# MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

## Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee Meeting Minutes

**April 8, 2026 - 10:15 am – 11:15 am**
**Virtual Only**
Google Meet joining info
Video call link: https://meet.google.com/ekw-wprp-zpn
Or dial: (US) +1 516-654-7488 PIN: 764 423 375#

**Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee** - Priorities include marketing of agricultural products to increase attention to purchasing Maryland goods, preserving agricultural land throughout the state, and identifying opportunities for economic viability. Interacts with various programs at MDA, including MALPF, Marketing, and others as appropriate.

| **Commodity** | **Representative** | **Committee** |
|---|---|---|
| Ag. Education | Dr. Missi Welsh | CALE |
| Agribusiness | | |
| Aquaculture | Johnny Shockley | VAA |
| Biofuels | Raj Kathuria | VAA, CoWS |
| Committee on Young Farmers | Jenell Eck McHenry | CYF |
| Consumer | Kellie Hinkle | VAA |
| Controlled Environmental Agriculture | | |
| Dairy | Jenni Mallott | |
| Direct Farm Market | Amy Crone | Profitability, VAA* |
| Equine | Ann Merryman | Profitability, Leg. Affairs |
| Farm Bureau | Paula Linthicum | Leg. Affairs* |
| Field Crops | Chris Rhodes | Profitability, Leg. Affairs |
| Food Processing | Nikita Bocharov | |

| **Commodity** | **Representative** | **Committee** |
|---|---|---|
| Ag. Education | Dr. Missi Welsh | CALE |
| Forestry | Hunter Pusey | CoWS, CALE |
| Fruit | | |
| Hemp | Stefanie Reiser | Profitability, VAA |
| Livestock | Eleanor Leak | CALE |
| New and Beginning Farmers | | |
| Nursery, Landscape & Greenhouse | Kelly Lewis | Profitability |
| Organic Farming | Emma Jagoz | Profitability*, Leg., VAA |
| Poultry | Zach Evans | Leg. Affairs, CoWS |
| Related Services | Keith Parker | Profitability |
| Socially Disadvantaged Farmers State Grange | Richard Stonebraker<br>Gordon Kretser | CALE*<br>Profitability, CoWS* |
| Turf | | |
| University of Maryland – AGNR Urban and Small Farmers | Dr. Darren Jarboe | CALE |
| VAA/Agritourism | Janna Howley | VAA |

| **Commodity** | **Representative** | **Committee** |
|---|---|---|
| Vegetable | Russell Shlagel | Profitability |
| Veteran Farmers | Peter Scott | |
| Veterinary | Dr. Marianne Bailey | Leg. Affairs |
| Viticulture | Rachel Lipman | VAA |

**Committee Members Present:**
Emma Jagoz Keith Parker Raj Kathuria
Ann Merryman Eleanor Leak Gordon Kretser
Amy Crone
**MDA Staff Present:**
Harrison Palmer Susan Kivioja Kevin Atticks
Elizabeth Hoffman

# Call to Order:

The April 2026 Farm Profitability & Sustainability Committee meeting was called to order by Raj Kathuria at 10:23 AM.

# Approval of Minutes:

A Motion to approve the November and February 2025 meeting minutes was made by Raj Kathuria, seconded by Keith Parker, and was unanimously approved.

# Committee Discussion:

## Farm Profitability and Programs

Global market volatility and federal funding cuts threaten agricultural profitability. The Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) program offers limited relief to qualifying growers, with an extended application deadline of April 24th. This program allocates $1 billion for specialty crops from an $11 billion relief package, with payments up to $155,000 based on 2025 acreage and FSA mapping. High tunnel and greenhouse crops are ineligible; covered crops include tomatoes to tree fruits.

## Institutional Procurement and Incentives

Discussion focused on shifting toward local procurement mandates to support farmers and counter federal cuts. There was consideration of implementing requirements that prioritize local farmers in competitive procurement processes to avoid a "race to the bottom" on price. Accountability mechanisms (carrot-and-stick approaches) for the state's 20% local procurement mandate were considered, though punitive actions are not anticipated. Instead, tax credits or other incentives were suggested as more feasible, drawing from models like Kentucky's restaurant local-purchase credits and Maryland's existing tax credit for produce donations to food banks (up to $10,000).

Opportunities for broader "buying local" efforts beyond food products were noted, including Maryland’s Best branding to reach new audiences.

## LEEF Program Sustainability Integration

Elizabeth Hoffman provided information on how The Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) program aims to boost economic viability through conservation incentives while supporting Chesapeake Bay restoration, nutrient reduction, emissions mitigation, and related environmental goals. The program keeps early adopters engaged and addresses the economic viability of farms providing water quality and climate benefits.

**LEEF Structure and Incentives:**

● Housed in the Office of Resource Conservation.
● Farmers submit a portfolio of conservation best management practices and "community best practices."
● Incentives include priority points on grant applications (e.g., land preservation, infrastructure) and reduced loan rates for equipment.
● Marketing and recognition components will integrate with existing agricultural development programs, evaluating LEEF certification in contracts and institutional purchasing. ● Pilots include diverse operations (poultry, dairy, vegetable, equine) to recognize that every farm type contributes to solutions.
● Community best practices fall into three pillars: research (e.g., on-farm trials), resilient food system involvement (e.g., GAP certification), and education (e.g., field trips, mentoring beginning

farmers).

**Marketing and Broader Applications:**

Strategies to link sustainability with profitability were explored, including expanding consumer perception beyond Maryland's Best to associate local purchases with environmental benefits. Alignment with corporate sustainability efforts (e.g., climate-neutral supply chains) and addressing public perceptions of agriculture (such as odors) through education were discussed. Non-food producers (turf, equines, forestry, grain) and their integration were specifically addressed. Additional ideas included highlighting farms' role in community building, physical environment access, and mental health benefits amid broader societal needs.

**Adjournment:** Raj Kathuria motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:10 AM.