



Maryland Agricultural Commission Minutes January 10th, 2024

Present:

Amy Crone
Chris Rhodes
Cliff Newsome
Dr. Darren Jarboe
Dr. Marianne Bailey O'Malley
Frank Allnut
Hunter Pusey
Joe Dymek
Johnny Shockley

Kellie Hinkle
Kelly Dudeck
Levi Sellers (Zoom)
Paula Linthicum
Rachel Lipman (Zoom)
Raj Kathuria
Russell Shlagel (Zoom)
Sean Hough (Zoom)
Stefanie Reiser (Zoom)

Absent:

Tom Mullineaux
Ann Merryman
Kelly Lewis
John Murphy

Mike Levensgood
Gordon Kretser
Far Nasir

MDA Staff:

Sec. Kevin Atticks
Steve Connelly
Rachel Jones
Jessica Hackett
Hans Schmidt

Cassie Shirk
Harrison Palmer
Heather Barthel
Martin Proulx

Guests:

Emma Jagoz, Moon Valley Farm
Jonathan Cribbs, AFP
Charlotte Davis, RMC
Dave Nemazie, UMCES
Brooks Long, Deliteful Dairy
Dr. Moises Cairo, UMES
Katie Stevens, FCOED

Shelby Watson, SMADC
Scott Knoche, PEARL
Zach Evans, DCA
Steve Levitsky, Phospholutions
Elizabeth Thilmany, UMD
Stacy Kubofcik, MARBIDCO

Call to Order:

The January 2024 Maryland Agricultural Commission meeting was called to order by Kelly Dudeck at 10:05 am.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the December 2023 meeting minutes was made by Joe Dymek second by Raj Kathuria at 10:08 AM

Presentation from Steve Levitsky, Phospholutions

Commodity Reports:

Ag Education- Joseph Dymek:

- **MAEF** – Reported by Susanne Richards, MAEF Executive Director
 - MAEF annual calendar mailing has gone out. Additional copies are available through our website.
 - Application periods for the MAEF Academic and Seibel Scholarships are open through March 25.
 - Nominations/applications for the Velma Clark Award for Excellence in Teaching About Agriculture are being accepted through March. If you know an elementary school teacher who is doing an excellent job of incorporating agriculture into curriculum as a context for teaching, nominate them or encourage them to apply! Winner receives a \$500 classroom stipend and travel expenses to the next National Ag in the Classroom Conference.
 - Please consider being a volunteer reader during the 2024 Ag Literacy Week! Volunteer readers purchase a book/kit from the MAEF website, volunteer to read to an elementary classroom and conduct a classroom activity related to the book and farming. The book and activity are left with the classroom for future students to enjoy. It's a fun experience and one we recommend.
- **FFA** – Terrie Shank, Maryland FFA Executive Director, MAEF Asst. Director High School Program
 - Four MD FFA State Officers are currently in Australia learning more about their agriculture as they are participating in the International Leadership Seminar sponsored by the National FFA.
 - Fall Membership is 2160 student members. Chapter Advisors have until the end of February to add their second semester students to their rosters.
 - February 22-24 MD FFA will be hosting the National FFA Southern Region Vice-President Carter Howell at events at Chesapeake College, Washington County Technical HS, Maryland State Fairgrounds and Gwynn Park HS.

- February 28, 2024 is the MD FFA Advocacy Day in Annapolis. Chapters are currently signing up to attend tours, legislative visits and committee meetings.
- April 13, 2024 are the MD FFA Spring Career Events at Westminster High School from 8am-5pm.
- June 24-26, 2024 will be the 96th MD FFA State Convention at the Wisp Resort in Garrett County and Garrett College.

