



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry

Office of the Secretary

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Maryland Agricultural Commission

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Maryland Agricultural Commission Minutes May 13, 2020

Present:

Agribusiness: Thomas Mullineaux
Agritourism: Kelly Dudeck
At Large Ag Service: Matthew Levi Sellers
Direct Farm Market: Amy Crone
Forestry: Elizabeth Hill
Food Processing: Cheryl DeBerry
Horticulture: Keith Ohlinger

Livestock: Sean Hough
Nursery I: James Raley
Organic Farming: Matthew Nielsen
Poultry I: Michael Levengood
Poultry II: Michelle Protani-Chesnik
Turf: Tom Warpinski

Absent:

Ag Education: Martha Clark
Aquaculture: Talmage Petty
At Large Ag Service: Frank Allnutt
Consumer: Carroll Shry Jr.
Dairy II: David Pyle
Equine: Michael Pons
Farm Bureau: Jonathan Quinn

Field Crops: Donald Maring
Nursery II: Ray Greenstreet
State Grange: Clifford Newsome Jr.
University: Dr. Craig Beyroudy
Veterinary: Dr. John Brooks
Viticulture: Matthew Corey Spies

MDA Staff:

Hans Schmidt
Steve Connelly
Julie Oberg
Cassie Shirk
Kevin Conroy
Joe Bartenfelder
Rich Colburn
Jason Schellhardt

Guest/Speakers:

Allison Roe MARBIDCO
Stacy Kubofcik MARBIDCO
Steve McHenry MARBIDCO
Jonathan Cribbs Delmarva Farmer

Approval of Minutes:

March minutes were approved 1st by Michelle Protani- Chesnik and 2nd by Elizabeth Hill with changes made to Kelly's section motion to approve minutes passed.

Commodity Reports:

Tom Mullineaux- Agribusiness:

- I spoke with a number of Agriculture Business enterprises last week located in Salisbury, Cecilton, Bel Air, Hampstead, Upper Marlboro, Mt Airy and Frederick.
- These are fertilizer, seed, crop protection, farm supplies and several Garden centers.
- All of these businesses have adapted to the mask and 6 ft spacing.
- Here's a list of comments regarding the owners/Managers thoughts on how the Virus situation has affected their businesses.
- Fertilizer, early season crop protection and No-Till burn down business has not to a great extent been affected. There is some "Belt Tightening" on fertilizer.
- Farmers for the most part will stay with their rotation's wheat-soybeans –corn and not change even though commodity prices STINK! The prevailing opinion is that commodity prices being in the stat they are is a direct result of the Corona 19 mess.
- Corn and Soybean seed sales are about flat.
- There are serious worries on the part of seed, fertilizer and chemical suppliers that when bills for goods and services are due there will be issues with farmers ability to pay.
- Feed sales: Horse feed sales are down in some places 50%. No horses coming north from Florida to race.
- Chicken feed sales are up 100% due to baby chick sales up 100%.
- Pet food sales are up slightly.
- Dairy situation is grimmer by the day. Several farmers have been forced to dump milk since dairies not picking it up! Prices continue to be below production cost.
- Several garden centers have told me that their garden plants and seed sales have been and continue to be up 30-40%. Folks are staying home and gardening.
- Early season veggies and fruit sales at stands are up.
- Two retailers have been forced to close their retail showrooms and resort to customer pick up due to employees not reporting to work. Consequently, sales are down.
- Overall, I believe the "Big Hit" will come in mid-June when bills for spring inputs for corn and soybeans come due. Stay tuned.

Levi Sellers Ag Services:

- **April MD Hemp Report**
- With April ended and May upon us MD hemp farmers are preparing for the 2020 growing season. Seeds have been started in greenhouses and clones are rooting to be transplanted in May or as soon as the weather permits. Excitement has been growing for the oncoming season, but with some caution.
- As of 4/20/20 the Maryland Department of Agriculture has approved 53 growers, 848 acres and 359,836 sq. ft. of greenhouse space with pending 16 growers 300 acres and 112,100 sq. ft. of greenhouse space for the 2020 season. That is an increase of 5 new approved applicants since early March, 48 additional acres and almost 40,000 sq. ft. extra of greenhouse space. Even with the pending applications possibly approved by the start of this growing season it seems we have a similar amount of cultivators in the state (69 licensed MD hemp producers) as we did last year, but with a lot less projected production (acreage is down 27% and greenhouse square footage is down 55.8%). This shows a more cautious approach to production for this year over last year, as many farmers are

still sitting on product (raw and extracted oil) from last year given that the demand did not meet the supply.

