

**ST. MARY’S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE, SEAFOOD & FORESTRY BOARD
2025 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 2025 are as follows:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Term Expiration Date</u>
Scott Bacon	Forestry	12/31/2025
Bonnie Brown	Citizen Member	12/31/2029
Justin Cheseldine-Gass	Waterman	6/30/2027
Kaitlin Fraer	Citizen Member	6/30/2029
Connie Gunn	Real Estate	12/31/2029
Phil Langley	Waterman	12/31/2025
Donald Larocco	Citizen Member	12/31/2029
James Moore	Farmer	6/30/2027
Jeffrey Pharis	Waterman	06/30/2030
Alan Polk	Forestry	12/31/2029
Stephen Reeves	Vice Chair, Farmer	12/31/2025
Michael Sirk	Forestry	06/30/2026
Joseph Wood	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 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.

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE, SEAFOOD & FORESTRY BOARD
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

- In February, the Board received a presentation from Martin Proulx, Value Added Agricultural Specialist with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, about an initiative to create Statewide Guidance Document for Value Added Agriculture & Agritourism. Mr. Proulx pointed out that there is a Tangled Regulatory Web consisting of all levels of government (Federal-State-Local). MDA's Statewide Guidance Document is intended to educate State and Local agencies and officials on the diversity and evolution of agricultural industries, to include agricultural processing and Agritourism, for the sake of regulatory and policy-based decision making.
- Several Board Members participated in the Board participated in the focus groups and steering committees that met with a consultant to establish a St. Mary's County Agriculture & Seafood Brand. The Consultant development work was funded using the Department of Economic Development's current funding, however, a request for FY26 funding of \$40,000 was submitted to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County to support marketing and promotion of the Brand. The Board submitted a letter of support for this funding request.
- The Department of Economic Development also submitted a request for additional FY26 funding in the amount of \$14,112 to increase the hours for the Part-Time Market Manager at the Barns at New Market. The Board submitted a letter of support for this funding request.
- The Board received a presentation from Jeff Carroll from Unified Wood Economy at it's June Meeting. Mr. Carroll gave a presentation to the Board about his company that finds value in fallen trees. Unified Wood Economy works with community partners to recycle trees from cities, towns, neighborhoods, and rural areas that have fallen from storm damage, age, disease, development or other reasons. These trees normally end up in landfills where Unified Wood Economy works to keep this wood in circulation, providing value-added products and reducing the release of carbon in the atmosphere. Such products include
 - high value lumber which is used by builders and other end users such as furniture manufacturers, architects, and artisans
 - biochar is a versatile carbon-based product that has many diverse uses, such as soil amendment and water filtration
 - nutrient-rich compost which supports plant growth as nature's fertilizer everywhere from organic backyard gardening to large-scale agriculture.
- Liz Mildenstein, the Executive Director for Visit St. Mary's also updated the Board at the June Meeting with the tourism entity's efforts to promote and market St. Mary's County as a destination for overnight visitors and day trippers.
- The Board assisted with two Farmers Feeding St. Mary's events in August and September. Almost 2,000 citizens were provided fresh, locally grown produce and meats from St. Mary's County farmers.
- Board Members volunteered at 3 Farm to School Events in October at Mechanicsville Elementary School, Banneker Elementary School, and Evergreen Elementary School. The Farm to School program strives to bring locally produced foods into school cafeterias; hands-on learning activities such as farm visits, producers visiting schools,

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE, SEAFOOD & FORESTRY BOARD
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

school gardening, and the integration of food-related education into the standards-based classroom curriculum.

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 request to void a preliminary lot release, a request for farm use solar installation, and 2 Unrestricted Lot Request.
 - Due to budget cuts to the State Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) funding, the FY26 & FY27 Easement Cycles have been combined and applications will not be accepted until July 1, 2026.

Program	Acres Preserved in 2025	Total Acres Preserved To Date
MALPF	902.77	16,650.57
Rural Legacy	178.77	8,756.067
MARBIDCO SANG	0	19.22
TDRs	1.03	4,795.27
Total	1,082.57	30,221.13

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 year round from 9 am until 1 pm. The Home Grown Farm Market had twenty-eight (28) vendors in 2025.

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE, SEAFOOD & FORESTRY BOARD
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

- 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 27 through November 23. The California Farmers Market had twenty (20) vendors in 2025.
- The Barns at New Market is located at 29133 Thompson Corner Rd, Charlotte Hall, MD 20659. The Barns at New Market Seasonal Market were open Monday through Saturday through November. The Seasonal Market had one hundred and seventeen (117) vendors participate in 2025. The Holiday Market was held on Saturdays from 9 am until 3 pm November through December. The Holiday Market had ninety (90) rotational vendors participate in 2025.

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 new complaints were received during 2025.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

- Farmland Conservation Easements. Year after year there is interest from landowners to participate in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program however there is always more applications than funding available for the program.

PLANS FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

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

***2026 Meeting Calendar**

February 12, 2026	August 13, 2026
April 9, 2026	October 8, 2026
June 11, 2026	December 10, 2026

*Commissioner and citizen attendance is always welcomed.

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.