Agribusiness- Thomas Mullineaux:

- No Report

Agritourism - Kelly Dudeck:

- GROW & FORTIFY → CULTIVATE+CRAFT
 - Grow & Fortify, a firm specializing in consultation and business development in the value-added agriculture industry, closed its doors at the end of 2023. Founded in 2015 by Kevin Atticks, who now serves as Maryland's Secretary of Agriculture, Grow & Fortify has played a pivotal role in nurturing and empowering value-added agriculture businesses while fortifying the state's craft alcohol industry. Likely to be announced next week, a new firm named Cultivate+Craft will be filling that void. Kelly Dudeck and Janna Howley, both of whom had been with G&F for nine years, will be spearheading this new venture and look forward to updating you all along the way.
- LEGISLATIVE
 - With the 2024 Legislative Session starting today, we will be scanning bills to ensure there isn't anything being introduced that would negatively impact Maryland's agritourism industry. We will be weighing in on the bill that addresses the SDAT issue, where agricultural producers (mainly those involved in value-added agriculture) have been reassessed, from agricultural to commercial. While we have been very involved, along with MDA, in this workgroup, we are not thrilled with the concessions being asked of the Ag industry. There will be a bill introduced to make permanent some of the privileges that were extended to the craft alcohol industry during COVID, on behalf of the Maryland Wineries Association, The Maryland Distillers Guild, and the Brewers Association of Maryland.
- COUNTY SPECIFIC
 - An issue has surfaced in Montgomery County through a newly introduced zoning text amendment (ZTA 23-09) that has the agricultural community divided. This bill would allow overnight farm stays in Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve. One of the issues with the bill is the definition, or lack thereof, for Accessory Structure and its level of permanence.
- Cultivate+Craft will work with Montgomery County to help resolve this issue, as the optics of Ag vs Ag aren't good for anyone.
- Baltimore County commissioned Grow & Fortify/Cultivate+Craft to do an extensive

review of policies and regulations impacting value-added agriculture, agritourism, and far-based craft beverages. The county is looking for recommendations on how to better support these industries, to encourage more business to choose Baltimore County, or to encourage and support already existing farm businesses to scale up. We will be presenting our report and recommendations next week and will then make that report publicly available. We are super encouraged by Baltimore County and their forward thinking, and hope that other counties explore this option.

Aquaculture - Johnny Shockley:

- ***Lessons learned from a rough season for oyster health***
 - ***By: Ryan Carnegie of Virginia Institute of Marine Science***
 - The report highlights the worst season for oyster health in a decade, especially in the Mid Atlantic. He notes that dermo and MSX reached elevated levels and intensity at the same time resulting in sharply increased disease pressure on both the cultured and wild oyster populations. However, despite the myriad impacts, Carnegie shared an optimistic perspective. He highlights findings from a VIMS study (sponsored by NOAA) showing that oysters that were produced in intensively cultured, high disease areas of the Chesapeake Bay displayed modest levels of MSX and levels well below the wild oysters from the same area. He also notes that MSX is generally absent during routine health certifications completed to certify the absence of disease for transport across state lines. Also, cultured oysters derived from disease-resistant brood stock show lower levels of disease within the areas of high wild oyster mortality. Carnegie was very optimistic about the progress made in reducing MSX and Dermo through selective breeding programs. However, he emphasizes the importance of continuing to develop more refined lines of animals in collaboration with the industry.
- **INNOVATION:**
 - **Solar Oyster Platform System (SOPS):**
 - Solar Oyster Platform System is a platform designed by Ecologics and Marine Applied Physics Corporations, both Maryland based companies. SOPS was designed to capture solar energy to run a system of chain ladders suspended in the water column and rotated perpetually to create an intertidal setting for oysters. The process allows for controlled air drying and tumbles of the animals resulting in a high-grade product. The system was tested near Baltimore's Inner Harbor and the oysters grown in that system were not for human consumption showed about 90% survival rate with very solid shell and meat qualities. Ecologics recently reached out to Blue Oyster Environmental to conduct the final testing so that the system can go to market. The testing will take place in the open waters of Fishing Bay in Dorchester County. We anticipate that the SOPS system along with other international systems will quickly revolutionize the aquaculture industry.
- **Conferences/Events:**
 - **Chesapeake Oyster Alliance** (November 2023) hosted their 3rd Annual Symposium at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge Maryland. The

Chesapeake Oyster Science Symposium brings together people from the oyster world to begin re-establishing Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay as a world leader in the oyster industry. There were 90 in person attendees and 390 national and international virtual attendees. Topic areas included restoration and farming emphasizing hatchery science, restoration monitoring opportunities in nutrient trading related to aquaculture and restoration.

