Maryland
Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

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Maryland Agricultural Commission

Agriculture | *Maryland's Leading Industry*
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MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Value Added Agriculture Committee Minutes

April 8, 2026 - 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: Join Google Meet Video Call

Or dial: (US) +1 413-591-4098 PIN: 199 152 466#

Value Added Agriculture Committee - Promotes value added agriculture initiatives through identifying economic incentives, training opportunities, market development and infrastructure initiatives, and supporting MDA's Value-Added Agricultural Specialist, Martin Proulx.

Commission Membership

Commodity	Representative	Committee
Ag. Education	Dr. Missi Welsh	CALE
Agribusiness		
Aquaculture	Johnny Shockley	VAA
Biofuels	Raj Kathuria	VAA, CoWS
Committee on Young Farmers Consumer	Jenell Eck McHenry Kellie Hinkle	CYF 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

Commodity	Representative	Committee
Food Processing	Nikita Bocharov	
Forestry Fruit	Hunter Pusey	CoWS, CALE
Hemp Livestock	Stefanie Reiser Eleanor Leak	Profitability, VAA CALE
New and Beginning Farmers		
Nursery, Landscape & Greenhouse Organic Farming	Kelly Lewis Emma Jagoz	Profitability Profitability*, Leg., VAA

Commodity	Representative	Committee
Poultry	Zach Evans	Leg. Affairs, CoWS
Related Services	Keith Parker	Profitability
Socially Disadvantaged Farmers		
State Grange	Richard Stonebraker	CALE*
Turf	Gordon Kretser	Profitability, CoWS*
University of Maryland – AGNR	Dr. Darren Jarboe	CALE
Urban and Small Farmers		
VAA/Agritourism	Janna Howley	VAA
Vegetable	Russell Shlagel	Profitability
Veteran Farmers	Peter Scott	
Veterinary	Dr. Marianne Bailey	Leg. Affairs
Viticulture	Rachel Lipman	VAA

Committee Members Present:

Janna Howley Amy Crone Ann Merryman Paula Linthicum Emma Jagoz

MDA Staff Present:

Rachel Jones Martin Proulx Susan Kivioja

Call to Order:

The April 2026 Value Added Agriculture Committee meeting was called to order by Amy Crone at 3:04 PM.

Approval of Minutes:

A Motion to approve the November 2025 and February 2026 meeting minutes was made by Emma Jagoz, and was seconded by Janna Howley with unanimous approval.

Committee Discussion:

Legislative Update on Value-Added Impacts

A key departmental priority was the Horse Industry Board sunset extension bill, which has passed in both chambers.

Stormwater Management and Montgomery County Legislation

Stormwater management has been a significant issue for value-added agricultural producers, particularly in Montgomery County. Montgomery County Council recently passed legislation specific to exemptions and the treatment of agricultural activities. Additional time is needed to fully understand the implications of this action. The Montgomery County bill appears more related to buildings than the broader statewide stormwater management issue.

Update on On-Farm Food Service Facility License Bill

A Maryland Department of Health bill (House Bill 272 / Senate Bill 344) was discussed. The bill aims to establish an on-farm food service facility license to address the gap between permanent and temporary food service facility licenses for agri-tourism operations.
The license is intended to provide creative solutions for temporary infrastructure requirements, such as portable toilets or holding tanks, for seasonal operations.

The House passed House Bill 272, but the bill appears to be held up in the Senate with only a few days remaining in the session, making its passage unlikely.

Updates from Craft Alcohol Producers

The definition of what could be made into wine was expanded last year to include any Maryland ingredient (excluding cannabis). The definition of pomace brandy was also expanded.

A Prince George's County bill is pending that would provide a personal property tax exemption for craft alcohol manufacturers' equipment and products. If passed, this could serve as a model for other value-added agricultural producers.

Status of SDAT Discussions and Solar Development Overlap

Ongoing discussions were held regarding the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT) and its determinations of what constitutes agriculture, especially where solar development overlaps with agricultural land. There is concern with SDAT's broad discretion in determining agricultural use. SDAT does not prioritize agriculture and frequently assesses farm properties as

commercial rather than agricultural.

Senate Bill 344 (House Bill 734) most likely passed and will retain language allowing SDAT to determine if proposed agri-voltaic projects qualify for an agricultural use assessment. This is viewed as setting a dangerous precedent.

Need to Advance the Definition of Agriculture

The current definition of agriculture is outdated and does not adequately account for value-added activities or retail. The next step is to advance the proposed new definition of agriculture and work toward incorporating it into COMAR. If SDAT accepts the proposed definition, they would amend their regulations accordingly. Until then, agricultural assessments depend on the discretion of SDAT assessors or inspectors at individual sites.

It remains unclear whether the new proposed definition would supersede the existing one referenced in COMAR related to tax assessments.

Suggestions for the Commission's May Tour

Suggestions were made for the Commission's May tour to include stops in Howard and Frederick counties. These stops would highlight value-added businesses currently dealing with SDAT issues, allowing the full commission to hear directly from affected producers. Power lines for data centers were noted as a current concern in one county. Farms whose owners are impacted by the spread of agri-voltaics could also be suggested as tour stops.

Proposal for Tourism Presentation and Collaboration

A suggestion was made to have the Office of Tourism present to the Agricultural Commission to discuss increasing engagement with agricultural producers and developing meaningful agri-tourism trails.
Support was expressed for a collaborative campaign to highlight the benefits of farm visits for mental health, community connection, and the economy. This could include providing customizable promotional templates. It was also suggested that collaboration with tourism could include an educational component, such as a "manners sheet," to address inappropriate public behavior on farms.

Increasing Awareness of the Value-Added Producer Grant

Emphasis was placed on the need for the MDA to regularly issue public service announcements (PSAs) about the USDA's Value-Added Producer Grant program. The program includes direct-to-consumer and specialty crop operations. Increased awareness is intended to correct misconceptions and improve the competitiveness of Maryland farmers in securing these federal funding opportunities.

Adjournment: Janna Howley motioned to adjourn, and it was seconded by Emma Jagoz at 3:40 PM.