

Aug 28, 2026

Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture

Full Commission Meeting

August 28, 2026

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Attendees

- In Person: Secretary Kevin Atticks, Secretary Josh Kurtz, Secretary Serena McIlwain, Darren Jarboe, Amy Crone, Mike Stringer, Jessica Richards, Harrison Palmer, Allie Cavanagh
- Virtually: Secretary Rebecca Flora, Secretary Stacey Rodgers, Director Kelly Speakes-Bachman, Dr. Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm, Anupa Geevarghese, Dr. Prem Bhandari, Leslie Sessom Parks, Susanne Richards, Stephanie Jones, Joshua Parker, Jo-Ann Chason, Kelsey Keadle, Heather bois Bruskin, Katie Stevens, Ashley Drakeford, Margaret Todd, Jenny Dempsey, Steve McHenry, Nancy Nunn, Les Knapp, Dr. Cliff Mitchell, Cristina Campbell.

Agenda  GICA Agenda - 8.28.26.docx.pdf

Slide Deck  GICA Meeting - 8.28.26.pptx.pdf

Meeting records  Recording

Summary

State agricultural leaders addressed freeze impacts and regulatory definitions alongside new food service policies and workforce standards.

Midge Remediation Policy Consensus

Discussions regarding freeze responses and research center closures preceded the consensus that midge remediation efforts require a statute change and additional funding.

Regulatory and Standard Updates

Updated on-farm food service licensing protocols and stormwater management definitions define new agritourism regulations. State standards for heat illness prevention now mandate specific rest, shade, and hydration requirements.

Program and Innovation Reports

Regional partners shared progress on food exchange technology and educational workforce initiatives. Various county organizations finalized accelerator partnerships to improve local food supply chains.

Decisions

Aligned

- **June 2026 meeting minutes approved** The June 2026 meeting minutes are approved as presented.

Next steps

- ☐ [Allie Cavanagh] Coordinate Subcommittee Meetings: Email subcommittee members to determine the optimal meeting time for October 1.

- ☐ [Cliff Mitchell] Circulate Draft Regulations: Share draft HB 272 regulations with stakeholders for informal comment.
 - ☐ [Cliff Mitchell] Email Farm Bureau: Send the draft regulations to the Farm Bureau for review and feedback.
 - ☐ [Cliff Mitchell] Distribute Guidance Document: Send an explanatory guidance document alongside the draft regulations to stakeholders.
 - ☐ [The group] Share Conference Info: Distribute the Maryland Agritourism conference details through professional networks to encourage attendance.
 - ☐ [MDA] Promote Fair Purpose: Create promotional materials to educate the public on the educational significance and 4H participation at state fairs.
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Detailed Notes

- **Approval of June 2026 Meeting Minutes:** Secretary Atticks opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, and presented the minutes from the June 2026 meeting for approval. Jo-Ann Chason moved to approve the minutes as presented, and Secretary Kurtz seconded the motion. Following a call for discussion and a vote, the motion passed with no opposition.
- **MDA Updates**
 - State Response to the April Agricultural Freeze: Sec. Atticks discussed the severe agricultural freeze on April 21st, which caused severe crop and profit losses for row crop farmers, orchards, vineyards, and nurseries. In response, the department worked with the governor's office to issue an executive order outlining state government support. Additionally, Sec. Atticks and Allie Cavanagh met with USDA Under Secretary Ford to address program gaps for

specialty crops and nurseries, establishing coordination with agricultural commissioners and secretaries from six other states from New York down to Virginia to advocate for federal program adjustments or new appropriate legislation.

- Closure of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center: Sec. Atticks addressed the closure notices issued for the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, noting that USDA's plan to create regional agricultural centers results in the Mid-Atlantic region losing its only dedicated agricultural research center while staff face downsizing or relocation. The closure severely impacts the University of Maryland's College of Natural Resources due to its proximity and collaborative history. The state congressional delegation is actively supporting the issue, with a primary consensus goal to prevent the developable agricultural land from being sold off for development and keeping it undeveloped.
- Aquaculture and Seafood Marketing Work Group: Sec. Atticks reported on the formation of the Aquaculture and Seafood Marketing Work Group, established at the request of legislative chairs to address severe sales damage in the aquaculture and seafood industry caused by winter freezes, rough conditions, and disease pressures. The work group has held several public and subsector meetings, and Sec. Atticks encouraged participants to complete and distribute a live public feedback survey accessible via a QR code or email.
- Nuisance Midge Population and Remediation Funding Limits: Sec. Atticks discussed the emergence of millions of water-propagated nuisance midges in eastern Baltimore County, southern Harford County, and northern Cecil County, noting that drought and higher water salinity temporarily lowered population growth. DNR reported that commercial harvest in the area does not significantly impact fish species that feed on midge larvae, meaning fish predation remains active but midges are simply outpacing treatment. Allie Cavanagh discovered that current state funding for midge

remediation is inadequate and earmarked strictly for Baltimore County, establishing a consensus that a statute change and additional funding will be required as the midge issue spreads.