- **Upcoming Events:**

- January 10-12th Northeast Aquaculture Conference and Expo (NACE) and 43rd Milford Aquaculture Seminar
 - Providence, RI
- January 12-14th 49th East Coast Commercial Fishermen and Aquaculture Expo
 - Rowland Powell Convention - Ocean City, Maryland
- February 18-21 Aquaculture America 2024
 - San Antonio, TX
- February 24-Mar. 1 Oyster South Symposium
 - Contemporary Art Center
 - New Orleans, LA
- Aquaculture is pushing to work as a partner with agriculture and wants to be recognized as such.
 - This industry takes the brunt of the cleanup work since it is the only opportunity for nutrients to be removed once they are in the water. It deserves to have a seat at the table when decisions are being made on land that affect their work in the water.

Bio-Fuel - Rajneesh Kathuria:

- International Biomass Conference will take place March 4-6th at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

Consumer – Kellie Hinkle:

- 2024 Food Trends
 - As expected, everywhere we turn right now, the experts are forecasting something for 2024, food trends aren't getting a pass. Solo dining is expected to be on the rise and one can only assume that will translate to solo cooking and smaller portioning on grocery shelves. Food retailers might consider meal prep packaging options for singles, fewer bulk purchasing promotions, and little food luxuries.
 - What was old is new again on steroids in 2024. We will continue to see foods and brands return that conjure a sense of nostalgia; in many cases we will see a new twist, from Pop Rocks in Firecracker Popcorn to Exploding Bon Bons. Better Homes and Gardens jumped on the trend late in 2023-nothing speaks summertime louder, than a family reunion corn roast. The new twist on summertime sweet corn is corn ribs, which are showing up on menus in St. Mary's County.
 - A trend many outlets are forecasting is putting actual vegetables in the veggie burger. Generally speaking, brands are simplifying labels to just a handful of ingredients, replacing complex meat alternatives with mushrooms, walnuts, and

legumes. This is likely an outcome of the ongoing health span trend which always ramps up at the beginning of January. St. Mary's County chocolate maker BonAppeSweet is experiencing much success within this space, distributing chocolate sweetened with dates and less than five ingredients through large grocery retailers across the U.S.

- Finally, we will be keeping it spicy in 2024. All major food outlets are predicting the global pepper trend only getting hotter. "Specialty varieties like Scorpion Peppers, Guajillo or Hungarian Goathorn Peppers are found fresh, whole, ground or pickled, and a new wave of botana sauces and chili oils are popping up in condiment aisles nationwide." Local growers might add a few more hot pepper varieties to their seed orders and value-added food producers might consider recipes for pepper-infused everything.
- Maryland Association of Counties Housing Subcommittee is aware of the potential of the Governor's housing packages unintended consequence for incentivizing housing development on ag land and opposes that practice.

Dairy I – Vacant:

Dairy II- Vacant:

Direct Farm Market - Amy Crone:

- The rain means an early mud season and washing out of fields; some folks take these quieter weeks and get off the farm for some R&R.
- For the farmers markets that do stay open year round, you can see lists [here](#) for inspiration of what's in season before you shop the farmers market and the full list of market dates is [here](#).
- Winter CSAs are accepting members; they are [listed](#) on Maryland's Best for folks to find one near them and inquire if they offer options year-round.
- [Applications](#) are open for SMADC's Maryland Market Money program for the 2024 season.
- Conference season is in full swing; see list below.
- Grants / Opportunities / Conferences (in chronological order):
 - Discrimination Financial Assistance Program is now accepting applications from farmers and ranchers who experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending prior to January 1, 2021. Visit www.22007apply.gov or call 1-800-721-0970 for more details. The application deadline has been extended to January 13, 2024.
 - [FutureHarvest Conference](#) Registration is next week: 1/18-20, 2024
 - [MidAtlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention](#) is the last week of January: 1/30 – 2/1, 2024
 - [PASA Conference](#): 2/8-10, 2024
 - [MDA Farmers Market Conference](#): 3/12/2024

- MDA announced the [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program](#), with applications due on 3/15/24
- Ongoing challenges for this sector: processing dates, weather, labor

Equine (Horse Breeding) - Ann Merryman:

- No Report.