- Applications for the Maryland Hemp Program are still currently being processed, but with challenges created by the COVID-19 teleworking orders for the MD Dept. of Ag. Jim Drews has informed me that the processing of applications is taking longer than usual, due to the fact that mail is only received twice a week and only one person from each section is allowed in the building for three days a week. Applicants are asked to be patient during this difficult time.
- **Coronavirus Carries On**
- The introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic's strict social restrictions placed on individuals and local businesses in March carried over into April with layoffs, local businesses/retail stores closed or operating with online outlets, curbside, delivery and/or by appointment only. This lowered the sales of most MD Hemp based businesses and producers since the majority of sales were through local boutiques. Similar effects have been experienced across the nation.
- In March the federal government had classified hemp production, along with the entire food and agricultural production system, as "essential" but the classification doesn't extend to retailers selling hemp and CBD. Some retailers across the country were told to shut down during the coronavirus response and they have asked the authorities to reconsider and designate them "essential" businesses. They had pointed out that many states classify medical and recreational marijuana dispensaries as "essential" and that some customers rely on CBD products for anxiety relief during this time of crisis.
- The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$349 billion for small business Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) and Paycheck Protection Programs (PPP), but two weeks after the funds were made available (on April 3), the funds had dried up. This first round of relief funds was not open to agricultural small businesses, but a second round has since been approved and the USDA confirmed this time farmers are eligible. Thanks to the collective advocacy and efforts by Vote Hemp, Maryland Hemp Coalition, and many other national trade organizations for the hemp industry the additional \$321 billion that were replenished into the small business lending programs (i.e. the EIDL & PPP) by the federal government was also made available to hemp farmers. These assistance programs are on a first come first serve basis and farmers are encouraged to apply immediately by visiting www.sba.gov/disaster-assistance/coronavirus-covid-19.
- **Promising Research**
- A few studies have been highlighted in the news recently stating the effects of CBD potentially aiding in relief of COVID-19. One study in particular conducted by researchers at the University of Lethbridge in Southern Alberta, Canada shows promising data collected over the past four years that some extracts containing high levels of CBD and low levels of THC may help in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. The researchers say based on the preliminary data and pending further investigations, anti-inflammatory high-CBD cannabis extracts can modulate the levels of the receptors in highly relevant tissues that have now been shown to be key gateways to how the COVID-19 virus enters the body. Igor Kovalchuk, a researcher in the study stated, "Imagine a cell being a large building. Cannabinoids decrease the number of doors in the building by, say, 70 percent, so it means the level of entry will be restricted. So, therefore, you have more chance to fight it." The early discoveries indicate the potential for hemp-based products to be used for both clinical practice and at-home treatment.
- We all know that the impact of COVID-19 extends farther than the effects of the viral infection on an individual itself, but also impacts the economy and mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a parallel pandemic of fear, anxiety, and depression.

- A study conducted in Denmark, by a pair of researchers affiliated with the Nordic Cannabis Research Institute reviewed 25 clinical trials assessing the safety and efficacy of CBD in various populations. They concluded that there is some evidence that supports anxiolytic (reduce anxiety) of acute administration of oral CBD and in comparison, to other drugs, a better side effect profile was presented.
- **Interest in Hemp Grows**
- These studies highlight the extensive medicinal side of hemp while interest in the industrial side is increasing. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point have assembled a team of researchers to produce a testable textile for the military, who intends to use the plant-based textiles for seat covers, uniforms, and seat belts. This would allow for the products to be made in America, removing the need to import internationally which is particularly relevant when you consider that geopolitical tensions are currently at an all-time high. Experts claim that Wisconsin farmers, among others in the country, will reap the rewards this plant will bring.
- Another product that can be produced on the industrial side of hemp is “hemp plastic” and is increasingly becoming a viable option as an eco-friendly alternative to carbon-based plastic. Not only is this bioplastic sourced from safe and sustainable hemp plants, but it is also typically both biodegradable and recyclable. All plastics, no matter where it is derived from, require cellulose to structure the uniquely moldable, yet durable, characteristics. Hemp is a perfect replacement for petroleum, considering hemp hurds are roughly 80 percent cellulose, can be grown organically, and are non-toxic. Petroleum-based plastics contain harmful toxins like BPA, which have been linked to infertility, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and a whole slew of other negative health issues.
- Even in these troubling times hemp is providing some hope for a better future for all aspects of life, from health and healing to new opportunities and innovations.
- **Poll Info.**
- As of now we have had 32 respondents to our survey. Through that survey we have found that hemp is grown and processed in 24 jurisdictions and is most popularly grown in rural areas. 91% of the respondents were growers growing between 1-5 acres and 5 respondents stated that they are growing indoors for the 2020 season. 81% of the growers are growing for CBD production with the remaining (19%) growing for hemp fiber, seed, or grain.
- Currently the biggest issues facing the Maryland Hemp Industry, as expressed by the respondents, are sourcing funding, developing sales markets, and lack of processors. Financial assistance in the form of loans for startups are impossible to achieve. The requirements of the lending agencies require that business owners apply for loans based on revenue streams other than hemp (i.e. produce and other agricultural products) and that the producers have at least one year of experience in hemp production. Most respondents from the survey expressed that COVID-19 has made sales difficult since the existing Maryland retail stores are currently closed, making it difficult to make sales calls and market new products. Also, with other states further established in the hemp industry than Maryland producers, local businesses producing hemp-based products source raw materials from out of state with lower costs of goods. Addressing a shortage of Maryland processors for raw hemp materials would create a link between the farmers and these hemp-based consumer product producers. Processors for hemp fiber to seed/oil to CBD extraction facilities are needed across the state and the closer to the farmers the better.
- New regulations that are currently being drafted by the MDA to follow the USDA's Interim Final Rule should soon be available for public comment. A lot of concern is still surrounding this topic as some fear that new regulations will cause issues selling a product already difficult to sell. New regulations are also difficult for the MDA to

