



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

DRAFT Minutes

December 10th, 2025

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

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83578378249?pwd=IYwslt3x57cy6bltL3JUclSOMs2tsu.1>

Meeting ID: 835 7837 8249 Passcode: 018187

Present:

Dr. Melissa Welsh
Johnny Shockley
Raj Kathuria
Kellie Hinkle
Amy Crone, Chair
Ann Merryman
Paula Linthicum
Wade Butler
Stefanie Reiser

Eleanor Leak
Emma Jagoz
Zach Evans
Keith Parker
Gordon Kretser
Dr. Darren Jarboe
Janna Howley
Russell Shlagel
Peter Scott

Absent:

Jenell Eck McHenry
Jenni Mallott
Chris Rhodes
Nikita Bocharov
Hunter Pusey

Kelly Lewis, Vice Chair
Richard Stonebraker
Dr. Marianne Bailey
Rachel Lipman

MDA Staff:

Sec. Kevin Atticks
Rachel Jones
Jessica Hackett
Hans Schmidt
Martin Proulx

Heather Barthel
Lauren Moses
Elizabeth Hoffman

Steve McHenry
Allison Roe

Guests:

Stacy Kubofcik
Dave Nemazie
Dean Wendy Powers
Dean Moses Kairo
Grayson Middleton
Anne Litz
Shelby Watson-Hampton

Call to Order:

The December 2025 Maryland Agricultural Commission meeting was called to order by Amy Crone, Chair, at 10:08 am.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the September, 2025 meeting minutes was made by Paula Linthicum, second by Stefanie Reiser.

Presentations:

MARBIDCO Annual Report, BEACON Report
Stacy Kubofcik

MDA Statewide Guidance Document
Martin Proulx

Maryland Ag Commission Press Video Discussion
Lauren Moses

Committee Reports:

Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee – Emma Jagoz, Chair:

- Committee discussed the proposed definition of agriculture.
- Shared challenges from the SNAP disruption and the federal government shutdown, and more broadly how it impacts consumer decisions and business operations.
- Committee discussed opportunities from SMADC and other organizations who have stepped up in the face of challenges.
- Upcoming H2A programmatic changes will have impacts on the industry, shifting operations to make the decision individually on farm labor wages.
- The Committee discussed opportunities to engage with broad regional marketing organizations that have holiday gift guides or special press around buying local.

Legislative Affairs Committee – Paula Linthicum, Chair:

- The committee held a briefing from partners in agricultural government relations, including the Delmarva Chicken Association, Providence Strategies, and MDA Government Relations Director Rachel Jones.

Value Added Agriculture Committee – Amy Crone, Chair:

- The committee discussed the proposed definition of agriculture and provided feedback relating to impacts on Value Added Agriculture.
- The committee discussed the USDA reorganization plan and the imminent local impacts to BARC and the scientists supporting agricultural research.

- The committee discussed opportunities to support the Maryland's Best brand, and explored opportunities for a Check-Off style program to support statewide marketing with greater input from those farmers.
- The committee also discussed the ongoing challenges with SDAT's targeted reassessment of value added agricultural properties.

Committee on Watershed Strategies – Gordon Kretser, Chair:

- The committee was briefed by Elizabeth Hoffman on the ongoing developments in the Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) program.

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

- The committee discussed the proposed definition of agriculture.
- The committee discussed opportunities to restructure broad structure of the agricultural education framework in Maryland, and expressed interest in a statewide strategic plan for the advancement of agricultural education, leveraging interested partners to best utilize their strengths and opportunities to support the core mission.

Commodity Reports:

Agricultural Education – Dr. Melissa Welsh

- FFA is holding four of the Regional Leadership Conferences this week.
- We have 664 students registered from 32 Chapters.
- Frederick County will hold their workshop in March.
- MAEF/FFA holding their first Discovery Conference for Middle school Ag Ed students on Tuesday Dec.2 at the Carroll Co Ag Center. We have 115 students registered from the 3 Middle School Ag programs in MD. The State FFA Officers will be facilitating three leadership workshops.
- I'm working on getting our Ag Ed courses listed with Gen Ed status to hopefully pull some new students into the program or introduce Agriculture to others.
 - AGST 440 Exploring Maryland Agriculture, Ag Industry and Ag Literacy
 - AGST 442 Examining Leadership in Youth and Volunteers
 - AGST 435 Teacher Training for Agriculture and Environmental Literacy
- **MAEF**
 - Getting ready for the last Library Lunch & Learn, where Tonya (elementary) and Victoria (middle school) have teamed up to offer interactive webinars for school and public librarians/media specialists. On Dec. 11 at noon, they'll be talking All Things Plants. Their last LL&L was on chickens and eggs, and they invited their guests to "candle" an egg with them using their cellphone flashlights to identify parts of the egg, then cracked the egg open to discuss what's inside. Their evaluations for this series have been wonderful, demonstrating that there is a lot of interest in incorporating agriculture into library programs.
 - Gearing up for the CLNA in springtime (see attached) by working with Farm Bureau to make sure the farm community understands what this is and why it's important.

