



Maryland Department of Agriculture Environmental Justice Strategic Plan Overview

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Slide One: Maryland Department of Agriculture Environmental Justice Strategic Plan Overview

Speaker's Notes:

The purpose of this presentation is to give a brief background on the strategic plan, why the goals and objectives we identify will be important as MDA moves forward with its work, the development process of the plan and opportunities to provide input and feedback.

Agenda

1. Background
2. Environmental Justice Strategic Plan Overview
3. EJ Plan Components
4. Plan Development Process
5. Plan Engagement Strategy
6. Opportunities for Engagement



Slide 2: Agenda

No Notes



What Does MDA Do?



Resource Conservation

- Climate-Smart Agriculture
- District Operations
- Conservation Grants
- Nutrient Management
- Soil Health
- Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF)
- Environmental Justice
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP)



Plant Industries & Pest Management

- Pesticide Regulation
- Forest Pest Management
- Plant Protection and Weed Management
- Turf and Seed
- Mosquito Control
- State Chemist



Marketing, Consumer Services & Animal Industries

- Animal Health
- Food Quality Assurance
- Marketing and Agricultural Development
- Weights and Measures
- State Veterinary Board
- Maryland Horse Industry Board
- Maryland Agricultural Fair Board

Slide 3: What does MDA do?

Speakers Notes:

The Maryland Department of Agriculture serves to represent agriculture's importance and impact to the economy of the state. Our programs are a combination of regulatory, consumer facing and educational, or promotional in scope and are intended to provide the maximum protection possible for the consumer, safeguard the environment, and promote the economic well-being of our farmers, food and fiber processors, and agricultural businesses.

The department operates under three units: Marketing, Consumer Services and Animal Industries, Plant Industries & Pest Management, and Resource Conservation with each unit responsible for a wide range of programs, policies, regulations, and commissions. MDA deals with everything from its marketing programs such as Maryland's Best, Local Certified Farm and Fish, to Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, Animal Disease and Health, Pesticide trainings and regulations, sale and regulation of pesticides, animal feeds, pet foods, fertilizers, compost, and conservation programs such as our technical assistance through District Operations, our funding assistance from Healthy Soils Program, Urban and Small Farms, our developing Climate-Smart Agriculture program, the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (also known as MACS) and other conservation grants, and MDA's newest program, Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming, also known as LEEF.



MDA's Environmental Justice Efforts

- Development of producer recognition programs, such as **Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF)**, that aim to recognize value of climate-smart practices and holistic community benefits;
- **Expansion of Maryland Healthy Soils**, originally defined in HB1063, to include **'Regenerative Practices and Traditions'** that may draw on cultural traditions, practices, and Indigenous science;
- With release of the **Harry R. Hughes report, Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture Roadmap to Resilience**, MDA is positioned to further integrate EJ into priority actions for climate work.
- Identify and create tools to scale, such as MDE's EnviroScreen, and internal guidance and education materials.
- **Facilitate advisory committees** to reflect demographics and the communities.
- Established **Environmental Justice Advisory role** in August 2023 and agency's equity pledge.

Slide 4: MDA's Environmental Justice Efforts

Speaker's Notes:

At MDA, we work with conservation partners at federal, state, and local levels in order to remain a leader in agricultural conservation. Through our conservation efforts it is imperative that we pursue diversity, acceptance, and equitable access to our services, programs, and education. Examples of these efforts include: (see slide)

As well as our many ongoing efforts and developments with programs such as food system resiliency, food quality and marketing, healthy soils, or urban and small farms.

About MDA



Vision Statement →

Achieve excellence in programs and in services that preserve and protect agricultural resources and the environment, promote profitable agriculture and consumer confidence, and enhance the quality of life for all Marylanders.

Mission Statement →

Provide leadership and support to agriculture and the citizens of Maryland by conducting regulatory, service, and educational activities that assure consumer confidence, protect the environment, and promote agriculture.

