

Secretaries of the Maryland Department of Agriculture



The department's first Agriculture Secretary, [Y.D. Hance](#) was appointed by then-Governor Marvin Mandel. Mr. Hance was an established tobacco farmer from Southern Maryland.

In 1979, [Wayne A. Cawley, Jr.](#) became the department's second Secretary. Overseeing the final design and construction of MDA's new headquarters, the building was completed in 1982 and symbolized the critical importance of agriculture to every facet of Maryland life.



During Secretary Cawley's 12 years of service, he expanded agriculture's domestic and international marketing efforts, established the Maryland with Pride campaign, oversaw the research and development of the aquaculture industry and implemented nutrient management programs to restore the Chesapeake Bay.

When Secretary Cawley retired in 1991, Governor William Donald Schaefer named MDA's Annapolis complex: the Wayne A. Cawley, Jr. Headquarters Building.





In 1991, [Robert L. Walker](#) became the Department's third Secretary after having served as Deputy Secretary. During his tenure, he forged ties with the emerging countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. He continued the focus on keeping agriculture strong in Maryland.

"We focused on promoting, preserving and protecting agriculture and trying to do that to the extent we can to look at the profitability of the family farm. Marketing and promoting agriculture, which is what I thought is one of the most important things. So I think marketing is very important. Exports are important - one in three acres as you know go abroad from the farm. It's critical to our health as an agricultural economy and also the state, nation. So much of what happens with respect to the profitability of the farm, is beyond the farmers control. It's beyond the farm gate." ~ *Robert L. Walker, Secretary*

[Lewis Riley](#), a poultry farmer on the lower Eastern Shore, was both the fourth and seventh Secretary, serving from 1994 to 1997 and again from 2003 to 2007.

"The secretaries have always been interested in promoting the industry. Because really that's their job. They are there to represent Maryland's number 1 industry. Environmental issues have become probably the most serious thing the farmers have to deal with. The farm community understands why, but



sometimes it takes a lot of cooperation - helping to help them get in the position to abide by the rules and the regulations. So I think the Secretaries have had a very difficult job. It's a tough job to help the farmers accomplish what they have to accomplish." ~ *Lewis Riley, Secretary*



Henry A. "Bud" Virts, a veterinarian, became the Department's fifth Secretary in 1998. Dr. Virts worked at MDA for 14 years, first as an assistant state veterinarian and later deputy secretary. Dr. Virts stepped up MDA's international marketing efforts with initiatives to promote the state's horse industry in Korea and Europe and established ties with the Caribbean and South America.

"What my staff accomplished made me very proud. We came up with the tobacco buyout and we started planning on that. They developed this and sold it to the farm community – the tobacco farmers. The administration and the secretary of agriculture - the governor and secretary - have a great relationship and I'm so happy to see that. They will support agriculture. I think the cooperation is much, much better with administration and that makes you feel very good." ~ *Bud Virts, Secretary*



[Hagner R. Mister](#), the Department's sixth Secretary, served from 2001-2003. During his time, Secretary Mister – who is a farmer himself – helped Southern Maryland farmers transition from growing tobacco to other crops under the state's Tobacco Buyout program.



“We had the tobacco buyout program. And I am a tobacco farmer – was a tobacco farmer – not anymore. And I was amazed at how fast the tobacco left Southern Maryland. The farmers' markets and the MALPF program - that's still there. Looks like the department is doing well and I'm proud of them.” ~ *Hagner R. Mister, Secretary*



[Roger L. Richardson](#) served as Secretary from 2007 until early 2009. He oversaw the implementation of Maryland's Farm to School Program, now considered a national model and the first in the nation to have all public schools systems participating.

“I guess one of the best things that we did – the Governor had told me that where he came from there were no farms. And he wanted someone with farm experience to help him establish rapport with the ag industry. We accomplished that. He was very thankful. He's been to all the ag dinners. And that's been very good. Ag is the largest industry in the state and also the biggest economic engine in the state and that needs to be remembered when you are up here representing agriculture you need to know that.” ~ *Roger L. Richardson, Secretary*

Earl “Buddy” Hance, a 4th generation southern Maryland farmer, served as the eighth Secretary of MDA from 2009 to 2014, after serving two years as Deputy Secretary.



“The two things I am most proud of are our farmers implementing best management practices to meet our goals of cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay and our farmers who have opened up their farms to increase profitability and educate the public about Maryland agriculture. And I must acknowledge the staff, which just seems more like a family, for their dedication and commitment to the entire agricultural community of Maryland.” ~ *Buddy Hance, Secretary*



Joseph “Joe” Bartenfelder, was the Department’s 9th Secretary, with a term from 2014 to January 2023. Mr. Bartenfelder is a farmer and also served as a member of each of the following: the Baltimore County Council, the Baltimore County Spending Affordability Committee, and the House of Delegates.

“I am honored to head this agency which supports Maryland farmers and watermen. Maryland farmers continue to participate in land preservation and using conservation practices on the farm, thereby protecting the Chesapeake Bay. I am proud of the MDA staff that promotes agriculture through its various programs, including marketing of Maryland food products including seafood and managing the Highly Pathogenic Avian Flu outbreak, and the Spotted Lanternfly invasion.

Through the efforts of Maryland farmers, watermen, and MDA staff, Maryland has become a leader in restoring the health of the Chesapeake Bay and a national model for sustainable agriculture.” ~ *Joe Bartenfelder, Secretary*

In January of 2023, [Secretary Kevin Atticks](#), the Department's tenth Secretary, began his appointed term. Atticks was CEO (and founder) of Grow & Fortify, a non-profit that supports value-added agricultural organizations and businesses. Atticks was also the Executive Director of the Maryland Wineries Association, Brewers Association of Maryland and the Maryland Distillers Guild, and served as the President of the Maryland Agricultural Resource Council.