- o Assisting MSDE with additional Program of Study Guides/Standards for four more agricultural programs: Equine Care, Ag Mechanics and Power, Natural Resources, and Agribusiness (which will include Agritourism studies). After industry review, the ag teachers will have the opportunity to provide feedback, followed by a 30-day public comment period. The standards will then need to be approved by the state board of education.
- o Continuing to work on our newest Showcase!
- o Working on a ribbon cutting for the agricultural storefront at the Junior Achievement Finance Park in Montgomery County's Thomas Edison High School, Jan. 9. Finance Park offers a "model community" and challenges students to manage their finances as they shop their way around the Park. If anyone is interested in attending please let me know. Believe it is 3pm.
- **Maryland FFA**
 - o MD FFA Members participated in the National FFA Convention. (results attached)
 - o MD FFA State Officers have:
 - attended the MD State Board of Education meeting with Secretary Kevin Atticks in November and shared information about Ag Education programs and CTSO opportunities
 - attended the MAEF Annual Banquet and assisted with the program and welcoming attendees.
 - facilitated workshops at four Regional Leadership Conferences held in November reaching over 600 student members.
 - participated in their last National FFA training workshops for state officers
 - facilitated workshops for eight local chapters.
 - will be attending the MD Farm Bureau Next Gen Conference.
 - Hailey Pleasants and Sam Moreland will be traveling to Spain in January with National FFA ILSSO program for state officers.
- **Maryland 4-H Report – September/October 2025**
 - o As the 2025 fair season comes to a close, Maryland 4-H would like to say THANK YOU to all of the volunteers and staff of Maryland's community, county and state fairs for supporting opportunities for 4-H members to share, showcase and be recognized for their skills and project accomplishments!
 - o 4-H Youth Are Beyond Ready: Maryland Joins National Celebration of Leadership, Learning, and Service - from fairgrounds to classrooms, community gardens to robotics labs, 4-H youth across Maryland are proving they're not just ready for the future – they're Beyond Ready. During National 4-H Week, celebrated Oct. 5–11, 2025, local clubs and county programs will share how 4-H equips young people with the skills, confidence, and resilience to lead in a world full of opportunity and change. As America's largest youth development organization, 4-H empowers 6 million young people nationwide with hands-on learning experiences through clubs, camps, school programs, and community

events. Through the Beyond Ready initiative, 4-H will help prepare 10 million youth for work and life by 2030.

- o Congratulations to all participants and award recipients from the 2025 Maryland 4-H Equine Art Contest! Award recipients are spotlighted in a short highlights video located under the Maryland 4-H Visual Arts Contest tab on the Maryland 4-H Horse Program webpage at <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/4-h-youth-development/program-areas/animal-sciences/4-h-horse-program/>.
- o Registration is open for the 2025 Maryland 4-H Volunteer and Teen Forum: 4-H Beyond Ready to Lead the Future which will be held November 14-16, 2025 in Ocean City, MD. The forum will feature exciting activities, workshops, and opportunities for both youth and adults. Participants do not have to be a 4-H member or volunteer to attend. Regular registration closes October 15, 2025. Register at: <https://2025-MD-Forum.4honline.com>.
- o The Maryland 4-H State Council is now accepting 2026 General Membership applications. The Maryland 4-H State Council is the premier teen leadership opportunity in the Maryland 4-H program. It is comprised of active 4-H members from around the state interested in developing high-level leadership skills and representing their local 4-H program. 4-H members who will be ages 13-18 as of January 1, 2026 may apply to serve on the Maryland 4-H State Council in 4-H Online by November 15, 2025.
- o Applications for the 2025 Maryland 4-H State Animal Science Project and Record Awards Program will be accepted in 4-H Online between October 1 and November 16, 2025. Senior age 4-H members may apply. Guidelines for the 2025 Maryland 4-H State Animal Science Project and Record Awards Program, a submission help sheet, and the essay scoresheet can be found on the Maryland 4-H website at <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/4-h-youth-development/program-areas/animal-sciences/>.
- o The 2025 Maryland 4-H Animal Science Faculty/Staff In-Service will be held at the Howard County Fairgrounds on Thursday, December 11, 2025. This annual training event highlights program accomplishments, program updates and changes for the year, as well as addressing current and emerging topics in animal agriculture impacting educational programs and exhibitions.

Maryland FFA
National Convention Results
October 29- November 1, 2025

Career and Leadership Development Events			
EVENT	CHAPTER	TEAM AWARD	INDIVIDUAL AWARDS
Ag. Communications	Frederick	Silver	Lauren Fulmer Autumn Manahan Maden Schimel Alivia Waugaman
Ag. Issues Forum	Linganore	Bronze	Sierra Howell TJ Jacobs Natalie Miller Faith Miss
Ag. Sales	Middletown	Bronze	Daniel Carpenter- Bronze Danielle Eakle- Bronze Ella Fell- Silver Aubrey Michaels- Silver
Agronomy	Walkersville	Bronze	Isabella Fisher- Bronze Natalie Keiser- Bronze Emylee Sheets- Bronze Trajan Urban- Silver
Ag. <u>Tech.</u> & Mech. Systems	Hereford	Silver	Melaina Grothe- Silver Emily Michael- Silver Carsen Powers- Gold Miles Wagner- Silver
Conduct of Chapter Meetings	Catoctin	Bronze	Grady Abruzzese Kourtney Bell Preston Clark Majayla Eckenrode Valeria Lake Sophie Wagaman Delaney Warner
Creed Speaking	Linganore	N/A	Emma Jacobs- Bronze
Dairy Evaluation	Francis Scott Key	Silver	Grace Bertier- Silver Mikayla Derr- Gold Macie Eaves- 8 th Gold Ella Fritz- Bronze
Employment Skills	Howard County	N/A	Jackson Mansolillo- Silver
Environmental/ Natural Resources	Boonsboro	Silver	Hayley Gaither- Bronze Natalie Love- Silver Lilly Rumph- Silver Katlyn Wiles- Silver
Extemporaneous Speaking	Linganore	N/A	Wade Stephens- Bronze
Farm & Ag. Bus. Management	Catoctin	Bronze	Gabriella Brauning- Bronze Brody Mathias- Bronze Carly Nowell- Bronze Ryleigh Ruch- Silver
Floriculture	North Harford	Silver	Bryn Cespedes- Silver Blakely Jackanicz- Bronze Faith Perrone- Bronze Harley Weisman- Silver

