Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture

2025 Annual Report

Maryland Department of Agriculture

The Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture (GICA) was first established by Governor Erlich's Executive Order on June 29th, 2006, outlining a clear vision for the Commission to "promote the economic profitability of agriculture in the State by ensuring that all appropriate State agencies work in a cooperative, coordinated manner with local government and industry groups in planning, implementing, overseeing and evaluating the intergovernmental initiatives related to agricultural affairs of the State." After nearly 20 years of operations under the initial mission, Governor Moore reinvigorated GICA through an updated Executive Order on July 28th, 2025. This renewed call to action for GICA outlines the critical need for Maryland to increase the economic profitability of agriculture through reducing regulatory barriers and aligning agencies to support Maryland's #1 commercial industry.

The executive order also doubles the size of the commission by bringing six additional agencies to the table and directs the Maryland Department of Agriculture to lead a whole-of-government approach to reduce regulations, promote agricultural literacy, and create economic opportunities for Maryland farmers. Agencies added to the commission include the Maryland Energy Administration, Maryland Department of Labor, Maryland Department of Human Services, Maryland Department of Aging, Maryland Department of Emergency Management, Maryland Department of Education, as well as the president of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and the Dean of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences.

In 2024, the Commission formed 3 subcommittees to address the top priorities of Maryland agriculture, including the Labor, Education, and Development Subcommittee, the Environment and Natural Resources Subcommittee, and the Value Added Agriculture and Agritourism Subcommittee. Throughout 2025, each committee met in May, July, and September to discuss various challenges and opportunities where agency roles overlapped with agriculture.

Labor, Education, and Development (LED) Subcommittee prioritizes the strengthening and support of the agricultural workforce in Maryland, increasing agricultural education and literacy in K-12, post-secondary, and non-traditional opportunities, as well as supporting development and land use planning that prioritizes and protects agriculture in the State. Throughout the LED meetings, continuing discussion themes support the expansion of apprenticeship programs to create a pipeline for students to move into agricultural careers after graduation that can be fostered through partnerships between the Maryland State Board of Education, Maryland Department of Labor, and Maryland Department of Agriculture, and support the needs for a broadened agricultural workforce and a more agriculturally educated generation. The

subcommittee recognized that agricultural careers require a vast array of educational backgrounds, both on-farm careers and in the agricultural support careers like veterinary medicine, agricultural engineering, agronomy, conservation, or beyond, and well-rounded students equipped with the soft skills earned through programs like FFA and 4H are most likely to be successful in the industry. The Subcommittee evaluated the impacts of solar installations and other development pressures on farmers in Maryland.

The Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) Subcommittee's focus prioritizes agriculture's impacts on and from the environment, as well as environmental/ natural resource policies as they relate to agriculture. The Subcommittee discussed an array of topics ranging from Sunday deer hunting regulations, land use opportunities for farmers, and environmental regulations. The Department of Natural Resources is actively responding to a request from the Maryland General Assembly to identify potential unilateral Sunday hunting regulations that will meet the needs of stakeholder groups from the public, equine groups, and farmers experiencing crop damage. The Maryland Department of Agriculture supports DNR's efforts and continues to engage GICA to review suggestions. As farmers respond to environmental pressures such as saltwater intrusion and increased wildlife pressure, ENR discussed alternative crop opportunities such as Giant Miscanthus and the role that the State can play in developing market opportunities for farmers.

The Value Added Agriculture and Agritourism Subcommittee prioritizes engagement across key agencies that regulate agriculture, health, environment, and other regulators of the value added agricultural sector. The overarching challenge of this committee is navigating the regulatory environment in which state and local governments are obligated to operate, while also exploring opportunities to make the necessary changes in policy to adapt to an ever evolving industry. This Subcommittee helped to shape Maryland's Value Added Agriculture and Agritourism Statewide Guidance and Analysis that will be published by Martin Proulx, MDA's Value Added Agriculture Specialist, which will provide a level set document that outlines the overarching challenges and opportunities in regulating and supporting value added agricultural businesses in the State. Ongoing discussions and opportunities from this Subcommittee were centered around a lack of scalability for agricultural businesses under the current statute, a lack of clarity and consistency in regulations, and a layered and conflicting statewide regulatory framework. Agencies involved in the Value Added Agriculture and Agritourism Subcommittee are committed to supporting the development of a Statewide Guidance Document and engaging with MDA in the development of new policies that will support the agricultural industry.