develop and enforce given the current COVID-19 work from home orders, lack of staff and funding available to the MDA for hemp specific oversight.

Kelly Dudeck- Agritourism:

- Maryland distilleries for COVID-19 have transitioned from making alcohol to hand sanitizer because the need was overwhelming.
- It did take some time to get all the required ingredients and the containers needed.
- Received an enormous amount of calls from hospitals and senior centers that are desperate to get their hands on sanitizer.
- We have produced and distributed over 70,000 gallons of sanitizer and at least 17 of the distillers continue to produce and give sanitizer to first responders and none profits that need it.
- Agritourism as a whole specifically the alcohol industry we have been keeping in touch whenever there is an update from the governor we reach out.
- We recently did a survey to get a handle on what it looking like in the agritourism section.
- 63% of members said they have had to lay off employees. This is 500 plus employees so far.
- Prior to COVID-19 most of the revenue comes from the farm. 83% of sales happened on the farm. Luckily the governor has made some exceptions for delivering products around the state and that has been a life saver.
- 86% of sales are now in the deliver and to go section. This is hopefully able to be long term.
- Talk about tasting rooms and restaurants and having enough pte to manage and having people in an out require a lot of work especially with 50% occupancy. Having people in and out requires a lot of sanitizer, cleaning, masks, and gloves.
- The tasting rooms are trying to determine what is best to wash glasses or switch to disposable.
- It is an investment to produce and make sanitizer and continue to produce for quite a while.
- The USDA requested to fill an order of sanitizer to fill over 65 hundred plants across the country.
- Here is the link for sanitizer. Please feel free to pass along - if you could pass along the text with it, that would be appreciated.
- If you could please take a moment to fill out this form, that would be extremely helpful. As you can imagine, we are hearing from folks all over the state. Our distilleries are doing their best to continue production but the needed supplies are becoming harder and harder to come by. Please note that we are trying to meet the demand of our first-responders first, followed by local government entities, those essential to the food supply, nonprofits and businesses. Once we know your needs, I will see if I can connect you with one of our distillers who are able to meet the demand.
- <https://forms.gle/doeytwQtD8HMQ1zNA>
- We also ask that you please not reach out to our distilleries directly. Almost all of them have a skeleton staff in place and are completely overwhelmed.
- Hand sanitizer is strictly liquid at this point.

Amy Crone- Direct Farm Market:

- Thanks to MDA declaring farmers markets as essential, most markets have been able to keep close to their normal seasonal schedules, with a few notable exceptions (especially in Baltimore City where larger crowds attend markets).
- Farmers markets have implemented social distancing guidelines and have been sharing best practices while also implementing arrangements such as pre-purchasing, and item bundling to minimize physical contact.
- All direct farm markets have been increasing acceptance of electronic payments, as well as federal nutrition benefits acceptance.
- With the increase in SNAP participants due to the pandemic, direct-marketing farmers and markets are taking advantage of a USDA program to accept SNAP directly; NAFMNP is also working on enabling an online portal for SNAP acceptance for farmers and markets.
- State Program: <http://dhs.maryland.gov/bureau-special-grants/mobile-point-sale-equipment-program-mposep/>
- USDA-funded program: www.marketlink.org
- A map was developed to share local food resources (markets and direct-marketing farmers) with consumers who are seeking alternatives to the grocery store and might be in search of items that are in shorter supply at the chain stores (such as meat).
- <https://bit.ly/FindaFarmerorMarketMap>
- On-farm markets are also implementing social distancing as well as partnering with other farms who have lost restaurant sales to provide additional sales and revenue outlets.
- There have been a number of national webinars, list-servs, and websites (such as resources from MDA) that share best practices that Maryland direct farm markets have been able to take advantage of - for example new design of market layouts and use of online payment systems.