Maryland FFA
National Convention Results
October 29- November 1, 2025

EVENT	CHAPTER	TEAM AWARD	INDIVIDUAL AWARDS
Food Science	North Harford	Silver	Miranda Buettner- Bronze Luch Heisey- Bronze Sophia Reinert- Silver Grayson Whaley- Silver
Forestry	North Harford	Silver	Autumn Ferguson- Silver Nina Field- Gold Samantha Hawk- Gold Annaleigh Walker- Silver
Horse Evaluation	Middletown	Silver	Olivia Baltrotsky- 6 th Gold Madison McCutcheon- Bronze Stella Otto- Bronze Cassidy Stone- Gold
Livestock Evaluation	Catoctin	Bronze	Earl Schuebel- Silver Elizabeth Schuebel- Bronze Aaliyah Snedegar- Bronze Quamari Willard- Bronze
Marketing Plan	Hereford	Bronze	Lillian Boshoff Simone Clough Kendall Rosier
Meat Evaluation	Southern	Bronze	Allison Bullock- Bronze Kevin Kayton- Bronze Cheyenne Schneider- Bronze Colton Scofield- Bronze
Milk Quality & Products	Catoctin	Silver	Jonathan Guldán- Silver Caleb Krantz- Bronze Jackson Savage- Silver Blake Smith- Silver
Nursery/Landscape	Walkersville	Bronze	Gina Florimbio- Bronze Cash Richie- Silver Hayden Tennant- Bronze Brianna Trinquero- Bronze
Parliamentary Procedure	Linganore	Bronze	Sophie Ausherman Hannah Carr Hayden Jarels Emry Mayhew Olivia Morgan Faith Scarzello
Poultry Evaluation	North Garrett	Bronze	Emilee Bowman- Bronze Brady Garlitz- Bronze Emily Wilburn- Bronze Madalynn Wilkens- Silver
Prepared Speaking	Calvert	N/A	Angelina Perez- Bronze
Veterinary Science	Hereford	10 th - Gold	Annalise Decamp- Gold Ava Keefer- Gold Brooke Leaf- Gold Kat Wiggins- Silver

Maryland FFA
National Convention Results
October 29- November 1, 2025

American FFA Degree Recipients	
Chapter	Recipient
Brunswick	Mia McGuffin
Catoctin	Ellie Baker Cheyenne Van Echo
Frederick CTC	Stella Krause
Middletown	Josephine Delauter Megan Downing Sophia Ganley
North Garrett	Aurora Wilhelm
North Harford	Cole Hellwig Hope Mullins
Oakland	Dayton Custer Krista Rinker
Queen Anne's County	Emily Crossley
South Carroll	Sophie Phelps
Southern	Katelyn Bullock
Urbana	Calie Bloomfield

National FFA Chorus Member	
Chapter	Recipient
Caroline County	Elizabeth Johnson

Honorary American FFA Degree Recipients	
Organization/Title	Recipient
Abloom Florist, Owner & Operator	Ms. Lori Himes
North Harford FFA Advisor/Agricultural Educator	Ms. Aimee Densmore

National FFA State Delegates	
State Office	Name
President	Hailey Pleasants
Vice President	Connor Clary
Secretary	Sam Moreland

National FFA Alumni Lifetime Service Award	
Organization/Title	Recipient
Maryland FFA Alumni & Supporters, Chairman	Mr. Joe Linthicum

National Chapter Award	
Chapter	Star Recognition (3-Highest)
Frederick CTC	2 Stars
Howard County	3 Stars
Middletown	3 Stars
Parkside CTE	1 Star
Walkersville	1 Star

#SpeakAg State Showcase Presentations	
Chapter	Stage/Video Presentation
Frederick CTC	Advocacy Video
Howard County	Finals Stage- Session 5
Middletown	Finals Stage- Session 3
Urbana	Finals Stage- Session 10
Walkersville	Advocacy Video

Chapter	Recipient
Brunswick	Mia McGuffin

State Office	Name
Treasurer	Kaitlynn Bentz

Proficiency Award Recipients- Maryland			
Proficiency Area	Chapter	Award	Recipient
Ag Education- Entrepreneurship/Placement	Francis Scott Key	Bronze	Emily Fritz
Ag Science Research- Plant Systems	Brunswick	Participation	Victoria Christman
Dairy Production- Placement	Middletown	Bronze	Ella Fell
Diversified Ag. Production- Entrepreneurship/Placement	Winters Mill	Bronze	Collette Cook
Diversified Livestock Production- Entrepreneurship/Placement	Howard County	Silver	Charlotte King
Equine Science- Entrepreneurship	Middletown	Bronze	Olivia Baltrotsky
Equine Science- Placement	Howard County	Bronze	Jackson Mansolillo
Swine Production-Entrepreneurship	Winters Mille	Bronze	Jarrett Heard
Vegetable Production- Entrepreneurship/Placement	Southern	Bronze	Kevin Kayton

Agribusiness – Vacant

Aquaculture – Johnny Shockley

- No report.

Biofuels – Raj Kathuria

- No report.

Committee on Young Farmers – Jenell Eck McHenry

- The Commission hosted an “introductory” meeting in November to drum up interest in the new Committee on Young Farmers, requesting applicants submit a resume and cover letter that identifies their region/industry’s top 3 challenges and potential solutions.
- Harrison Palmer and Jenell Eck McHenry will review applications and host the new CYF during February’s Committee meetings.

Consumer – Kellie Hinkle

Next level gardening.....

AI in Gardening: At its essence, artificial intelligence in gardening involves tools and systems that rely on data, machine learning, and automation to observe, manage, and enhance plant care. It functions like a tireless virtual gardening assistant—constantly monitoring, adapting, and improving over time.

So asked CoPilot “How is AI used in gardening?”

“AI can assist gardeners with plant identification, automated watering, personalized garden plans, and troubleshooting plant problems. For instance, image recognition apps can diagnose diseases from a photo, smart irrigation systems can use weather data to optimize watering, and chatbots can answer questions about plant care or suggest companion planting ideas. However, it is important to cross-reference AI-generated advice with reliable local resources to avoid potential inaccuracies.

Garden planning and design

- Generate garden layouts: AI tools can suggest design ideas based on your space, climate, and preferences.
- Create plant lists: AI can help select plants that are suitable for your specific climate and soil conditions.
- Design companion planting schemes: You can use AI to generate guides on which plants grow well together.

Plant care and health

- Identify plants and diseases: Apps use image recognition to identify plants and diagnose issues like nutrient deficiencies or pests from a photo.
- Get personalized advice: Chatbots can answer questions about specific plants, such as when to prune, fertilize, or water them.

