

# **Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission**

June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Version 1.5

Developed to enhance and empower the advisory body to the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture and advance the industry through intentional, meaningful, and actionable recommendations, representative of the needs of agricultural stakeholders.

*Adopted June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

## **Executive Summary:**

The Maryland Agricultural Commission (the Commission) is charged with the duty of advising the Secretary of Agriculture, proposing agricultural improvements, promoting State agricultural industries and products, and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. The Commission was first formed as the Agricultural Advisory Board in 1961, making proposals to the (then) State Board of Agriculture. It was later pivotal in the establishment of the Maryland Department of Agriculture in 1972.

Over the past 63 years the Commission has kept its finger on the pulse of agriculture in Maryland and carried out its charge through the establishment of standing committees focused on key issues of the time including budgets, legislation, pollution, livestock, wetlands, weights and measures, and indemnity. These committees empowered the Commission to leverage the expertise of its appointed members and make policy recommendations regulating pesticides, poultry and livestock inspection, farmland assessment, and dozens of other State and Federal legislative proposals that ensured the farmer voice was prioritized.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined herein provides a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. This diverse and comprehensive board of industry leaders throughout Maryland's vibrant agricultural sectors is well equipped to serve and will continue with clear direction to advance our industry within the State.

## **Outline:**

- I. Restructuring of the Commission
- II. Establishment of priorities.
- III. Establishment of committees.
- IV. Establishing structure.

**I. Restructuring of the Commission**

- Commission Membership

- The Maryland Agricultural Commission currently seats 31 members representative of the major industries throughout the State of Maryland. These seats include:

Ag Education	Direct Farm Market	Livestock	State Grange (MD)
Agribusiness	Farm Bureau (MD)	Nursery I	Tobacco
Agritourism	Field Crops	Nursery II	Turf
Aquaculture	Food Processing	Organic Farming	UMD AGNR (Ex Officio)
Biofuel	Forestry	Poultry I	Vegetable
Consumer	Hemp	Poultry II	Veterinary
Dairy I	Horse Breeding	Related Ag Services I	Viticulture
Dairy II	Horticulture	Related Ag Services II	

- The following restructure has been proposed\* by the Commission:

*\*Requires MDA departmental bill in the 2025 legislative session for official appointment.*

1. Ag Education	9. Direct Farm Market	18. Livestock	24. Turf
2. Agribusiness	10. <b>Equine Horse Breeding</b>	19. <b>Nursery I-Nursery, Landscape, &amp; Greenhouse</b>	25. UMD AGNR (Ex Officio)
3. <b>Value Added Agriculture &amp; Agritourism</b>	11. Farm Bureau (MD)	<del>Nursery II</del>	26. <b>Urban &amp; Small Farm Tobacco</b>
4. Aquaculture	12. Field Crops	20. Organic Farming	27. Vegetable
5. Biofuel	13. Food Processing	21. Poultry	<b>28. Veteran Farmer</b>
6. Consumer	14. Forestry	<del>Poultry II</del>	29. Veterinary
7. <b>Controlled Environmental Ag</b>	15. Hemp	22. Related Ag Services	30. Viticulture
8. Dairy	16. <b>Hist. Underserved Farmer</b>	<del>Related Ag Services II</del>	31. <b>Young Farmers Advisory Board (Ex Officio)</b>
<del>Dairy II</del>	17. <b>Horticulture Fruit</b>	23. State Grange	32. <b>New &amp; Beginning Farmer</b>

## Meeting Schedule

- In [statute](#), “The Commission shall meet every month, unless by majority vote it decides otherwise. The Commission also shall meet when called by the Secretary.”
  - Currently the Commission meets January, February, March, April, June, September, November, and December (8 meetings annually) and conducts tours in May and October (2 tours annually) for a total of 10 annual meetings.
    - The proposed schedule is as follows:
      - January - Full Commission Meeting
      - February - Independent Committee Meetings
      - March - Full Commission Meeting
      - April - Independent Committee Meetings
      - May - **Tour**, Full Commission
      - June - Full Commission Meeting (election of officers)
      - July & August - Independent Committee Meetings
      - September - Full Commission Meeting
      - October - **Tour**, Full Commission
      - November - Independent Committee Meetings
      - December - Full Commission Meeting
- Full commission meetings will be held on the 2nd Wednesday of that month at 10:00 am at MDA Headquarters in Annapolis, offered in a hybrid format. They will include a presentation, pertinent industry updates, committee updates, and general discussion to advance the Commission’s priorities. There will be 5 (minimum) total full commission meetings.
- The 2 scheduled tours will include the full commission, foster meaningful discussion about regional agriculture, and follow the 5-year schedule.
- Independent Committee Meetings will be held in the months listed above at a date/time that is conducive to those committee members. There will be 4 (minimum) independent committee meetings per year.
- *Proposed meeting schedule in effect starting July 1, 2024.*

