

**ST. MARY’S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE, SEAFOOD & FORESTRY BOARD
2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

The St. Mary’s County Agricultural, Seafood and Forestry Board members shall be appointed by the Commissioners for St. Mary’s County, to meet statutory requirements, to include:

- at least three (3) members from the agricultural community (owner-operators of commercial farms who earn fifty (50) percent or more of their income from farming);
- at least one (1) member from the forestry community;
- at least one (1) member from the real estate community and
- at least one (1) member from the community not actively engaged in agriculture.

Each member of the Board shall be appointed for a term of office of five years with no member serving for more than two consecutive full terms. Members of the St. Mary's County Agricultural, Seafood and Forestry Board during 2023 are as follows:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Term Expiration Date</u>
Scott Bacon	Forestry	12/31/2025
Bonnie Brown	Citizen Member	12/31/2024
Justin Cheseldine-Gass	Waterman	6/30/2027
Phil Dorsey	Real Estate	12/31/2024
Kaitlin Fraer	Citizen Member	6/30/2024
Phil Langley	Waterman	12/31/2025
James Moore	Farmer	6/30/2027
James “Bubby” Norris, Jr.	Farmer	6/30/2025
Alan Polk	Forestry	12/31/2024
Stephen Reeves	Chair, Farmer	12/31/2025
Michael Sirk	Forestry	06/30/2026
Joseph Wood	Vice Chair, Farmer	06/30/2026

The following shall be ex-officio members:

- one (1) member from the University of Maryland Extension – St. Mary’s County,
- one (1) member from the St. Mary’s Soil Conservation District, and
- one (1) member from the St. Mary’s County Department of Economic Development.

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES FOR THE PAST YEAR

Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board:

- The Board received updates on the status of the Regional Agriculture Center (RAC) project.
- The Board monitored the sale of the Lothian Grain Elevator to Anne Arundel County and subsequent reopening under the management of Warfield Brothers.

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- In April, the Board discussed the Proposed Building Excise Tax before it went to Public Hearing and voted to send a letter to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County requesting an exemption of the Building Excise Tax for bona fide agriculture buildings. Implementation of the excise tax on agriculture buildings will dampen viability of farms within the County. The Board expressed interest in working with Land Use and Growth Management or other departments to define criteria of a bona fide agriculture building.
- Earlier this summer, there was an announcement from the Maryland Department of Agriculture to no longer fund the Nutrient Management Plan Writing Program through the University of Maryland Extension. As such University of Maryland Extension will no longer be able to fund the positions of Nutrient Management Plan Writers. The proposal was for farmers to use private entities to write their plans or take a 2-day training class, that is to be renewed every 3 years, to write their own plans. The Board was very concerned about the impact this decision will have on local farmers as Maryland law requires all farmers grossing \$2,500 a year or more or livestock producers with 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight to follow nutrient management plans when fertilizing crops and managing animal manure. Due to public outcry at state-wide listening sessions held in July, the Maryland Department of Agriculture entered into an agreement with UMD Extension to reinstate the Nutrient Management Plan Writers. Both agencies will work to seek more permanent funding to sustain the program.
- In November, The Board received a presentation from Ben Griffith, University of Maryland UAS Research & Operations Center. Mr. Griffith briefed the Board on a feasibility study for a UAS route network overlying the Chesapeake Bay. Such a network would be designed to enable unmanned aircraft to be flown safely within airspace that also included conventional, piloted aircraft. In addition, UAS utilizing the network would be able to fly beyond visual line of sight and over populated areas. Recently the University of Maryland Extension was able to hire a Precision Agriculture Agent who will attempt to streamline processes available for agriculture related projects.
- Also in November, the Board was introduced to Mr. David Zyga from Paladin Automation LLC. Paladin Automation, LLC is an industry partner who is available to serve small business and landowners. This company is looking to explore niche operations to expand their UAS capabilities. Currently this company is working with the St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission for cell and water tower inspections and Historic St. Mary's City to digitize their structure preservation efforts.
- The Board continues to work with the Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust (PTLT) to ensure the success of the Rural Legacy Program in St. Mary's County.
- The Board is pleased to have submitted 9 applications to the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) for consideration of easement purchase for the FY2024 funding cycle.
- The Board assisted in demonstrations at two local public schools during Farm to School Week. The program aims to bring locally-produced foods into schools, provide hands-on experiential learning to students, and integrate food-related education while promoting the benefits of local, nutritious foods.