Farm Bureau - Paula Linthicum:

- *Legislative Concerns & Priority Issues:*
 - In December, MDFB leadership and Secretary Atticks met with Governor Moore where agricultural concerns and priorities were discussed.
 - PFAS and Solar Siting are highly important topics of concern to the Ag Community. MDFB appreciates MDA's proactive approach to these concerns.
- *Timing of Fall Cover Crop Payments:*
 - For years, farmers across the state have discussed concern about timing of Fall Cover Crop payments. MD farmers choosing split cover crop payments rarely receive fall Cover Crop payments by December 31st. An important accounting principle is matching revenue and expenses in the same year. Cover crop expense and cover crop payments infrequently occur in the same fiscal year.
 - Of specific concern is aerial seeded cover crop in standing corn occurring by September 10th. Aerial seeding is more expensive than other cover crop seeding practices and has a measurable stand well before the early November Cover Crop Deadline. An accelerated fall payment would be greatly appreciated by farmers aerial seeding standing corn by September 10th.
 - Is it possible for MDA to review the cover crop approval/payment process for efficiency?
- *Maryland Farm Bureau Day in Annapolis February 7, 2024:*
 - A day of agriculture advocacy. Farmers from across the state will meet with legislators/staff to discuss issues of concern and how those issues impact their farm businesses.

Field Crops – Chris Rhodes:

- Wheat acres are projected to down 40-50% from last year due to price.
- All commodity prices are down.
- Soybeans have dropped \$1.50 in the past couple months.
- Corn is also way down due to lack of demand and many other factors.
- Markets will be soon determined with the Jan 12 USDA report known as the big one, It will make big changes to the market one way or the other.
- Shore Rivers and Chesapeake Bay Foundation are drafting a bill that would increase the critical area buffers from 25ft to 200ft. Early estimate state this would take 8600+ acres out of production.

Food Processing – Vacant:

Forestry – Hunter Pusey:

- Today is also the opening day of the 2024 Session of the Maryland General Assembly. No doubt agriculture and forestry will be scrutinized from a policy perspective, as always; meaning, “head’s up rural resource-based industries” for the next 90 days. Never forget the urban mindset dominates Annapolis b/c only a small percentage of State law makers hail from rural Maryland.
- Couple of things that might be on the 2024 horizon relevant to this observation: (1) a declining Chesapeake Bay means there will be proposals to mitigate its decline; (2) ways/means of meeting Maryland’s renewable energy goals from solar arrays to woody biomass energy production; and (3) ideas of reducing State spending in view of reduced revenue collections as reported by the Comptroller.
- Ideally, agriculture and forestry can work together this Session in addressing issues of mutual concern/interest...AFI pledges to do so on its part.
- For the record, the principal means of reducing State spending is the annual **Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act**. This Act has been around since the economic recession of 1990’s and has become an annual statutory mechanism for reducing State spending independent of the annual Budget Bill per se. We must all keep a watchful eye on the 2024 version of “BRFA” because its easy to be fiscally blind-sided by this Act, especially when it comes to existing mandated and discretionary State funding.
- As reported at the December 13, 2023, meeting, you all are invited to AFI’s annual legislative luncheon – this year being jointly sponsored by the Hunters of Maryland – as shown on the attached flier. As of this writing, it appears the January 18th event will be well attended by lawmakers and Administration officials.

Hemp- Matthew ‘Levi’ Sellers:

- The hemp industry has been pleased with the extension of the 2018 farm bill.
- Looking forward to working with partners during the current legislative session.

Horticulture – Vacant:

Livestock- Sean Hough:

- Prop 12 law has gone into effect in California restricting pork sales.
 - California consumes 13% of the pork sold in the U.S.
 - This does not have a current effect on Maryland but could in the future.

Nursery I- J. Kelly Lewis:

- I have little to report this month. 2023 finished with strong sales for most nursery operations. The relatively good weather allowed late season harvesting and planting.
- Most operations are currently preparing for MANTS (Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show) which takes place in Baltimore between January 10-12. This is the largest and most well attended Nursery trade show in the country. I expect by the show’s end, we will have a good feel for the coming season and 2024.

Nursery II- John Murphy:

- No Report.