## II. Establishment of Priorities

- The Commission will adopt a list of priorities annually. This shall serve as a guiding document for the establishment of committees, correspondence on behalf of the Commission, and actionable items.
- 2024 Priorities in order of importance (highest first) as collected by survey in March, 2024:
  - Farm Profitability
    - Conservation of resources, growing more with less
    - Economic Development Incentives
    - Corporate scale competing with local business (agribusiness, hemp, veterinary)
    - Technical assistance for profitability
  - Anti-agricultural Policy
    - Lack of agricultural literacy in government
    - Absence of advocates and non-unified voice for agriculture
    - Absence of organized promotion at the state level
  - Regulatory Restrictions
  - Promotion and Support of Value-Added Agriculture
    - Economic Development Incentives for Value Added Agriculture
  - Loss of Farmland
    - Pressures from solar and development
    - Environmental loss due to climate change and saltwater intrusion
  - Public Perception of Agriculture
    - Opportunity and funding for agricultural education
    - Perception of agriculture, trust in farmers
  - Bay Health & the Environment
    - Conservation of Resources
    - Interstate cooperation
    - Public education on agriculture's impact on Bay health
    - Climate Smart Agricultural Practices

### III. Establishment of Committees

- Based on the adopted priorities listed in Section II, the Commission will establish working committees that have the charge of making recommendations to the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture, the Governor of Maryland, the Maryland State Legislature, and other agricultural stakeholder groups.
- The independent committee meetings will be centered around evaluating and/or conducting surveys and/or case studies, and using relevant information to pose recommendations, actions, correspondence or other means of developing solutions to the adopted priorities.
  - Committees may bring in subject matter experts and other relevant stakeholders to participate in their meetings pending the approval of the committee chair.
  - At the full Commission meetings, each committee will have the opportunity to pose their recommendations for adoption by the Commission. Only Commission members have the ability to vote.
- 2024 Committees to address the Commission’s Priorities are:
  - **Farm Profitability and Sustainability Committee:** Focus on enhancing farm profitability, preserving farms and farmers, and providing assistance to producers through conservation efforts, economic development incentives, and technical assistance.
  - **Agricultural Policy and Advocacy Committee:** Analyze and advocate for policies affecting agriculture, address the lack of agricultural literacy in government, and promote organized agricultural promotion at the state level.
  - **Regulatory Reform and Oversight Committee:** Identify and address regulatory restrictions hindering agricultural growth, aiming to streamline regulations while maintaining necessary safeguards for environmental and public health.
  - **Value-Added Agriculture Committee:** Promote value-added agriculture initiatives through economic incentives, training opportunities, market development initiatives, infrastructure investments, research and innovation support, policy advocacy efforts, and fostering collaboration and networking among stakeholders.

- **Committee on Watershed Strategies:** Mitigate the loss of farmland due to urban development, environmental challenges, and ensure the long-term viability of agricultural land through policy exploration and protection efforts.
- **Agricultural Literacy and Education:** Improve public perception of agriculture, secure funding for educational programs, and promote the importance of farming in sustaining local communities and economies.

#### IV. Structure

- Executive Committee
  - There will be an Executive Committee that will meet as needed, consisting of:
    - Chair, Maryland Agricultural Commission
    - Vice-Chair, Maryland Agricultural Commission
    - Executive Secretary, Maryland Agricultural Commission
    - Chair, Farm Profitability and Sustainability Committee
    - Chair, Agricultural Policy and Advocacy Committee
    - Chair, Regulatory Reform and Oversight Committee
    - Chair, Value Added Agriculture Committee
    - Chair, Committee on Watershed Strategies
    - Chair, Agricultural Literacy and Education Committee
- Proposing action:
  - Any individual can propose action, whether it be a letter to the Secretary, testimony on behalf of the Commission for legislation, involvement in county issues, etc.
    - It must first be proposed to their Committee, who will discuss internally what the language and message of the proposed action should be. They will vote internally and it will then be proposed to the Commission by the Committee Chair.
    - Once it is proposed to the full Commission, there will be time to discuss and then vote on whether to proceed with the proposed action.
    - With a majority vote, the Chair of the Commission will work with the Executive Secretary to draft final language and carry out the action.