Elizabeth Hill- Forestry:

- Forestry like every other aspect of agriculture has felt the impacts of COVID-19.
- People in our industry, including myself, started to panic in mid- March as we were not included in some of the first discussions about “essential services” and “food supply chain”. I want to personally thank Secretary Bartenfelder for being so responsive to my concerns and ensuring that the Administration would view our entire industry as essential critical infrastructure as deemed by the Department of Homeland Security. The CISA guidance stated that “workers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including, but limited to timber, paper, and other wood products” should continue to work as they are “crucial to community resilience and continuity of essential functions”.
- As I have said many times before our industry is often overlooked and misunderstood, not just here in Maryland, but also in other states. Pennsylvania’s initial proclamation made the mistake of shutting down loggers and sawmills, and only allowed papermills to remain open. They clearly did not understand the supply chain and had to quickly had to walk that guideline back.
- But why is wood essential?
- Wood is not the first thing you think of when looking at the food supply chain, but the shavings and sawdust produced at our sawmills and factories is used for animal bedding. Providing clean litter, and healthy environment is essential in having a healthy food

supply. I thank Holly Porter from the Delmarva Poultry Industry for also weighing in on our behalf.

- While we no longer have a papermill here in Maryland our wood is used to feed plants in surrounding states, logging jobs fuel both the local and regional economy. Toilet paper seems to be one item that is on everyone's minds these days, but these plants produce a variety of products used to package both food and medical supplies. Along with pulpwood from loggers, these plants also utilize chips from our sawmills to make these products. We have in state manufactures that produce pallet lumber that is used to distribute products around the world. We also produce specialty timbers and poles that ensure reliable electrical, rail service, and critical construction projects are uninterrupted. I could go on and on, but I think you get my point, we are essential.
- So, are we feeling the pain of COVID-19? Absolutely! Just like other aspects of agriculture our lines were set up to accommodate the large users- restaurants and institutions. A paper plant in Virginia announced today that it was temporarily laying off 70 employees and shutting down a line. Mills are also stepping production down and placing loggers on quotas because they aren't able to move some of their most valuable grades of lumber due to lack of exports and construction. These conditions are leading to too much wood in the pipeline, and it will likely be a slow recovery once things open back up.

Cheryl DeBerry- Food Processing:

- In general, small food processors are struggling to keep up with demand – I'm thinking of the local meat processors and producers. Their demand is way up and they are harvesting animals early to meet demand. The small processors in Garrett County are still operating as much as they can. Others better than I how the big poultry processors are faring.
- In general, local direct farm sales are up in our region. Farmers market sales are steady to increasing (though it's hard to tell this time of year – not at peak production by any means).
- It's been a struggle getting farmers compliant with COVID-19 guidance at farmers markets – open air pavilions are difficult to make single entry/exit.
- Getting my farmers online to have web-based pre-ordering systems has been a challenge – most of the affordable platforms can't deal with things like meats that have packages of varying weights, to the hundredth of a pound. So, we're trying to work through that.
- Garrett County had a hard freeze Saturday morning and this morning marked the 4th frost in the last week. This is why very few tree fruits are grown here in the mountains.

Keith Ohlinger- Horticulture:

- Workers-there have been some delays or cancellations but most have received some or all of their H2A workers.
- Supplies-most of the supplies are coming as scheduled. Personal Protective Equipment is one area where we are lacking. Overall demand caused by the general population has made plastic and rubber gloves, dust masks, face shields, hand sanitizers, etc. hard to come by. This creates a challenge for workers physical protection while spraying and doing dusty jobs for example, and for front line interactions with customers.
- Weather-a warm winter followed by a cold wet spring are challenging plants, things had been running two to three weeks earlier but a few frosts have caused damage.
- Business Practices-the shutdown has caused the cancellation of any Agritourism. Businesses have tried to adapt to online ordering and curbside pickup, delivery and mailing products where possible. However, open markets, events, festivals,

weddings, hay rides, etc. are all major sources of lost revenue. Businesses that have an outlet of direct sales to the public have seen an increase in sales through the practices mentioned above, businesses relying on wholesale to schools, cafeterias, restaurants, etc. have been devastated.