- Receive care reminders: AI can send personalized notifications for essential garden tasks.
- Optimize soil and watering: AI can analyze soil sensors and weather data to create customized watering schedules and fertilization plans.

Automated systems

- Smart irrigation: AI-powered systems adjust watering based on real-time data like soil moisture and weather forecasts, which saves water and prevents overwatering.
- Smart home gardens: Indoor gardening systems use AI to monitor and adjust light, water, and nutrient levels automatically.
- Robotics: Future applications include robotic mowers and weeders that use machine learning to perform tasks with greater precision.

Important considerations

- Verify information: AI can sometimes provide inaccurate information, so it's best to cross-reference AI-generated advice with local resources and experienced gardeners.
- Be aware of potential misinformation: As AI content creation becomes more widespread, be cautious of misinformation, especially from new channels that may lack real-world experience.

Deeper AI Dive:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming gardening by providing a range of tools and systems that offer data-driven insights and automation, making plant care more efficient and accessible. These tools serve as virtual assistants, helping with everything from planning your garden layout to diagnosing plant problems.

How AI Is Being Used in Gardening

- Plant Identification and Problem Diagnosis: Apps use image recognition AI to identify thousands of plant species, as well as detect signs of pests, diseases (like powdery mildew), or nutrient deficiencies from a simple photo upload. This allows for early intervention and targeted treatment.
- Smart Irrigation Systems: AI-powered irrigation systems connect to soil moisture sensors and real-time weather data to deliver precise watering schedules, saving water and preventing both under- and over-watering.
- Garden Design and Planning: AI landscape design tools allow users to upload a photo of their outdoor space and select a desired style (e.g., English, Japanese, Mediterranean) to instantly generate realistic design ideas. Some tools also help with companion planting suggestions and optimal layouts based on your specific climate zone and sunlight patterns.
- Virtual Assistants and Task Management: AI chatbots and assistants can answer specific gardening questions 24/7, provide troubleshooting tips, and send personalized reminders for tasks like pruning, fertilizing, or harvesting.

- Nutrient Optimization: Advanced sensors and AI analysis can monitor soil nutrient levels to recommend the right type and amount of fertilizer needed for optimal plant growth, reducing waste and preventing chemical runoff.
- Indoor Smart Gardens: Smart indoor garden systems combine sensors, AI, and automation to manage light, water, and nutrients for growing herbs and vegetables with minimal human effort.”

*Popular AI Tools and Apps for Gardeners:

<u>Tool/App</u>	<u>What It Does</u>	<u>Best For</u>
Plantix	Diagnoses plant diseases from photos	Vegetable and crop growers
PictureThis	Identifies plants, gives care tips	Home and hobby gardeners
Rachio Smart Irrigation	Automates and optimizes watering	Outdoor garden owners
Click & Grow	Smart indoor garden system	Apartment or small-space
Garden Planner AI (various) garden	Designs garden layouts using AI	Beginners planning a new

*ECOGardener

●

Controlled Environmental Agriculture – Vacant

Dairy – Jeni Mallott

- No report.

Direct Farm Market – Amy Crone

- Farm stands and farmers markets are mostly closed for the season, with a handful that stay open year-round. Full list of farmers markets can be found [here](#).
- Some CSAs take a winter break; although more are continuing to provide fresh food with the help of tunnels and season extending technology.
- Direct marketing farmers are concerned about the affect of USDA cuts to programs that they had come to depend on such as the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement ([LFPA](#)). Some feel that this will be a significant blow to their businesses, and expressed frustration that they can find food produced in other countries at the food banks rather than from Maryland farmers.
- Holiday guides abound for ways to find local farm products as gifts this season; many counties have their own guides, and MD’s Best has been promoting MD produced items as gifts, along with the new “Make Mine a Maryland” campaign from Cultivate & Craft.
- Conference season is underway, with the major ones in the area as follows in chronological order:
 - [MD Farm Bureau](#) just concluded on 12/10/25 in Cambridge MD
 - [VABF](#) 1/9/26 to 1/11/26 in Roanoke VA
 - [Future Harvest](#) 1/17/26 to 1/18/26 in Silver Spring MD

- [PASA](#) 2/5/26 to 2/6/26 in Lancaster PA
- [Women in Ag Conference](#) 2/11/2026 in Stevensville MD (25th Year!)
- Ongoing challenges for this sector: weather, processing dates, labor, tariffs, ending of USDA programs

Equine – Ann Merryman

- Maryland's horse industry is experiencing one of its most significant periods of alignment and forward movement in decades, driven largely by **Governor Wes Moore's Executive Order directing the creation of a comprehensive Maryland Horse Industry Strategic Plan**. For the first time, all sectors of the horse ecosystem—racing, sport, recreation, breeding, workforce, land use, welfare, tourism, and education—are being brought into a single strategic framework. The Strategic Plan is designed to unify the industry, strengthen collaboration across agencies and disciplines, and provide a long-term roadmap for sustainability, competitiveness, and economic growth. Work is already well underway: the first Strategic Committee is in December. The industry conducting deep dives on the seven pillars outlined in the Executive Order. This is creating strong momentum and an unprecedented sense of coordination across statewide partners. There is a public form online to share your opinions and solutions, contact Anne Litz if you would like to share it.
- Horse month was a tremendous success in its 5th year with more events than ever. The month is highlighted by The Maryland Million. The Maryland 5 Star and Washington International Horse Show.
- Workforce development efforts continue to advance, including the upcoming launch of the **2026 Maryland Horse Career Program**, which has been updated and integrated into the new Bender Educational Series. The program under the leadership of Cricket Goodall at the Maryland Horse Foundation, has expanded to include the entire industry by partner with MHIB and University of Maryland Equine Extension in 2026.
- Industry education standards are also progressing through MAEF with the exploration of added Ag Ed classes for Equine Science as college prep courses.
- Externally, Maryland's equine presence remains highly active and visible. International partnerships continue through ongoing EU and French delegation exchanges; marketing collaborations are underway with Fair Hill International; and planning has begun for the 2025 Preakness Horse Farm Tours, which may expand based on demand. MHIB remains engaged in cross-agency initiatives.
- The Maryland Horse Park System Website is up and running, people can enter their own equine related events for free in the calendar.
- The horse industry continues to be protected by Animal Health, under the leadership of Dr. Trout as we navigate EHV-1.
- Overall, Maryland's horse industry is demonstrating strong organization, rising momentum, and renewed shared purpose. The **Strategic Plan Executive Order** is the catalyst—bringing all voices to the table, elevating the industry's profile within state government, and ensuring that Maryland's \$2.9B equine sector has a unified direction and a sustainable future.