Environmental Justice and Equity Pledge →

- Advance internal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ)
- Advance equity of MDA Workgroups and Programming
- Use tools and resources available to make informed decisions around policies and programming.
- Work to expand internal understanding and capacity for equity and inclusion in our programming, workgroups, and among MDA staff.

Slide 5: About MDA

Speakers Notes:

On this slide, we've included MDA's existing Vision and Mission Statement as well as our EJ and Equity Pledge. MDA's mission is to provide leadership and support to agriculture and the citizens of Maryland by conducting regulatory, service, and educational activities that ensure consumer confidence, protect the environment, and promote agriculture. Similarly, we've pledged to continue the advancement of Diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. MDA programs are open to all, but we will continue to advance equity of our workgroups, programming, and policy, and continue to build understanding and capacity internally.

As we move forward with the plan development, we will continue to keep these in mind.



VOICE Executive Order

- [Executive Order 01.01.2025.17 Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity \(VOICE\)](#) calls for state agencies to review engagement strategies with a focus on Marylanders who reside in historically overburdened and marginalized communities.
- Identify and implement mechanisms to increase resources and opportunities for historically underrepresented farmers, rural and urban, by reducing barriers to entry.

Slide 6: VOICE Executive Order

Speakers Notes:

Executive Order 01.01.2025.17 Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity (VOICE) The EO was signed in summer 2025 and covers several objectives across all the state's agencies. It calls for state agencies to review engagement strategies with a focus on Marylanders who reside in historically overburdened and marginalized communities.

This Includes identifying and implementing mechanisms to increase resources and opportunities for historically underrepresented farmers, rural and urban, by reducing barriers to entry.



What is an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan?

- EO Directs agencies to create an **Environmental Justice (EJ) Strategic Plan**
- Plan will serve as a **guidance document with goals and metrics** for promoting Environmental Justice in ways that are specific to the agency, its authority, mission, and programs.

CALL FOR MDA:

advance urban agriculture, reduce food insecurity, promote benefits of and access to fresh produce, and expand agricultural literacy to make resources available to new farmers and farmers from traditionally and historically underrepresented communities.



Slide 7: What is an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan?

Speaker's Notes:

The EO directs state agencies to create their own Environmental Justice Strategic Plan. The plans themselves are agency specific documents, with goals and metrics, that make sense for their work.

MDA, in specific, was called upon to continue our existing efforts and work surrounding the advancement of urban agriculture, reducing food insecurity, promoting the benefits and access of fresh produce, and expanding agricultural literacy across the state. We will also continue to make sure that resources and tools are available and easily accessible to farmers across the state, including new and beginning farmers and farmers from traditionally and historically underrepresented communities.

The plan will help further efforts and work already underway at each individual agencies and help enshrine that work moving forward. It's an opportunity for MDA to further build upon the agency's existing mission, define how EJ looks in the Agriculture sector, and highlight work being done to ensure that agricultural and food accessibility is for all Marylanders.



What is Included in the Plan?



Slide 8: What's Included in the Plan?

Speaker's Notes:

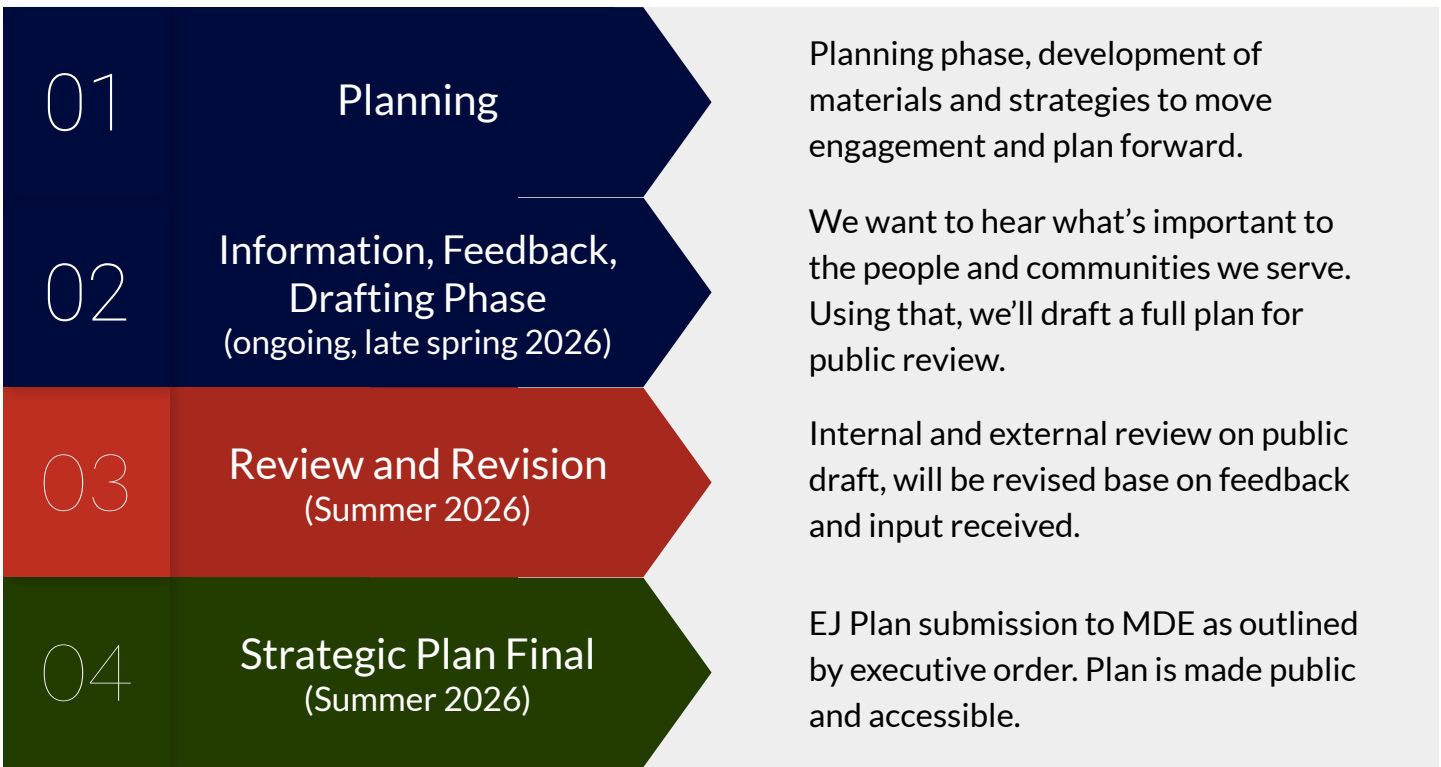
The figure included on this slide lays out all factors that will greatly influence the plan as it's drafted and written. And this is primarily where input from the agricultural community, our technical and financial service providers, educational and community partners play a large role in the pre-draft and drafting phase.

The first is our environmental justice vision. How are we defining it for the agency? What does this mean for our work in context? How do we make sure our vision and work continues to encompass the diversity in our agricultural community, their needs, and continue to be advocates for them? To do so, it's important for us to know how our communities define it for themselves and what they consider important.

Goals and objectives follow next. These are meant to connect back and support MDA's vision and mission over the long-term. These are the direction and results MDA seeks to achieve with measurable outcomes that are able to be seen. What will help us move forward?

And finally, we have our Priority Actions and Metrics. Can we identify and reduce barriers to access? How do we measure and track our progress in ways that are easily measurable and allow us to gauge progress?