- Insurance-many regulations stand in the way and it remains to be seen if an issue arises whether a business will be covered for their new practices and remain in compliance with such things as the Food Safety Modernization Act for example.
- Health Care-many “elective surgeries” have been cancelled, doctor’s office are sometimes closed, phone in appointments are being done in some places. Many small operations and sole proprietors are concerned about their businesses, families should they become sick or die since they are the only farmer or only worker.
- Finance-most producers are trying to take advantage of the lower rates. It remains to be seen which ones are able to survive. Personally, we are preparing for another Great Depression.
- Processing-processing is running about four weeks behind, if it is available at all. Workers at the places still open are concerned for their health and safety.

Sean Hough- Livestock:

- Beef and pork at a national level: the issues with the packing plants shutting down due to COVID-19 and employees not coming in.
- This is affecting the supply out there and affecting the grocery stores.
- Commodity prices however for beef and pork are up due to shortage.
- Nationally farmers are exporting more beef and pork because of lack of packing plants so export numbers are increasing over the last month.
- Maryland local level: all the local level butchers are overwhelmed with product.
- If you have something to go to slaughter right now it is hard to get them in. It is good for the butchers however because their retail stores have lines around the block with people wanting to buy local and can’t get in the grocery stores.
- Locally a lot of the 4H kids are nervous about not having the fairs and are they going to have outlets to sell their livestock.
- A lot of the central Maryland fairs and shows are trying to have virtual livestock auctions so the kids can still sell their animals.
- There are going to be issues with the packing plants and they are telling local fairs they can’t take animals after the sales.
- Trying to work out virtual sales for the kids.
- If you have animals ready to go to slaughter it is going to be hard to get them in.

James K. Raley, Jr. - Nursery:

- Landscape companies are ordering bedding plants from greenhouse producers to fulfill their planting contracts. Greenhouses are shipping finished product daily to wholesale and retail nursery outlets. Garden centers at businesses like Lowe’s and Home Depot have been heavily patronized for the past four weeks, as consumers required to work from home due to the pandemic are improving the appearance of their yards.
- Some nursery operations are reporting that they are finding extra laborers from people who have been laid off from their jobs in the restaurant and hospitality industries
- Tobacco plants are being transplanted to fields. Some patchy areas of frost were noted today on some of the plants in Southern Maryland.

- The Maryland Congressional Delegation announced \$4.1 million for Maryland's fishing industry through the Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The funds are being provided through the CARES Act, which provided \$300 million nationally for businesses in the fishing industry who have been negatively affected by COVID-19 nationwide.
- Compliments to organizations like the Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association, the Maryland Farm Bureau, Maryland Dept. of Agriculture and similar groups for curating information from government, health officials, and others concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The information disseminated to the nursery industry, and all others involved in agriculture, is central to keeping employees safe while enabling essential businesses to remain open to serve their respective customers.

Matthew Nielsen- Organic Farming:

- As of this writing organic farmers across all sectors of the industry are busy in fields and greenhouses working towards a successful season. Like many of the commodities represented in the Commission organic farms have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of note have been the hindrance of travel restrictions on third party Organic certifiers and many are not accepting new clients as a result creating a back log of those awaiting certification and a stressful donut hole scenario for those hoping to enter the marketplace this year. Many certifiers have adapted and switched to video inspections of returning customers for the time being. While acceptable for some this has in turn created many difficulties for our Amish farmers, a large section of the organic industry.
- Organic grain commodity prices have been impacted as well. Organic flour wheat has increased in price tracking the recent rallies in the conventional market as the population increases use of home bakes goods. Organic corn is down due to a large carryover, and increasing production nationally. Corresponding imports have slowed due to the increase of high-quality domestic supply and a weaker US dollar. Organic soybeans have seen a strong increase in price due to low supply and interruptions in imports primarily from India whose logistic infrastructure has been impacted by the coronavirus.
- Recently the National Organic Program has proposed additional measures to reduce the likelihood of fraudulent grain in the marketplace. If approved all handlers at every step of the supply chain will need to be certified and additional record keeping will need to be maintained. As a result of some of these recent actions and reviews many USDA accredited certification agencies in the notoriously fraudulent Black Sea region have had their certifications revoked resulting in an overall reduction of imports from this region.