Farm Bureau – Paula Linthicum

- Maryland Farm Bureau hosted their 110th annual meeting and introduced new policy priorities to include:
 - Artificial intelligence and precision agriculture
 - Cryptocurrency
 - Digital Infrastructure and Data Centers
 - Food Systems & Local Purchasing

Field Crops – Chris Rhodes

- No report.

Food Processing – Nikita Bocharov

- No report.

Forestry – Hunter Pusey

- **Truck Weight Increase:** Chapter 51, Acts of 2025 ("*Exceptional Hauling Permit- Farm Products*") establishes a new exceptional hauling permit enabling agricultural product haulers to carry more weight on certain types of loads. In short, the new law (effective October 1, 2025, link shown below) allows haulers - like loggers -to haul 88,000 pounds of timber from the fields to the processors on 5 axels instead of 6 axels. AFI led a 2-year effort to realize this increase. Attached are (1) AFI's February 6, 2025, testimony; and (2) the DOT Press Release.
 - https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/chapters/noln/Ch_51_hb0225T.pdf
- **Efforts to Use Maryland Wood in Rebuilding Key Bridge:** AFI led an unsuccessful effort to convince engineers involved with rebuilding the Key Bridge (Kiewit) to use Maryland wood for timber mats instead of using Douglas Fir shipped from the Pacific Northwest. AFI's efforts also included outreach to Federal and State decision makers. There for a while we were optimistic; but, on September 22, 2025, Kiewit informed AFI that use of Maryland wood
 - especially loblolly-could not meet engineer specifications.
- **Re-Focused Efforts to Use Maryland Wood for State Construction Projects:** Having been rejected by Kiewit, AFI turned its attention to the Moore Administration in seeking a policy-ideally via a Gubernatorial EXECUTIVE ORDER-to use Maryland wood for publicly funded construction projects where wood was needed. Currently, AFI is encouraged by the reception of the Moore Administration to effect adoption of Maryland wood policy.
- **Fiscal Compliance Audit of DNR:** Funding for Maryland's *Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund* ("W/FJ is critical to the DNR Forest Service's mission in helping manage Maryland's forests. At issue is WIF's annual share - capped at \$200,000 - of revenues derived from the agricultural land transfer tax. This tax is imposed whenever farmland and/or farmland is converted to development after having benefitted from a lower property tax assessment. A historical review of WIF funding from this tax shows WIF has been short changed.

- o AFI presented its case before the State Auditor who agreed with AFI. Here is the link to the April 2025 Audit Report of DNR which, among other things, addresses the WIF shortfall.
- o <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabPDF/DNR25.pdf>
- **Invitation to Forestry/Sportsmen's Legislative Luncheon:** AFI cordially invites all Members of the Commission to join us on Thursday, January 22, 2026@ Harry Browne's on State Circle for the annual Forestry/Sportsmen's legislative luncheon. Details are attached. This is a much-anticipated event which is always well attended by Members of the Maryland General Assembly, Administration officials, NGOs, and more.

Fruit – Wade Butler

- No report.

Hemp – Stefanie Reiser

- The hemp industry is facing EXISTENTIAL THREATS at the Federal level and in multiple states due to lack of robust regulatory action for the industry, despite significant and ongoing calls for clear regulation from the industry itself.
- Language was included in the bill to reopen the government – sponsored by Rep. Andy Harris (R) (MD), and Senator Mitch McConnell (R) (KY) that effectively KILLS the hemp industry by redefining hemp to EXCLUDE any products with ANY QUANTIFIABLE amount of THC. Heretofore, the definition of hemp was “cannabis sativa plant” having no more than “0.3% THC by weight.” This new definition requiring hemp to have NO quantifiable THC would effectively immediately make 99.9% of all hemp products illegal, and kill a \$28.4 billion hemp market.
- The bill language, however, did include a 1-year moratorium on this taking effect, clearly with the intent of allowing for a regulatory pathway to be worked out in the interim.
- The US Hemp Roundtable – which is the leading advocacy group for the hemp-derived cannabinoid industry – and other industry groups are working now to extend this moratorium by 1 or 1.5 years, to give legislators and industry sufficient time to work out a regulatory framework.
- In the wake of this federal ban, some states (Ohio most recently) are effectively following suit to the federal ban, making hemp products illegal in those states.
- At the federal level, there is rapidly growing push-back against this ban. There is an expectation that there will be bi-partisan legislation introduced in both the House and Senate to either repeal this ban or extend the moratorium which will be offered in January to be included in the next Continuing Resolution to keep the government funded, which will need to be enacted before the end of January.
- Beyond extending the moratorium on the ban, there are bipartisan efforts in both the House and Senate to offer a comprehensive regulatory legislation. On the Senate side, this is S. 5243 Cannabinoid Safety and Regulation Act introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden (D) (OR). In the House, similar legislation is in draft form by Rep. Morgan Griffith (R) (VA)