The full Commission met twice prior to October 1st, convening agency Secretaries, appointed public members, and designated staff from across Maryland state leadership in Annapolis to identify and address potential chokepoints in regulations and processes and make the state more efficient in its support of agricultural businesses. During these meetings, agencies had the opportunity to share successes and highlight programs that support agriculture, including the Maryland Department of Labor's Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program, the Maryland Department of Emergency Management's Food System Resilience Council's annual report, the Department of Human Services Sun Bucks program, and the Maryland Department of Commerce's Manufacturing 4.0 Grant Program. The meetings were also a time for agencies to

address work being done that stemmed from Subcommittee discussions, including progress on the Maryland Department of the Environment's engagement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's General Discharge Permit for Animal Feeding Operations, the Maryland Department of the Environment's review of stormwater regulations to accommodate agricultural structures and value added agriculture businesses, the Maryland Department of Planning's interagency permitting council to streamline projects that are bottlenecked in State permitting, the Maryland Department of Health's proposed regulations to relieve sales caps for on-farm processing licenses, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' expanded Sunday hunting program opportunities.

Agency Ongoing Projects:

- Maryland State Department of Education
    - Continuing work on the Local Food Exchange to better connect Local Education Authorities (LEAs), state agencies, and farmers for food procurement.
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
    - Developed recommendations for the Maryland General Assembly to develop Sunday Hunting regulations that will help mitigate deer damage and will share them with the Maryland Department of Agriculture for input and review.
    - The Department is centralizing all leasing programs through a new land management program, aiming for transparency and increased access. A new program is expected to launch in the Fall of 2025 to focus on prioritizing regenerative farming practices, connecting farms in food deserts, and offering direct sales on state owned property.
- Maryland Department of the Environment
    - PFAS - MDE is continuing to gather data from wastewater treatment plants and industrial users to establish action levels.
- State Department of Assessments and Taxation
    - GICA has begun discussing the conflicting enforcement of agricultural vs. commercial use assessments on agritourism and value added agriculture properties.
- Maryland Department of Health
    - Ongoing revision of food service regulations and seasonal uses
        - Proposed Regulations, *Food Establishments - Portable Chemical Toilets (SB544/HB559, 2025).*
- Maryland Department of Agriculture
    - The Maryland Agricultural Commission, based on recommendations from GICA, has begun developing a definition of agriculture for MDA to adopt.

Commission-Driven Successes for Agriculture:

- Maryland Department of Agriculture
    - S*tatewide Guidance and Analysis Document on Value-Added Agriculture and Agritourism, October 2025.*
- "On-Farm Home Processing" License

    - Proposed Regulations (*MDH, September 2025)* to expand License accessibility to leased farms and increase revenue caps for producers.
- Animal Feeding Operations
    - U.S. EPA has approved the Controlled Animal Feeding Operations draft permit that was submitted by MDE, which is currently open for public comment.
- Maryland Stormwater Design Manual
    - MDE's Stormwater Design Manual draft updates have been posted for review, to include streamlining a standard plan for agritourism parking lots.
- Agrivoltaics Workgroup
    - Within DNR's Power Plant Review Program, an agrivoltaics workgroup has been initiated with MDA at the table to represent agriculture.

The Governor's Intergovernmental Commission on Agriculture persists in its endeavor to advance Maryland agriculture, prioritizing economic growth and business support, and confronting both immediate and long-term challenges within the industry.