Organic Farming – Emma Jagoz:

- Overall there market is strong and growing for organic in the state, region and nation
 - Record sales every year for organic across the board ([Organic Trade Association](#))
 - Certified organic is up to 6% of total food sales in the US
 - Sales of organic foods are far outpacing the growth of non-organic foods, at 8.7% annual growth rate compared to overall food industry growth expectation of 3.8% through 2027
 - Organic produce is at the top of all organic sales (\$22B out of >\$61B), 15% of all veg and fruit sales in US
 - Millennial parents are the top buyers of organic products
 - Organic farms overall across the nation are increasing in acreage (5% increase in the nation from 2019-2022) - [USDA](#)
 - There's 62 certified organic farms in Maryland (fiscal year 2022)
 - Pennsylvania organic sales have skyrocketed over the past 10 years, competing with Washington state for the #2 spot (next to California) in the nation for organic
 - Noteworthy especially because many PA growers are selling into Maryland and across it into DC and NoVA
- Top organic products across US: all are trending up in sales growth
 - Milk
 - chickens/broilers
 - Eggs
 - Apples
 - Corn for grain
 - Strawberries
- Top ways of selling organic:
 - Direct to consumer
 - Direct to retail or institutions
 - Value-added products
- Top organic production practices employed
 - Buffer strips
 - Applied animal manures
 - Use water management practices
 - Plant and incorporate green manures
 - No-till or minimum till
 - Produce or use mulch and/or compost
- Challenges
 - Top challenge faced by organic farmers: regulatory issues
 - With new organic standards coming into place with an update in 2023, these may be exacerbated in 2024 and beyond
 - Alternatives to the label
 - Among many organic growers, distrust of the changes in the requirements, namely allowing for some CAFO operations and hydroponic operations to become certified organic fueled a new movement called “Real Organic”
 - “Regenerative” momentum continues despite having a universal definition
- Opportunities for organic growers are abundant

- Grant opportunities abound for organic farmers – costing attention and discernment to filter through and apply for
 - [Organic Market Development](#) grant via USDA was new in 2023 and only available for organic or transitionally organic growers with a \$75M pot
- Cost shares and supportive programs
 - Cover crop programs are expanding to include small-scale growers
- Organic is defined as a “value add” and therefore all USDA opportunities for “value-added agriculture” are available for organic farms
- Many complicated and untimely annual USDA grant opportunities (such as [VAPG](#)) are adding “fast track” applications to ease the burden on farmer applicants

Poultry I- Zach Evans:

- Mid-shore there’s been a lot of public discussion between the public and poultry industry regarding the application of soil amendments.
- Echos concerns that were heard in the lower eastern shore a few years ago.
- Delmarva Chicken Association will be hosting a meeting to address those concerns and be proactive on the issue.
 - Date: January 18th, 2024

Poultry II- Far Nasir:

- No Report.

Related Services I – Frank Allnutt:

- No Report.

Related Services II – Stefanie Reiser:

- No Report.

State Grange- Clifford Newsome:

- Reports and paperwork have occupied the time of many Granges across the country.
- Three Grange and our state Grange received national awards in 2023.
 - Maryland was one of seven states to report an increase in membership.
- Now, we need to maintain this level and prepare for our 150th Anniversary.
 - Many details have been completed but we will hear more this Saturday when more ideas and committees are formed.
 - We will present local histories of Granges across the state during this year.
- Some issues will also be brought to the attention of local and state governments.
 - Funding for education will get attention during this year’s Maryland legislative session.
 - The answer is not fighting the whole problem at once.
 - Finding an affordable solution for all counties is necessary. Agriculture needs to be supported by other state agencies.
 - Funding for many 4 H programs has been decreased because funds are needed elsewhere.
 - Now a state and county funding problem.

- Cleanup of bay waters is still being blamed on farmers & no reports of other polluters.
- Are there better solutions to clean up pollution and provide a better education than to spend money which many counties do not have.

Turf- Gordon Kretser:

- No Report.