- Below is the language from the most recent “Industry Update: An Inflection Point for Hemp” by the US Hemp Roundtable:
 - This is an inflection point for hemp.
 - If no Congressional action is taken with the next 353 days, 95% of hemp extract products currently on the market will be deemed Schedule 1 narcotics, while the remaining 5% of THC-free isolates would be impossible to manufacture given the limits on extraction. Much of the industrial hemp industry would be thrown into disarray, particularly grain farming. This would also severely disrupt the cannabinoid supply chain of the regulated marijuana market.
 - In fact, our farmers are under fire right now. A member of the Roundtable’s Farmers Advisory Committee shared that he could be left with over \$1 million of unsold biomass from this year’s harvest due to broken contracts. And next year’s crops are in serious jeopardy – farmers need to make decisions in the next few months whether they can lay seed in the ground.
 - Worse yet, some state policymakers are treating the prospective hemp ban as a fait accompli, pursuing legislation that would incorporate the McConnell/Harris ban language in their states.
 - This is why we’re moving quickly. Our first priority is to secure an additional one-year moratorium on the effective date of the ban. We’ve seen a strong public backlash, with many more Members of Congress raising their voices in favor of regulation, not prohibition. This additional one-year period would allow for the appropriate level of transparency and scrutiny needed to reach a responsible resolution. We ask you to join our grassroots efforts to convince Congress to add this extension to the continuing resolution in late January.
 - Second, we will be supporting efforts led by Sen. Rand Paul and members of the Minnesota congressional delegation to ensure that states have the authority to regulate hemp without federal interference – setting their own policies on THC potency and permitted form factors.
 - Finally, we are working to develop the federal regulatory framework to replace the ban. We have been sitting down with our champions, conservative Republican Rep. Morgan Griffith of Virginia, and liberal Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, who are each developing legislation to be introduced in the coming weeks. After extensive meetings on Capitol Hill, the only path with bipartisan support – which is required to keep our industry alive – would include the following:
 - Extend the hemp ban moratorium from 1 to 2 years.
 - Guarantee states’ full authority to regulate hemp across all form factors and strengths without federal interference. To protect states without regulatory frameworks, raise the federal floor on potency from the current 0.4 mg THC per container to a minimum of 5 mg THC per serving and 30-day supplies.
 - Oppose carveouts for any one form factor.
 - Establish robust federal regulation requiring GMP, third-party testing,

- truth-in-labeling, prohibiting misleading packaging, and banning sales to minors.
- Ban synthetic/artificial cannabinoids masquerading as hemp, while allowing bioconversions for naturally-occurring cannabinoids in greater than trace amounts.
- Maintain a unity-first approach – open to all collaboration while finding bipartisan solutions that keep the entire hemp industry alive.
- This is an existential fight, and we can't let perfect be the enemy of the good — so we are laser-focused on what's politically possible. Please join us in a united front to secure a one-year extension on the ban, states' rights to establish potency limits, and a long-term regulatory solution that allows for the future of the hemp industry in the context of this new political reality.

Livestock – Eleanor Leak

- The cattle market for most of 2025 has been excellent, trending upwards which has resulted in an increase in demand for beef.
- The selling of female cows to feeder lots will affect the overall numbers of heifers in the future. It will limit our domestic expansion.
- Major meat packing plants are cutting production and laying off workers. This will have an impact on market prices and the availability of beef to the consumer.
- Many Maryland livestock farmers are now using advanced techniques such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI) to improve the genetic base of their herd. Maryland farmers continue to lead the way in the genetic advancement of livestock.

New and Beginning Farmers – Vacant

Nursery, Landscape & Greenhouse – Kelly Lewis

- No report.

Organic – Emma Jagoz

- **Opportunities**
 - Submit feedback on the USDA's reorganization plan by Sept 30 (seems the deadline was extended from Aug). From an organic lens, the NOP has already lost 1/3 of the team due to staffing cuts and is at risk of losing significantly more with proposed moves out of the DC area
 - For perspective, organic is the fastest growing market in the US food industry and NOP staff protect organic standards
 - Thank you to everyone who contributed to submitting feedback to the USDA vis-a-vis the Farm Profitability committee, especially in regards to the proposed closing of the Beltsville Research Center
- Farmer Interest Tour + Food Hub Open House at Moon Valley Farm!
 - Wednesday, Feb 18 9a-11:30a
 - Join us for a behind-the-scenes look at how our regional food hub works, and how YOUR farm can thrive as part of it! Learn how we partner with farmers to expand market access, streamline logistics and grow consistent, profitable sales. All current + aspiring farmers welcome.

- [Get a free ticket here](#) (so we know how many snacks and coffee to get!)

News

- Under Big Beautiful Bill, Organic Cost Share program got funded \$8M for the next 7 years, continuing to make organic certification more accessible to farmers
 - Organic Transition Initiative was funded \$5M for the next 6 years
 - Organic Data Initiative, boosted \$10M over the next 6 years (doubling the budget it had from 2018)
- [Immediate changes to the H2A program](#) affects all farmers who utilize the program
- 2 changes overall: lowering the wage for H2A employees (designed to compensate for the housing provided), and dividing labor into 2 categories, Level 1 and Level 2
- [Youtube video](#) detailing the changes

Organic farmer feedback

- The Farm at Our House (Produce in Montgomery County, MD)
 - Season is generally going well for us though climate change is making the window in which we can get crops in the ground and expect good results tighter.
 - Our market sales are holding up even as I've noticed weaker CSA sales. We could use more institutional clients who are willing to buy on a big scale, but are very grateful for Manna and Community Farm Share, both in Montgomery County.
 - I wish we had access to a co-packer and business that amalgamates like Lancaster Farming Cooperative
 - Challenges:
 - Labor is expensive as is workforce housing- I think it negatively impacts our operation in comparison with those outside of the state
 - Land is expensive, which for us, has resulted in limited land security. There needs to be assistance with ensuring fair, long term leases that enable farmers to develop their operations. The lack of land security is a major barrier to entry and the placement of solar panels on 5% of ag land will not bring the cost down. I was disappointed to learn that tariff exemptions have enabled cheap Mexican produce to continue entering the US, while our machinery, which is largely made abroad is getting tariffed.
- Oak Spring Farm (Baltimore County, produce)
 - What is your biggest production challenge right now? Insects/disease-per usual; Weather/climate extremes-an increasing problem. The copious amounts of rain we had this spring and early summer were hard on our onion crop.
 - What is your biggest barrier to profitability right now? Labor costs
 - What is your biggest workforce challenge? small pool of qualified applicants
 - What aspect of organic certification feels most burdensome? It does bug me that I have to keep SO many records, have to prove why I don't buy a certain variety of broccoli as organic seed and larger growers (like grain) can use conventional seed with hardly any explanation. As a small diversified grower it is more laborious for us to keep so many records and have to prove ourselves.

