisor positions in Allegany, Charles, Washington, and Wicomico/Worcester Counties has posted to the UMD jobs website at https://umd.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/UMCP/details/Coordinator--Nutrient-Management-Advisor_JR100744?q=nutrient%20management. The best consideration date is February 28.
 - The UME Assistant Director of Operations position is open to internal candidates.
- Publications
 - Dill, Shannon, Serena Taylor Newton, Andrew Kness, Erika Crowl, Sarah Hirsh, and Jennifer Rhodes. 2024. University of Maryland Extension Winter Meeting Data 2023." FS-2024-0731. <https://go.umd.edu/FS-2024-0731>
 - Goeringer, Paul, Sima Majnooni, and Holly Russo. 2024. Guidelines for Delaware and Maryland Agricultural Operations on Writing an Employee Manual." EB-2024-0725. <https://go.umd.edu/EB-2024-0725>
- Award
 - Paul Goeringer was awarded the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center 2025 ERME Outstanding Project Award for "So You Want to Own Rural Land: Maryland Ag Land Legal Project."
- Grant
 - Little, N.G., Henley, S., Kettermann, J., Nichols, K., Sorenson, C., Wei, X., Dill, S.P. 2024. Farm Business Coaching: Cultivating Entrepreneurship. Extension Foundation Agriprospects Workforce Development Mini-Grant Program. \$98,898.

Vegetable – Russell Shlagel:

- Industry is concerned with the changing of the Maryland's Best logo.
- More bad things are coming than good:

- SMADC is facing cuts
- MALPF is facing cuts
- Cover crop funding is facing cuts
- Wholesale buyers are being lost
- Cattle prices are still high!
- [WTOP Interview](#) highlighted the True-Blue program and drew interesting parallels to agriculture.
- Agriculture and seafood are extremely consumer driven, the more that consumers and customers ask for LOCAL products, the more pressure it puts on retailers to source locally and support Maryland agriculture.

Veterinary – Dr. Marianne B. O’Malley:

- Veterinarians are monitoring HPAI and its effect on cattle and pets. A cat was recently euthanized because of an infection. Has the state released guidance for testing non avian species? – **Dr. Trout, State Veterinarian, is working with MDVMA & SBVME to put out messaging for backyard flock owners and can discuss impacts for veterinarians. Dr. Bailey mentioned that SBVME correspondence is often more widely received and recognized across the industry.**
- The veterinary industry is down so far for 2025 across the state and nation. Expenses are up however so this will cause issues when employers do reviews and raises are discussed.
- A lot of people that still don't know about HPAI/ don't understand how it can affect their pets/ know what to do if they find a dead bird or what to do if they think a cat is infected.
- **Paula Linthicum raised concerns with “rent-a-chicken” services – registration for backyard flocks is required by law but these specific services may be engaging with consumers who are unaware of the biosecurity and registration requirements. Zach Evans reported that poultry industry veterinarians have identified that mammal-to-mammal transfer of HPAI (i.e., infected lactating dairy cattle to humans/pets) is more common, whereas avian-to-mammal is not seen.**

Viticulture – Rachel Lipman:

- No report.

Young Farmers Advisory Board – Jenell Eck McHenry, Chair:

- The Maryland Young Farmer Survey closed with 534 responses
- The Board will review the responses and analyze the data throughout the spring, then host a preview session for stakeholders and sponsors in the summer.

Maryland Department of Agriculture Staff Updates:

Secretary Kevin Atticks:

- HPAI Collaboration
 - Kudos to the collaboration between the Delmarva State Departments of Agriculture, poultry farmers, industry, and USDA that efficiently handled the outbreaks that we saw throughout the winter.
 - Maryland is in a better place than the rest of the country due to the diligence of the region and the concentrated teamwork.
- Marketing Maryland crabmeat
 - There is resistance in restaurants to use the True Blue logo on items such as crabcakes that identifies Maryland crabmeat being used, because it then highlights the other menu items such as crab soup that may not be made from Maryland crabs.
 - Most crabmeat sold in Maryland is not Maryland crabmeat but is being marketed at Maryland crabmeat prices.
 - It is a shame because that is the Maryland economy, Maryland jobs, and Maryland pride that is not being invested back into in the retail space.
- Federal Cuts
 - We are waiting to see what will be funded throughout this administration, right now there is not clarity for direction because many of the cuts that are being made do not align with the administration's vision.
- Export Markets
 - MDA is focused on supporting farmers who sell into local, state, regional, national, and international markets.
 - Recently met with the Governor, Secretary of State, and the Vice President of Vietnam.
 - Vietnam's priorities sit in higher education and importing American products.
 - There is a global imbalance in trade and export from the U.S., both in products as well as information and expertise that farmers in Maryland can leverage.
- Regenerative Agriculture
 - Secretary Atticks proposed that the Maryland Ag Commission consider posing a definition for regenerative agriculture to address the concerns brought forward from Commission members surrounding the language included in the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act.
 - **Zach Evans moved that the Maryland Agricultural Commission explore a statewide definition of Regenerative Agriculture in Maryland, second by Nikita Bocharov, all were in favor.**

Rachel Jones, Director of Government Relations:

- Expressed thanks to Kelly Lewis for testifying for the Maryland Ag Commission bill.
- Expressed thanks to Emma Jagoz and Jenell Eck McHenry for testifying for the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act.

- Some of the Departmental bills have passed, but 3 are stuck in committee.
- Monday, 3/17 is Crossover day, which guarantees that any bill that has passed in its original chamber will have a hearing in the opposite chamber for consideration.

