

Oct 1, 2026

Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture

Environment & Natural Resources Subcommittee Meeting

October 1, 2026

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Attendees: Garry Aime, Allie Cavanagh, Jo-Ann Chason, Nadya Chehab, Rachel Felver, Hannah Fuchs, Deborah Herr Cornwell, Elizabeth Hoffman, Steve McHenry, Lydia McPherson, Joseph Milone, Nancy K. Nunn, Vincent Pacheco, Harrison Palmer, Jessica Richards, Susanne Richards, Matthew Stegman

Agenda  GICA - ENR Sub. - Agenda - 10.1.26

Slide Deck  GICA - ENR Sub. Meeting - 10.1.26.pptx

Meeting records

 (Virtual) GICA Environment & Natural Resources Subcommittee - 2026/10/0...

Summary

The meeting covered schedule changes and LEEF program updates and federal executive order implications.

Meeting Schedule and Minutes: Rescheduling of the final GICA meeting and unanimous approval of July 2026 minutes.

LEEF Program Overview: Introduction of the Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) program and tiered financial incentives.

Federal Executive Order Discussion: Review of the new federal executive order replacing the 2009 Chesapeake Bay restoration framework.

Detailed Notes

- **Approval of July 2026 Subcommittee Meeting Minutes:** The July 2026 subcommittee meeting minutes were unanimously approved following a motion by Jo-Ann Chason and a second by Susanne Richards.
- **LEEF Program**
 - Overview and Objectives: Elizabeth A Hoffman -MDA- provided an update on the Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) program, established under the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act that went into effect on July 1, 2025. The program aims to reduce nutrients, mitigate farm emissions, increase carbon sequestration, and align environmental goals with farm profitability through two core components: environmentally focused conservation best management practices and community best practices. The community best practices are divided into three pillars supporting resilient food systems, education and literacy, and on-farm research and trials. Applications for farms seeking certification will open in the fall, with certified farms announced in the spring.
 - Incentive Framework and Certification Review: Responding to an inquiry from Joseph Milone -COMMERCE-, Elizabeth A Hoffman -MDA- explained that farm certification requires a nutrient management compliance review, an on-farm visit, verification of conservation practices, and confirmation of community best practices. Certified farms can unlock tiered financial incentives—tentatively structured around baseline, silver, gold, and platinum tiers with illustrative amounts ranging from \$3,000 to

\$10,000—to reinvest back into farm operations and level up certifications.

- Adaptive Management and Review Cycle: Responding to a question from Allie Cavanagh -MDA- regarding program adaptation, Elizabeth A Hoffman -MDA- detailed that LEEF operates on an annual program year with applications opening in the fall, reviews occurring over the winter, and certifications announced each spring. Advisory committees will meet quarterly to evaluate new scientific practices, such as agroforestry, allowing the program framework to remain flexible and adapt toward the state's 2040 bay restoration milestone.

- **Federal Executive Order on the Chesapeake Bay**

- Overview: Matthew Stegman presented an overview of the federal executive order issued by the administration on September 16, which repealed the 2009 Obama-era executive order 13508 that previously guided federal and state bay restoration partnerships. Matthew Stegman noted that the new order replaces the prior framework with simpler, less directed language, creating significant uncertainty and concern regarding future agency coordination and policy direction.
- Implications of the Federal Executive Order: Discussing the executive order's agricultural impacts, Matthew Stegman noted that while specific directives for the United States Department of Agriculture to focus working lands resources on high-impact geographies were removed, the order's vague wording leaves it unclear whether resource allocations will change.

- **Upcoming Meeting Dates:** Allie Cavanagh -MDA- announced that due to space availability challenges, the final full commission GICA meeting of the year has been rescheduled to November 30, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Maryland Department of Agriculture headquarters in Annapolis, with a virtual option available.

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