Michelle Protani- Chesnik- Poultry:

- I hope this communication finds everyone well and safe. The current Covid 19 Pandemic is wreaking unprecedented devastation on agriculture and the food supply chain in our country and globally. Grocery store shelves are sparsely stocked, but huge amounts of produce poultry, livestock, dairy, and eggs are being destroyed. The reason being that it is unable to reach the end consumer because of either the switch from food services or illness among plant and agricultural workers. If I am correct 70% of seafood harvested goes to restaurants. I am well versed in contract poultry and what is occurring in that area. I know how Covid 19 is impacting my rural community.
- I would like each of you to put together a brief summation of how this is impacting your commodity in Maryland and the things that you and other members of your commodity need to stay in business, provide food or services to your customers(if you direct market).

Help in finding alternative markets or supply chains. If you have PPE, if not what do you need. Discuss financial impact, shortages of items you need to stay in business. What is the impact to the rural community you live in? Ethanol plants have a far-reaching impact, I understand the impact on the companies that feed birds, DGS are becoming nonexistent. I don't understand how or to what depth it impacts other commodities. Are folks in your ag community in need of medical or mental health support? I ask this as you all saw on the news that 2 million birds have been depopulated in the field by one poultry company, several of those farms are in Maryland. This is not only an economic blow; it is a huge emotional one to the farmers who have raised these birds from day old chicks to big beautiful birds that with no way to have them processed and sent to market are euthanized. As we all know suicide rates by farmers are among the highest in the nation. Veterinarians are another extremely high group and deeply impacted by euthanizing healthy animals. Covid 19 it a monster, it will take its toll on physical, mental and financial health.

- I would like to take these reports, compile a comprehensive list for our Secretary Joe Bartenfelder to send on up the chain in hopes of making the State of Maryland aware of the needs of Maryland Agriculture. I know MDA is boots on the ground, but they have an overwhelming task in front of them. We have trade organizations like DPI and Maryland Farm Bureau as an example, who are working hard to give input. Unfortunately, they are not on the frontlines like the farmers and don't always get the input they need to help. Not all ag folks belong to these groups and they need to be heard from. Please take a moment and send me an overview of what is occurring in your area of expertise. If calling is easier call me.
- I have asked Julie Oberg and Jessica to see if we could arrange a conference call and or a zoom meeting to talk about this in May in place of our canceled tour. If we had some written comments prior to such a call. I feel it would be helpful once we have a conversation.

Mike Levensgood- Poultry:

- Overall, it's all about COVID-19. The farmers have been the least effected by the disease itself, with them working on their farms. We at Perdue have only had a couple farmers that needed to self-isolate because of contact with someone with COVID-19. Their contacts were from people who worked off the farm, this has been a good thing for the farmers. The main issue has been the disruption to the supply chain. The first issue was the plants that supplied food service, changing that product over to retail was not an easy switch. The second issue came with poor attendance at the harvest plants, this caused birds to back up in the field. Third issue and most important for the farmers is layouts, the companies had to balance throughput to labor availability which has led to reduced production and longer layouts. Everyone believes this is short term maybe 1 or 2 cycles.
- The following note from DPI announced that:
- **Sens. Coons, Carper, Warner, Van Hollen, Cardin, 13 others press USDA for direct aid to chicken growers, support for processors** Following calls for urgent action from DPI, the National Chicken Council, and other chicken community groups, 18 U.S. Senators pressed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide "direct financial assistance" to chicken farmers coping with "changing and uncertain demand" during the COVID-19 crisis.
"The impacts of COVID-19 on the chicken industry are becoming more serious and visible as the disease continues to spread throughout the United States," the joint letter stated. "As an industry essential to American food security, we urge you to provide necessary support for chicken farmers and processing facilities."

I has repeatedly pointed out the absence of direct aid to chicken growers in any USDA financial support programs addressing COVID-19 disruptions for agriculture to date with ag officials and lawmakers.

- Multiple integrators on the shore have done chicken sales to the public. Sent product to organizations to get it to the needed.
- Currently I would say all integrators are working hard to create a safe work environment to make the associates feel comfortable. I know at Perdue we have tested all associates on the eastern shore and have had very positive visits by the CDC.