University of Maryland – Dean Craig Beyrouthy | Dr. Darren Jarboe:

- The Agricultural Nutrient Management Program (ANMP) has received requests for 467 nutrient management plans and about 35% have been completed. An ANMP update was presented at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Nutrient Management Updates in Annapolis on December 19 and Midway on January 9.
- The Agriculture and Food Systems Extension (AgFS) In-Service took place on December 15. An AgFS-focused futuring activity was facilitated by Dr. Marie Ruenenapp, Extension specialist and co-director of the Michigan State University Extension Urban Collaborators Program managed by the Urban and Regional Planning Program. This was the initial step in the AgFS strategic planning process for 2025–29.
- The AgFS Program has 12 positions in various stages of recruitment. Candidates have been selected for the urban agriculture farm and agribusiness management specialist and urban agriculture production specialist positions and are proceeding through human resources processing. The Charles County AgFS educator has been reposted on eTerp, the UMD employment website, and is open to receive applications. The best consideration date is January 31. The AgFS vegetable production specialist and ruminant livestock specialist positions are expected to be posted on the eTerp around March 1. The Caroline County AgFS educator position description is being revised and will post in late spring.
- The faculty specialist, ANMP program director announcement is expected to start accepting applications later this week. The coordinator (nutrient management advisor) announcement posted on eTerp and is open to receive applications. There are positions available in Caroline, Montgomery, Wicomico/Worcester, and Washington Counties, and statewide. The best consideration date for these positions is February 4.

Vegetable – Russell Shlagel:

- A few growers have started seeding greenhouses with onion and leek transplants as well as some tomato and pepper plants to be used in high tunnel.
- There are some winter markets that will go through till Spring to a dedicated following of buy local customers.
- With the recent no plastic bag laws enacted in PG and AA county, farmers are seeking clarity. No exceptions were made for farmers markets or farm stands. Also, if you're involved in any type of food drop programs packaging for 200-family meal kits will increase from 40 cents to \$20-\$30 per drop. When you're working on recovery costs this cuts margins and will affect the food insecure.

- We are in the middle of conference season. Yesterday's Md Best Buyer/Grower event was held, and I hope to be able to see some positive results from that. There are plenty of excellent opportunities afforded to us by MD cooperative extension, MDA, and industry trade partners to get our credits for nutrient management vouchers, crop protection applications and food safety compliance. Don't waste the winter, get your paperwork in order.
- The one thing it seems farmers never have enough of is time. I don't understand for the life of me why these excellent learning opportunities offered by the MD cooperative extension are not recorded and posted on you tube or someplace so they can be watched and used as a reference later when convenient. My pet peeve.
- MDA currently has a survey out for specialty crop grant funding priorities. Closes 1/16/2024
- The Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) Program provides assistance to specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety program expenses in 2022 and 2023. This program closes Jan. 31, 2024, additional information can be found online or in your local FSA office.
- Finding reliable legal workers for Ag jobs continues to be a struggle.
- If you rely on H2-A labor, you should already be working on next year's paperwork. Changes with the AWER calculation and job classification continue to dissuade some growers from using the program. This year, 2024, H2-A laborers will be paid \$17.20/hour.
- Now is the time to get those "Winter Jobs" done that you've been putting off all Spring and Summer.
- Deer continue to be a problem and not just to the Ag community. This past week in Charles County a traffic accident involving a deer proved to be fatal when the deer was struck and flew through another vehicle during the mid-afternoon commute.
- The good news is the days are about 12 minutes longer since the Solstice, Spring is just around the corner.

Veterinary – Dr. Marianne B. O'Malley:

- Veterinarians are monitoring the Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease which seemed to spike in December. Cases have been declining but no new information including a cause or treatment has been reported.
- The Anne Arundel County Plastic Bag Reduction Act does affect veterinarians as well. Vets must charge a minimum of \$0.10 per bag.
- USDA maps represent where there are shortages of large animal vets which have further implications on grant funding opportunities. Maryland has not been keeping this information up to date which has excluded these vets and practices from those opportunities.
- There are issues with people on the shore who have been practicing veterinary acts but are not vets, issues like this need to come before the Maryland Vet Board to be addressed.
- Veterinary Shortage
 - Vets are not adequately prepared to start work the day that they graduate.

- Often, larger small-animal practices are recruiting vets in their junior year and offering signing bonuses, which help the individual but take the vets away from the underserved areas who get less attention.

Viticulture – Rachel Lipman:

- Proposed technical bill in the Maryland legislature to fix the Wine & Vineyard Economic Development Fund
- Tri-Industry bill to remove sales caps for spirits & beer in the state that have been prohibitive to shipping within the state.