That said I don't mind proving myself if EVERYONE else has to do the same. Do more soil tests and plant samples across the board so we can more easily prove ourselves and weed out farms who aren't being honest and transparent.

- Have you faced challenges with food safety compliance (GAP, FSMA, etc.)?
No
- How is climate change impacting your farm most? Weather extremes
- What's a success story from your farm or organic farming in Maryland you'd like to share? Oak Spring's success story is that we have scaled back not up, remain profitable with a high quality of life for owners and workers alike and we have a solid, supportive community. It is possible for communities to support their small organic farms and allow the owner/farmer to make a decent living.
- If you could tell the Secretary of Agriculture one thing organic farmers need most right now, what would it be? I think the public needs to understand the difference between conventional and organic food and how different the growing of food is, how different the end result of the product. I love the 'transition to organic' program that helps farmers transition - the more organic farms the better. The more the public is educated the better
- What state or federal programs have been most helpful — or least helpful — to your farm? VAPG was incredibly helpful. MAC is great, I do it for the greater good, not necessarily because it helps me. Cost share programs through NRCS have been super helpful. EQUIP helped me with all my tunnels.
- From David Paulk, Sassafras Creek Farm – requests for Secretary Atticks + MDA staff
 - H-2A. Support federal Farm Workforce Modernization Act initiatives. H2A needs cost control; year-round access; Ask his [Secretary Atticks'] staff to provide him with the percentage of MD farmers that depend on H-2A. The trend is up despite labor costs.
 - Climate Change. Recommend his staff find sponsors for next legislative session to address the need and budget for systems to deal with increasing hotter, drier summers. a. Irrigation ponds and, b. irrigation management systems to conserve water resources e.g. Underground irrigation piping, Overhead boom irrigation systems for smaller farms; wells on variable speed drives, reclaimed water for irrigation from industries - Example, in St Mary's County, Seven Points Agro-Therapeutics, LLC is an large in-door hydroponic marijuana facility, Pumper trucks each day to transport spent water daily from the facility to a municipal water treatment plant. In California and other states, water is reclaimed for agriculture; and c. Climate controlled high tunnel structures.
- Moon Valley Farm
 - Strong direct-to-consumer sales channel this season
 - Federal changes caused a lot of uncertainty this year overall with the changes affecting mostly our school, food pantries and nonprofit partners

Poultry – Zach Evans

- The poultry industry continues to work with MDE on the CAFO permit, reminding farmers and stakeholders to submit Public Comment before the comment period closes on January 2nd, 2026.

Related Services – Keith Parker

- Thanked the Commission and Governor Moore for the opportunity to engage, prioritizing food security in the state.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers – Vacant

State Grange – Dr. Richard Stonebraker

- No Report.

Turf – Gordon Kretser

- The State of the Industry:
 - Camden Yards officially is seeded in Maryland grown sod.
 - Over 5000 acres of Maryland Sod was harvested and sold.
 - >200,000 square feet
 - >350,000 pallets of Sod
 - >6M miles shipped, approximately \$950K fuel
 - >2M lbs of seed
 - >\$4M of fertilizer and chemical purchases
 - >\$11M of payroll
 - >\$4.7M in land rent
 - Maryland Certified Sod Program
 - Nearly 100% of the acres shipped fell under the Maryland Certified Sod program
 - >\$45K inspection fees
 - >\$100K of blending inspection fees

UMD College of Agriculture and Natural Resources – Dr. Darren Jarboe

- President Darryll Pines announced the launch of Forward: The University of Maryland Campaign for the Fearless—a \$2.5 billion fundraising effort to achieve unprecedented transformation of the university. College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) Dean Wendy Powers has established teams to develop projects that fit the advancement of Forward.
- The AGNR held the 7th Annual AGNR Cornerstone Event on Thursday, October 23 at The Adele H. Stamp Student Union—Center for Campus Life. The keynote speaker was Sanjay K. Rai, secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission.
- The annual University of Maryland Extension (UME) Statewide Extension Advisory Council meeting took place October 16 at CMREC-Clarksville. There was a statewide virtual webinar on December 2 to provide a UME update for county Extension advisory boards and councils.
- The Engaging Extension: Connecting Research, Teaching, and Community meeting was held in College Park on November 6. The objective was to foster collaboration among campus and field faculty.
- The 2025 Agricultural & Environmental Law Conference occurred November 10 at the Graduate Hotel in Annapolis. The major topics were From Crops to Kilowatts: Growing with Maryland's Energy Demands, Maryland's New Heat Illness Prevention Standard, Addressing Local Food Security through Farmer-Centered Community Partnership Networks, From Fields to Courtrooms: Ag Law Shifts in 2025 and Beyond, Effectiveness

of Economic Incentives to Enhance Riparian Buffer Adoption and Environmental Benefits in Maryland, and Unpacking Federal Agriculture Appropriations and Budgetary Decisions on USDA Grant Programs.