Clifford Newsome- State Grange:

- Good Morning to my fellow Md. Ag. Commission members. Covid 10 has had a profound effect on everyone in Maryland and will continue to have many nasty results in our lives. The Maryland State Grange held its first Executive meeting last week using zoom. Medford Grange, my home Grange, also held its first ever zoom meeting. It could have gone better except we lost internet connection for a short time. I found out that my computer was not equipped with camera or speaker so we used another members laptop to make the connections. Since he has need of his laptop, I am submitting this written report.
- The Grange has interests in many areas of life other than Agriculture but yet life is tied to it. America found out that food actually comes from a farm, not the grocery! At least for a little while, Farmers have been given “Hero” status. Let’s hope that many will remember how Agriculture binds us together. From farm to processing points to groceries or other outlets, food is essential to all. We also found that good health care practices are needed daily and must be continued constantly to keep us all safe. During our meeting, we discuss a variety of issues that affect all of our members. They are:
- Agriculture --- Planting of fall crops, corn & soybeans, has gotten underway. The cold, wet Spring has delayed it but this week’s warm forecast will bring it to full force. Prices for 2019 stored crops were not great but 2020 prices are going to be a loss unless exports pick up in volume. Bio-fuels are not being produced, at present, due to low world- wide gasoline prices. Most farmers produce nearly the same amount of these crops every year so no price increases are predicted. With a surplus on hand already, nothing will seem to change this picture. Even if some farmers are forced to shut down their operations, it will not affect prices or production. Their land will be farmed by others. History has proven this. I’m sure the Soybean Board representative and a member of the Grain Board will give us their input also.
- Dairy report is grim also. Dairy farmers are pouring out their milk by trailer loads. I haven’t seen this since 60’s & 70’s. Their prices have dropped far below the break- even point for many months now. Last year, at least 10 dairy farmers, quit milking and sold their herds. This was in the dairy production counties of our state. The milking cows got good prices but older cows and young stock sold for below meat prices. Double whammy again! Milk Processing has slowed due to several factors. No demand from school lunch programs with schools now closed through the end the school year. There was a surplus of milk being produced without a sales outlet. Small farm outlets have an increase of sales and we hope they do well. The Ag. Price support enacted recently will be a very weak crutch for our dairy friends. It will not do a whole lot for our grain producers either. World markets not doing well either.
- Farmer’s Markets may be a bright spot for us all. A recent “soft opening” held with Health Dept. approval and supervision, was successful with 12 vendors and about 200

shoppers during 4 hours. Hopefully when restrictions are lifted, we will see more local support in other counties as well. There is also more interest in home gardens and chicken coops for small flocks.

- Community Service --- Activity was hindered at the beginning of this outbreak. With the restrictions being so tight about travel, social distancing, school closings and many stores being closed, our normal community services came to a halt. With small & large companies closing and laying off workers, food became a primary issue. Several Grange Hall established food pantries or food distribution centers. Other Grange members volunteered at Food Pantries throughout the state. Areas to have Blood Drives and Drop-Off of unused prescription drugs have been in place.
- Transportation – Our Big Rig Truckers are getting “Hero” status! People finally recognized they don’t just run up & down the road for no purpose at all. They have that all important task of hauling toilet paper! Pun intended! They have always hauled the seed, fertilizer, spray material, harvested crops and farm equipment all over our country. Be thankful for them and give them a five-finger flag when you see them on the road. It might shock them but then you will see a smile and a wave back. Also BACK OFF the tailgating!!!
- Education -- The second reason why the Grange was established. So important then and even more so in 2020. To those of you who never taught, now you know whether your child or grandchild really was a pleasure to teach in school. We also get to know that 1 + 1 does not always equal 2! We also get to teach them about school when you were there. And to teach them what you know that they don’t and learn what they know that you don’t. Tell them learning doesn’t stop when they leave class and neither does teaching.
- Safety – By now we have been taught about Health & Safety as we never have before. As of today, 1643 deaths have occurred from the Corona Virus in the state of Maryland. First treated like a common cold and then full blown within weeks. No one ever thought something like this could occur in today’s world of modern medicine. Self- isolation, social distancing and total hospital confinement are the only thing working right now. Is there a cure or vaccine that will work? Will it come back worse in 6-8 months?
- Stay safe my friends. Check on your loved ones and friends. Tell them you love them. Until we meet again.

Tom Warpinski- Turf:

- Covid- For the most part, much of the Turf industry has been allowed to remain open such as Sod Farms, landscaping and turf maintenance companies. Main closures have been Golf courses, parks, ball fields and recreational facilities.
- Those businesses that have remained open have vastly modified their operations to ensure employee and customer safety. The common morning employee meetings are now usually a series of directives transmitted electronically to crew leaders. Multiple employees per vehicle has, for the most part, been eliminated by assigning dedicated drivers for vehicles and employees reporting directly to jobsites. Customer contact has pretty much been eliminated as companies utilize online sales, payment and customer communication. The need to improvise has led to some creative procedures that have made workflow more efficient and will be used permanently.
- Although golf courses and parks have been closed until recently, the grass keeps on growing; most golf courses have been maintaining grounds with skeleton crews. With the recent opening of golf courses, all have modified operations to make outings as safe as possible.