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Subcommittees

Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board

The duties of the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board are:

- (1) To advise the county governing body with respect to the establishment of agricultural districts and the approval of purchases of easements by MALPF within the county;
 - (2) To assist the county governing body in reviewing the status of agricultural districts and land under easement;
 - (3) To advise MALPF concerning county priorities for agricultural preservation;
 - (4) To approve or disapprove an application by the county for certification;
 - (5) To promote preservation of agriculture within the county by offering information and assistance to farmers with respect to establishment of districts and purchase of easements;
 - (6) To meet at least annually with forest conservation district boards in order to work cooperatively to encourage the promotion and retention of farmland and woodland in their respective jurisdictions; and
 - (7) To perform any other duties as assigned by the county governing body.
- The Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board approved a transfer of land to cure a violation on an Easement Property, 4 Child Lot Release Requests, 1 Owner’s Lot Release Request, and 1 Pre-Existing Dwelling Release Request. All requests were forwarded to the State MALPF Board for consideration.

Program	Acres Preserved in 2023	Total Acres Preserved To Date
MALPF	433.87	14,966.05
Rural Legacy	86.74	7,843.03
MARBIDCO SANG	0	19.22
TDRs	0	4,794.24
Total	520.61	27,622.54

Farmers Market

The duty of the Farmers Market Subcommittee is to address issues facing farmers markets administered by DED throughout the County.

- The Home Grown Farm Market is located at 21078 Three Notch Road in Lexington Park. The Home Grown Farm Market was open Saturdays January 7 through December 16 from 9 am until 1 pm. The Home Grown Farm Market had twenty-six (26) vendors in 2023.
- The California Farmers Market is located at the BAE Systems parking lot at the corner of Town Creek Drive and Route 235. The California Farmers Market was open Saturday from 9 am until 1 pm April 29 through November 18. The California Farmers Market had twenty-two (22) vendors in 2023.
- The Barns at New Market is located at 29133 Thompson Corner Rd, Charlotte Hall, MD 20659. The Barns at New Market Seasonal Market was open Monday through

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Saturday April through November. The Barns at New Market Seasonal Building had twelve (12) vendors participate in 2023. January – March a Winter Market was held at the Barns at New Market Value-Added Building on Saturdays from 10 am until 2 pm. The Winter Market had fourteen (14) vendors participate in 2023. A Holiday Market was hosted at the Barns at New Market Value-Added Building on Saturdays from 9 am until 2 pm November 5 through December 16. The Holiday Market had thirty-nine (39) rotational vendors participate in 2023.

Agriculture Reconciliation Committee

The Agricultural Reconciliation Committee arbitrates and mediates disputes involving agricultural operations conducted on agricultural lands. The Committee issues opinions on whether such operations conform with generally accepted agricultural management practices.

- No activity for this committee was required in 2023.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

- Attendance. Member attendance at Board meetings continues to be a challenge. The Board modified its schedule in 2022 to meet bi-monthly however attendance was still an issue.
- Farmland Conservation Easements. Year after year there is interest to participate in the MALPF program from landowners however there is a shortfall of funding for the program.
 - The Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board continues to be concerned over the quality of appraisals used to determine easement values for the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation easement offers. It is the opinion of the Board that the appraisers used by the State are not familiar with the area and therefore determine lower than realistic property values for St. Mary’s County. In addition, on multiple instances, the two appraisers had widely varying assessments of the properties.

PLANS FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

- The Board will continue to meet the second Thursday of every other month.

*2024 Meeting Calendar

February 8, 2024	August 8, 2024
April 11, 2024	October 10, 2024
June 13, 2024	December 12, 2024

*Commissioner and citizen attendance is always welcomed.

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ONGOING ACTIVITIES

- The Board will continue to promote and discuss initiatives, projects and programs as they relate to the implementation and update of the St. Mary's County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.