- UME's request to use carry-forward funding for FY 2026 was approved. This limited funding enabled UME to extend SNAP-Ed employee contracts beyond October 1, ensuring a proper closeout of the program and its employees.
- Dr. Sung-Jin Lee has joined UME as assistant director and program leader for Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS). She earned her M.S. (2006) and Ph.D. (2010) in housing from the Department of Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management at Virginia Tech University where she also completed a Graduate Gerontology Certificate. In 2010, Dr. Lee began work in the Department of FCS at North Carolina A&T State University, where she advanced from assistant professor of Housing Research to full professor before joining UME.
- Caroline County Extension conducted its first Agriculture Awareness Day for eighth graders at the Caroline County 4-H Park on October 1. Frederick County Extension hosted the Ag Olympics program for youth on October 4 and 5 in Frederick. Throughout October, Montgomery County Extension conducted Close Encounters with Agriculture for ~3,000 fourth graders.
- LEAD Maryland named Class XIV. Fellows will start the program in February 2026.
- The current UME AgFS openings are:
 - *AgFS Extension*
 - AgFS county educator, Frederick County: Finalist references are being checked.
 - AgFS county educator, Talbot County: Finalist interviews are being set up.
 - LEAD Maryland agent associate: The job announcement has been posted at https://umd.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/UMCP/details/Agent-Associate--LEAD-Maryland-Fellowship-Program_JR102983?q=extension. The best consideration date is January 2, 2026.
 - AgFS county educator, Prince George's County: Funding is being secured for the position.
- *Agricultural Nutrient Management Program*
 - Program director and faculty specialist: The position description will be revised and reposted in early spring.
 - Candidates for the nutrient management advisor positions in Baltimore, Harford, and Montgomery Counties have received offers.
- Award
 - Chuck Schuster received the Landscape Contractors Association MD-DC-VA (LCA) Industry Partnership Award. This award honors an LCA member company or individual industry partner whose collaboration and commitment have meaningfully advanced the landscape profession. This award recognizes exceptional service and support that elevate industry standards and contribute to long-term success in the region.

Urban and Small Farmers – Vacant

Value Added Agriculture & Agritourism – Janna Howley

- Federal Bill - Accelerating the Growth of Rural Innovation and Tourism Opportunities to Uphold Rural Industries and Sustainable Marketplaces Act (AGRITOURISM ACT)
 - https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/final_text_-_agritourism_act_of_2025.pdf
- Cultivate and Craft announced the “Make Mine a Maryland” campaign to help promote Maryland produced alcohol products.

Vegetable – Russell Shlagel

- No report.

Veteran Farmers – Peter Scott

- Broadly engaging with veterans in agriculture, a historically underrepresented group.
- The Farmer Veteran Coalition is actively pursuing the development and growth of a Maryland chapter. FVC is searching for volunteers to engage on the new board, and is hoping to kick off the interest meeting in the late winter.
 - There is no obligation to be a veteran to serve on the board and support veteran farmers!

Veterinary – Dr. Marianne Bailey

- No report.

Viticulture – Rachel Lipman

- No report.

Maryland Department of Agriculture Staff Updates:

Secretary Kevin Atticks:

- The Federal shutdown and consolidation continues to impact the state budget through a detraction of state income tax - contributing to the State’s \$1.4B budget deficit.
- The Marketing department has expanded its mission and function to represent Marketing and Agricultural Development. Martin Proulx has been appointed to serve as the incoming Chief of Marketing and Agricultural Development, starting in January of 2026.
- MDA has a distinct opportunity to engage further with food and its crossover with agriculture in policy and function. Through MDA’s new podcast titled “Farmers Eat Last”, we will continue to broaden the discussion with farmers, policymakers, food providers, and the public.
- The Federal “MAHA” movement announced today its initiatives and interface with agriculture and food. MDA is still tracking this development and the next steps.

- There has also been conversation at the federal level to allow for larger purchasing opportunities direct from farmers, including the purchase of ½ or ¼ beef or pork products, and potentially expanding to allow for the purchase of hot poultry (roisserie products).

Rachel Jones, Director of Government Relations:

- Briefed the Commission on upcoming departmental bills pertaining to agriculture:
 - Racing Commission - prohibiting the sale of thoroughbred horses for meat
 - Changes to the Critical Area Commission, enabling the CAC to approve any fiscal modifications to the Atlantic and Coastal Bays Trust Fund
 - Maryland Department of Health - establishing an on-farm food service license
 - Maryland Department of the Environment - restricting the sale and use of PFAS products & testing wastewater treatment facilities
 - Possible Sunday hunting legislation
 - Interstate veterinary licensing
 - Prohibition of penalties against veterinarians prescribing medical cannabis
- Rachel Jones announced that she will be stepping down from her role as Director of Legislative Affairs in the coming weeks.
- The House of Delegates will be electing a new Speaker, upon Speaker Adrienne Jones stepping down.

New Business:

- Definition of Agriculture
 - Adopted by the Maryland Agricultural Commission 12/2025
 - Motion to adopt from Kellie Hinkle, second by Stefanie Reiser, unanimously approved.
- **Agriculture** includes but is not limited to; the cultivation, production, management, maintenance, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of food, feed, fiber, fuel, forestry, turf and ornamental horticultural products, as well as equines. It includes traditional land-based crop farming and animal husbandry, as well as aquaculture, agroforestry, viticulture, apiculture, silviculture, hydroponic, aquaponic, and controlled-environment production, along with the refinement of outputs into biorenewable products such as biofuel and biochar. Further discretion and determinations of agriculture shall be deferred to the Secretary of Agriculture, with input from the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

- **Agricultural activities include but are not limited to;**
 - (i) managing the nutrients in soil to support biochemical processes, application of fertilizers, manures, and soil amendments to replenish critical elements of life, and the adoption of technologies and management practices to maximize soil health,
 - (ii) pest management practices throughout the growing season, the storage and application of soil amendments, nutrients, and crop management tools like pesticides,
 - (iii) harvesting, extraction, fermentation, packaging and processing of agricultural products that were raised,
 - (iv) marketing agricultural products, both for off-site and on-site sales through global, national, regional, and local markets,
 - (v) land preservation and conservation measures on recently farmed land or fallow crop ground,
 - (vi) further discretion and determinations of agricultural activities shall be deferred to the Secretary of Agriculture, with input from the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

- Ag Commission Video
 - Members shall to record a video of themselves on their farm with
 - Name
 - Farm/Business
 - Ag Commission Role

Old Business:

- None.

Public Comment:

- None.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:22 pm by Paula Linthicum, seconded by Dr. Darren Jarboe.

Respectfully Submitted by Harrison B. Palmer, Executive Secretary