- Farm Deer Crop Damage and Mitigation Strategies: Sec. Atticks addressed severe deer crop damage impacting the farm economy across Maryland, particularly on the mid and lower Eastern Shore. To combat this, the state is deploying tools enabled by a 2026 bill from Delegate Boyce that established hotspot designations. DNR outlined available management tools, including deer cooperator permits (which allow night hunting and the use of thermal optics and rifles outside regular seasons), standard crop damage permits, and expanded hunting on public lands and state parks using bows and crossbows. Furthermore, MDA and DNR developed a matchmaking program—with over 2,200 approved hunters signed up—to connect farmers with qualified hunters to increase hunting access on farm properties.
- **Legislative Subcommittees and Upcoming Session Priorities**: Allie Cavanagh provided updates on subcommittee meetings, noting that the agritourism and value-added agriculture subcommittee discussed implementing House Bill 272, while the labor, education, and development subcommittee focused on the family program and heat stress standards. Ally Kavanagh noted that the next round of subcommittee meetings is scheduled for October 1st, with email coordination underway to set times in preparation for the 2027 legislative session.
- **Presentations from Agencies**
 - MDE Stormwater and Agritourism Regulations: Les Knapp -MDE- provided an update on MDE stormwater and wastewater regulations, highlighting that forthcoming major stormwater management regulations will include a modified model definition of agritourism reviewed and approved by MDA. The definition requires agritourism to be secondary to primary agricultural farming activities and excludes camping, guest farms, and incidental outdoor stays because they fall under separate regulatory bodies

like the Maryland Department of Health. Additionally, MDE is incorporating cropland sheet flow management, developing a standard plan menu for occasional grass parking lots to eliminate engineering studies, and establishing built-in flexibility and emergency regulatory placeholders for wastewater and portable toilet standards to align with MDH. Responding to an inquiry on determining secondary agritourism status, Les Knapp -MDE- explained that MDE will apply common sense on a case-by-case basis and develop future guidance.

- Maryland Department of Health Implementation of HB 272 On-Farm Retail Food Service Licenses: Cliff Mitchell -MDH- reported on the implementation of House Bill 272 to create a new on-farm retail food service license, noting that MDH has met weekly with MDA, MDE, and local health departments and held eight public meetings across the state. The draft regulations clarify the operational distinction between on-farm retail food service and full-scale restaurants, incorporate water and wastewater flexibilities developed with MDE, and establish an aggressive timetable to meet the January 31, 2027 implementation deadline. Cliff Mitchell -MDH- committed to circulating the draft regulations and an accompanying guidance document and Q&A to internal stakeholders and the Farm Bureau for informal comments prior to the formal register comment period. Joshua L Parker -MDH- raised questions regarding operational attributes, which prompted Cliff Mitchell -MDH- to confirm that explanatory guidance documents will be included.
- Maryland Department of Labor Heat Illness Prevention Standards: Cristina Campbell -LABOR- delivered an overview of the Maryland heat illness prevention standard, detailing employer requirements for monitoring the heat index (starting at 80°F, with increased measures at 90°F and 100°F) using National Weather Service data or the NIOSH/OSHA heat tool app. Employers must provide rest, shade, and drinking water (32 ounces per person per hour). For high

heat conditions at 90°F, employers must provide mandatory rest breaks and/or alternative cooling control measures (such as misting fans, cooling vests, portable AC units, and cooling PPE) especially when shade is unsafe or infeasible, such as during roadside work. At 100°F, regulations mandate 15 minutes of rest every hour, though alternative cooling controls may be used to reduce core body temperature in lieu of or in addition to mandatory breaks. Cristina Campbell -LABOR- also emphasized worker acclimatization, proper hydration - a cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes, emergency response procedures for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and training resources including a MOSH webinar and a Montgomery County campaign resource.