EJ Plan Development Process



Slide 9: EJ Plan Development Process

Speaker's Notes:

In order to sum up the figure on the slide, the creation and process of the plan has many moving parts. To put it simply, we're currently in phase 2, focusing on information gathering. We want to make sure we're hearing from the people we serve, those who interact with MDA, those that don't know where to start. If you're new, beginning, or seasoned, your thoughts matter as we move forward with drafting a full plan. We'll have a few opportunities to submit feedback or offer suggestions, and I'll go into detail about those on a later slide.

We're hoping to have a full draft plan completed by late Spring 2026. From there, we'll head towards phase 3, review and revision. We'll do some internal review and open it up publicly for comment and more feedback. A draft will be made available on MDA's website, and if you're interested, a follow up email can be sent directly to you.

The full plan for all agencies is meant to be submitted by mid summer 2026. From there, plans for all state agencies will be made publicly available.

EJ Plan Engagement



Drafting Phase



Goal: Information gathering and goal alignment



Audiences: MDA staff, districts, interagency, identified partners, farmers, commissions, etc.



External Methods: virtual workshops, surveys, presentations, partnerships



Internal Methods: discussions with leadership, internal assessments

Post-Draft Phase



Goal: Draft plan review, gather input on draft plan



Audiences: Broad, identified partners commissions and boards



Engagement: Public draft release, share with partners and participants, comment period, agency review

Slide 10: EJ Plan Development

Speaker's Notes:

Previously mentioned, is that a major component for the development and drafting of this plan is the feedback and response we're hoping to receive.

It's partly to assure MDA's priorities align with the issues, concerns, and priorities of the communities we serve and across the state. Our work is important to us. The intent is to offer several chances to offer the feedback and input, across different platforms, and from a wide range of stakeholders, partners, and communities. MDA staff, Soil Conservation Districts, our interagency partners, farmers, Commissions and Boards, Researchers – all groups that we cross paths with during or work. The opportunity to provide feedback will come in virtual surveys, webinars, presentations, discussions, and one-on-one meetings.

This plan is meant to be a guiding document for our work moving forward, ensuring that our work continues being equitable and just for all of Maryland's farming communities.



Vision, Goals, Metrics - Engagement Opportunities

1) EJ Strategic Plan Survey – **Open until Summer 2026**

- a) What issues is the agricultural community facing that you consider important? Is there something for MDA to be more aware of?
- b) What are we doing to help? What could we do to help more?
- c) What kind of metrics are you looking for? What would be helpful for us to track?

2) General EJ Contact Form

- a) Request a one-on-one meeting.
 - i) Discuss plan development and goals.
 - ii) Presentations for smaller groups, audiences, committees.
 - iii) Is there a comment you'd like to follow up on? Additional questions?
- b) Provide comments and feedback at **any time**

3) Public Comment

- a) Once a full draft is available in Late Spring 2026, MDA will open it to public comment and review for partners and on website.

Slide 11: Visions, Goals, Metrics – Engagement Opportunities

Speaker's Notes:

MDA is currently in the drafting, information gathering phase. While we have ideas and goals identified internally, we want to hear from the public and our partners. Your input and feedback will directly guide how we move forward with drafting our EJ Plan.

Currently we have two options available for public input. The first would be to fill out the EJ Strategic Plan Survey. The survey has about 11 open ended questions and will be open for submissions until Summer 2026. At this time, it is only available in English, but we are working on a Spanish translation.

The second option is through MDA's Environmental Justice contact form. This is a general contact form, with no closing date. It can be used to request a meeting, follow up on questions, or concerns. It can also be used to request a one-on-one meeting within smaller groups or committees for a more in depth presentation and conversation surrounding the development and drafting of the EJ Strategic Plan.

We anticipate that the full draft will be available by Late Spring to early summer of 2026. The draft will be open to public comment and review and will be available on our EJ webpage for viewing.



Questions? Comments?

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Slide 11: Questions? Comments?

Speaker's Notes:

That concludes this presentation. If you have any questions or comments, you are welcome to reach out by email or by filling out our contact form, mentioned previously.