Cassie Shirk, Assistant Secretary of Marketing, Animal Industries and Consumer Services:

- **Marketing**

- We received word last week that the USDA is terminating the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program, LFPA 25 (which is the third round of funding). However, LFPA 1 and LFPA Plus will continue. We have notified our partners at the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Bank.
- The Maryland's Best program is seeking Maryland dairy farms with on-farm creameries producing ice cream to join the 2025 Maryland's Best Ice Cream Trail.
- We announced the first ever winner of the Maryland's Best Chef Partner of the Year award. Jason Daniloski of Silver Queen Cafe in Baltimore was named recipient of this honor, which recognizes an individual chef's dedication to using local Maryland products, from seafood to produce to dairy and beyond.
- We are accepting proposals for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, a reimbursement grant program aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Maryland's specialty crops. The department anticipates that approximately \$400,000 in funding will be available, subject to availability.
- The program is seeking applications from eligible non-profit organizations, government entities, for-profit companies, and other organizations for projects that aim to promote or enhance the production of and access to Maryland specialty crops.

- **Animal Health**

- We have extensive information on our MDA website - *High Path Avian Influenza: What You Need to Know* - for both poultry and dairy cattle. Additionally, we have been communicating and pushing out general HPAI and biosecurity information on our social media channels as well as to our backyard flocks groups.
- Poultry
 - HPAI has been detected on 9 commercial premises in the Delmarva region since 1/3/25. All control zones around these premises have been closed and business has returned to normal.
 - The index premises are in the Cleaning and Disinfection process
 - Salisbury lab tested over 2500 Poultry samples from the control zones to ensure containment and keep movement occurring
- USDA Updates
 - Two weeks ago, Secretary Rollins announced a \$1 billion HPAI comprehensive strategy that includes an additional \$500 million for biosecurity measures, \$400 million in financial relief for affected farmers and \$100 million for vaccine research, action to reduce regulatory burdens and exploring temporary import options.
 - We are keeping a close eye on these announcements and are happy to keep the commission posted as we learn more.

- Dairy

- HPAI has been detected and confirmed in dairy cattle in the following states in the last 30 days: Arizona, California, Idaho and Nevada.
- There have been 980 cases of HPAI in dairy cattle in 18 states since April 2024.
- On December 31, 2024 Secretary Kevin Atticks and Maryland Department of Health Secretary signed a joint order governing mandatory testing of milk from Maryland dairy farms.
- The agencies are implementing mandatory milk testing, at the farm bulk tank level, to determine if Influenza A/HPAI is circulating in lactating dairy cattle throughout Maryland.
- Given the virus' ability to be transmitted between dairy cattle and poultry, Maryland is being proactive to safeguard both industries from potentially devastating losses by providing no-cost testing.
- Since June 2024, Salisbury lab has tested over 570 Bovine samples. All Negative for HPAI. This includes over 225 bulk milk samples from dairy processors and in conjunction with MDH.

Hans Schmidt, Assistance Secretary of Resource Conservation:

- New Food Processing Residual (FPR) regulations and permits have been put into effect, permits have been issued for transportation, storage, and land application.
- Cover Crop – 2024 was a banner year with over 500,000 acres planted in cover crops at a value of over \$35M. We are unsure of what next years budget will be for cover crop, but all of the 2024-2025 contracts will be honored.
- Whole Watershed Act (2024) – 2 of the 5 watersheds identified in the program have agricultural components. MDA will be supporting those watersheds and engaging with farmers to enhance conservation on their farms.
- NRCS has been impacted by federal cuts – MDA and NRCS have a very strong partnership and staff will be working together to ensure that farmers needs are met when they walk through the door of their local Soil Conservation District.
- Released a new Facebook page and Cost Share program for equine operations for pasture and manure management.

Michael Calkins, Assistant Secretary of Plant Industries and Pest Management:

- Vigilantly addressing spotted lanternfly. SLF team is tracking movement and emergence, encourage everyone to report any sightings of egg masses and living insects.

Jessica Hackett, Director of Communications:

- Requested input for recommendations about MDA communications and messaging, and asked the Commission to help identify misinformation if it is seen on social media.

Guest Reports:

- None.

Old Business:

- None.

New Business:

- Business 2 Business Bill
 - Harrison will work on a letter of concern to send to the respective committees today, and will engage with the Legislative Affairs Committee and other interested Commission members when that draft is ready.
- Regenerative Agriculture definition
 - Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee will work on an outreach plan during the April Committee meetings.

Administrative Updates, Executive Secretary:

- Senator Alsobrooks Agriculture Community Informational Session:
 - This is a listen & learn opportunity for the Senator to understand broad agricultural needs that is an invite-only event.
- Next meeting dates:
 - April 9th – Committee Meetings – continuing work on the FSRC recommendations, chairs should be bringing business to the table and actionable recommendations for discussion.
 - May 14th – Full Commission Tour of Howard & Montgomery Counties – details to come
 - June 11th – Commission Meeting – MDA HQ in Annapolis
 - July – BREAK
- Appointments
 - HB262/SB240 both have crossed over into the opposite chambers and will likely be passed.
 - All reappointments will have to be considered by the Governor's Appointments Office and must go through the full application process.
 - The appointments database is continuing to accept applications for appointments and reappointments and can be found here (<https://govappointments.maryland.gov/>)

Meeting Adjourned at 12:38 pm by Zach Evans, second by Nikita Bocharov.

Respectfully Submitted by Harrison B. Palmer, Executive Secretary