Legislative Priorities:

Issues of concern from the Maryland Agricultural Commission:

- Prop 12 or similar legislation restricting sale of products in the state unless they meet certain criteria.
- Increasing buffers in the critical area that restrict agriculture.
- Management of deer and other pests.
- Solar mandates and increased pressure on agricultural land.
- Federal level – Childhood Nutrition Act that funds the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, currently federal delegation is trying to figure out how to adjust the figures down from pandemic levels.

Issues of Concern from Rural Maryland Council

- Renewable energy portfolio standard
 - There are always efforts to remove anaerobic digestion, chicken litter, biomass, etc. from the suite of renewable energy sources. RMC opposes this.
- Program Open Space
 - This program funds Maryland Ag Land Preservation Foundation, in a tight budget year this program is at risk.
- Housing
 - The governor announced a large housing package. State needs a lot of workforce housing opportunities around the state, but there is concern with unintended consequences incentivizing the development of agricultural land into housing developments.

Issues being addressed by Maryland Department of Agriculture:

- Solar/ solar siting legislation.
- Setbacks stemming from the CESR report.
- Pilot programs to manage deer populations.
- PFAS and biosolid legislation.

Maryland Department of Agriculture Staff Updates:

Secretary Kevin Atticks:

- There is an ongoing perception that agriculture has a responsibility to act based on reports that come out that have to do with agriculture.
 - More often than not, these reports list findings and recommendations “to” the agricultural industry, but rarely offer to work “with” the agricultural industry.
 - The new Agriculture Committee within the Chesapeake Bay Commission will serve to keep agriculture at the table for these discussions and hold agriculture as a partner in the solution, not “the problem”.
- Deer
 - MDA is finalizing a pilot program in conjunction with sister agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other non-profits.
 - MDA’s deer management survey had approximately 200 respondents
 - Survey data proves that nearly 90% of farmers are not using the existing resources that are designed to manage the statewide herd of deer.
- Buyer Grower Expo was on 1/9
 - Over 100 farms, over 200 buyers
 - Noticed an increase in distributors looking to purchase food for higher education institutions.
- Equine
 - Maryland Thoroughbred Racetrack Operating Authority released their report in the first week of January.
 - Made recommendations for what needs to happen with horse racing in Maryland.
 - Pimlico “Plus” will be the site moving forward for Maryland horse racing, it will be demolished and then rebuilt with training facilities and various critical upgrades.
 - During the transition and 2–3-year rebuilding process, Laurel will house Maryland horse racing and the Preakness event.
 - After racing moves back to Pimlico, Laurel will be decommissioned.
 - Pimlico will be sold to the state who will form a non-profit to run it, and Preakness will be licensed to the state to use the name.
- Agritourism
 - The industry has to police itself. Agritourism is likely to generate some angst from the community, so at a minimum the industry must establish that this is only allowable on legitimate agricultural operations and bona fide farms.

Martin Proulx:

- Exploring a statewide program or roundtable to communicate to local offices of agriculture and economic development addressing value added agriculture, license, and programs.

Guest Reports:

- Dave Nemazie, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences
 - Restoration efforts:
 - UMCES with partners produced about 1.5 billion spat on shell.
 - 80% for restoration, some goes to aquaculture industry, some goes to watermen.
 - Nexus with agriculture, group looking at shoreline protection and bringing solutions.
 - Buffers help the bay and land
 - Ag land directly on the shore of the bay on the eastern shore of Maryland is a primary concern.
- Shelby Watson-Hampton, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
 - Lots of workshops and opportunities coming from SMADC in the coming year.
- Brooks Long, Deliteful Dairy
 - The price of milk is tailing off, which is typical for winter.
- Dean Moises Kairo, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
 - Board of Regents approved a 3-year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program at UMES.
 - Working now on the accreditation process to get this program operational.
- Stacy Kubofcik, Maryland Agricultural Resource Based Industry Development Corporation
 - Oyster Shucking House loan program is open and accepting applications.
 - Maryland Livestock Processing loan program is open and accepting applications.
 - MDA's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grant Program open
 - Infrastructure grants require non-federal match, MARBIDCO is working with applicants provide those matching funds for projects that include at least 4 certified local farm enterprises, or for those projects selling specifically to wholesale and institutional markets.
 - Those match applications will be available by the end of the month.

Meeting adjourned at 11:43 am by Cliff Newsome, second by Paula Linthicum.

Respectfully Submitted by Harrison B. Palmer, Executive Secretary