- Residential landscaping and maintenance jobs are still proceeding relatively strong but commercial projects are slowing way down. New housing starts are down more than 25% as of April 15th.
- Sod farms have had average sales through the month of March but April and May sales are down substantially. With the tremendous drop in housing starts, Sod farms expect things to get much slower and take a long time to rebound with the lag of time from housing starts to home completions needing sod.
- Continued wet and cool weather has made farm harvest conditions demanding.
- Sod supply, as one would expect, is adequate but we expect there to be an oversupply by mid-summer.

Staff Updates:

Cassie Shirk:

- General assembly adjured early due to coronavirus.
- House bill 100 would have added seat to the ag commission for the hemp industry but the bill did not make it through this session simply because time ran out.
- Levi Sellers was given a position at large for ag services and will be given an update on the hemp industry.
- Departmental bills all ended up passing.
- Two agricultural related bills that Gov Hogan did take veto action on.
- One being the ban on chlorpyrifos. The department is moving forward with the regulatory process to phase out the use of chlorpyrifos. The legislature did pass their bill resulting in the governor vetoing that.
- The other bill the governor vetoed was the MD Food for MD Institutions bill given the economic impact.

Kevin Conroy:

- Inspectors are still in the field and are going out on a requested basis.
- Trying to remain proactive as possible and make sure people are not coming into contact with others.
- The lab staff is unable to come into the labs but happy with the services the program is still able to offer.
- Nursery inspectors are still going out.
- Forest management did a spray on the lower shore.
- Encouraging working with partners in the field.

Hans Schmidt:

- With PMT we are still working on trying to relocate litter and easier methods to relocate litter either it be within or outside the water shed.
- We updated the manure transport program stream lined to give farmers and brokers more flexibility to move the litter and work around their schedules.
- The cost share for moving litter was raised. The lower 4 counties those cost share rates were raised to 16 cents per ton per mile and the rest of the state is 14 cents per ton per mile.
- Working with the university signed off on a PMT study that there needed to be further research done by the university but due to COVID it has stalled slightly. It will be a five-year study.
- When the state went into an elevated level 2 state employees are working from home this includes MDA staff that was out in the soil conservation district.
- We have identified three areas that our staff can go out and do some work.

- Primarily addressing any emergency situations that arise in the field.
- Second was to do construction checks on cost share projects.
- Third was making sure that farmers that have sent in claims for projects they have completed that those claims were being processed and checks were getting back to farmers as quickly as possible.
- Last week gave green light to MDA staff to do some limited work with strict guidelines that they most follow. Not going back into the soil conservation office at this time.
- Cover crops made allowances for farmers to call in or email in to the districts their spring certifications to when they had done their kill down. This is working as smoothly as possible and have been processing at least a million dollars worth of claims a week for the past month and expect more claims to continue to come in. In the process of trying to finalize FY21 Cover Crop Program.
- If we continue to stay in an elevated level and workers continue to telework from home, we are looking to take applications through the mail or email for the cover crop program.

Steve Connelly:

- There have been some problems with the slaughter plant for poultry in the past 6 weeks. Illness in the plant has resulted in not being able to run at full capacity.
- In Maryland the State Health Department is working with the community health departments to do community testing as well as last Thursday they tested employees at the Perdue plant in Salisbury and results are coming back and looking promising with less than 5% infection rate. Community testing has a little bit of a higher rate.
- Reports from the Health Department are running smoothly and it increased the positive attitude of employees knowing they are not going into a facility where the person next to them could be spreading the virus.
- We have had testing at the egg packing plants on the upper eastern shore. There has been small amount of virus there.
- Cecil and Kent county departments of health tested about 300 employees and family members of those employees at Warwick Mushroom Plant. The test results were sent to lab corp and awaiting results.
- Testing is taking place and employers in the supply chain such as dairy processing plants or meat processing plants or even those that have workers in the canning industry are working with the health department for the next steps.

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Julie Oberg:

- There are a number of different resources on our website from Jason and the governor's office and individuals at MDA.
- COVID-19 resources folder on the main page.
- The governor is on the path to get us into recovery and there is a press conference at 5.
- There is a \$10,000 forgivable loan.

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Joe Bartenfelder:

- Everyone is doing their best to hang in there during these tough times.
- Farmers are very resilient and as long as there is a hope and I pray people will continue to do what they are passionate about.
- Hope that the economy can rebound and things open up and can have a good second half of 2020.
- Need to work and stick together and make the best out of the bad situation.
- The governor is doing the best he can do and focus on the health of Maryland.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:45 am respectfully submitted by: Jessica O'Sullivan