- **Agency & GICA Member Updates**

- DNR Secretary Josh Kurtz announced an open RFP for a projected agricultural opportunity at Point Lookout State Park, encompassing 111 total acres divided into independent fields, with a site visit scheduled for interested bidders.
- Representatives from the University of Maryland reported on the agricultural nutrient management program, an upcoming summit at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum Heights on January 14th, the final year of a USDA extension internship program that supported 47 interns over five years, a 4H robotics program automating oyster production, and active recruitments for the associate dean for academic affairs and the environment and natural resources grant program leader.
- Rebecca Flora -MDP- expressed support for permitting progress and noted attendance at an upcoming ice cream trail event.
- Stacy L Rodgers -DHS- announced joining the team and expressed an interest in supporting young people and cultivating the next generation in relevant career areas.

- Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm stated they had no updates as a first-time attendee, but confirmed they are hosting an upcoming Board of Regents meeting scheduled for September 18th.
- Anupa Geevarghese -LABOR- provided an update stating that eligible employees will be able to take up to 12 weeks of paid, job-protected leave starting January 1, 2028. Employer registration officially opens on September 1st, with 3,500 employers already registered. Additional critical milestones include withholdings beginning January 1, 2027, the first contributions and quarterly wage and hour reports due April 30, 2027, and benefits becoming available on January 1, 2028.
- Prem Bhandari shared that the University of Maryland Eastern Shore is organizing an agritourism conference from November 15 through 17 in Cambridge, Maryland, and asked attendees to share the information across their networks.
- Leslie SessomParks -MSDE- reported that local food exchange technology development is progressing, with testing expected in late winter into early spring, a full operational launch planned for summer, and an awaited date for the farmer solicitation posting.
- Amy Crone, representing the agricultural commission, announced an upcoming full commission meeting in a couple of weeks following committee meetings held a few weeks prior, alongside an October tour with openness to location suggestions in Queen Anne's County.
- Susanne Richards reported that agriculture programs are operating in all 24 local education agencies for the first time in a long time, including a new program at Chopticon High School in St. Mary's County. The State Board of Education will consider new program standards on October 29th following a public comment period earlier in the month, while work continues on industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeships through a Department of Labor

grant. Additionally, a scholarship golf tournament is scheduled for September 9th.

- Stephanie Jones - QAC reported that the Maryland Association of Counties conference held in Ocean City focused heavily on data center and artificial intelligence information, and noted that the planners affiliate is preparing for the 2027 legislative session.
- Joshua L Parker -MDH- stated that the Maryland Association of County Health Officers reviewed and responded to a spreadsheet distributed by the Maryland Department of Health. County representatives highlighted that health licensing, stormwater management, agritourism, and deer management remain key areas of focus for farmers.
- Jo-Ann Chason thanked Secretary Atticks for addressing specialty crops not covered by USDA freeze programs, noted ongoing work on a deer pressure survey with the Department of Natural Resources, and acknowledged collaboration with the Department of Labor on heat stress issues. Jo-Ann Chason also highlighted the ongoing Maryland State Fair, encouraging attendance at the Young Farmer Booth for ice cream at the Cow Palace and the animal birthing center. Sec. Atticks added that fairs provide an opportunity for 4-H youth to present raised animals for market sales and noted a need for better public promotion regarding the educational purpose of agricultural fairs.
- Kelsey Keadle announced that the 2026 rural readiness program cohort ended with applications due on August 1st, leading to 6 to 8 training sessions scheduled between September and December. Community investment training applications submitted in July will undergo a selection process from August to October.
- Heather Bois Bruskin announced that a partnership between the Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience and Marbidco regarding a local food aggregation grant has been finalized. A new facility will be established in Montgomery County

to create 10 new jobs and connect local farms to institutional buyers, with an official press release expected the following week.

- Katie Stevens shared that Frederick County is working on a feasibility study for a center for farm retail innovation modeled after Wisconsin's dairy innovation center, with public outreach planned for the fall. Furthermore, they are partnering with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture to launch a farm-to-food accelerator program running from January to April of the next year.
- Ashley Drakeford reported that Capital Market has collaborated with the Prince George's County Soil Conservation District to host four farmer forums, aggregating data on challenges from federal government changes and compiling policy recommendations. Additionally, they are working with faith-based institutions to connect with local farmers and map out the food system chain to expand capacity for cold storage and commercial kitchen space.
- Margaret Todd shared via chat details about the upcoming Farmland Institution Research and Policy Symposium scheduled at the Department of Agriculture on Wednesday, September 2nd, from 9:00 to 3:30.
- **Upcoming Meeting Dates:** Sec. Atticks announced upcoming meeting dates of October 1st for subcommittees and December 3rd for the next full commission meeting, before entertaining and passing a motion to adjourn.

Meeting notes were supported by Gemini and edited for accuracy by Allie Cavanagh - MDA-.