

Agriculture, Seafood and Forestry Board
Meeting Date: Thursday, August 8, 2024
Generated by Lisa Ledman
Approved 12/12/2024

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 12:05 PM

2. ROLL CALL

A. Confirmation of Quorum

Members present included Benjamin Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, James “Bubby” Norris, Phil Langley, Priscilla Leitch, James Moore, Richard Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

B. Welcome Guests

Chris Kaselemis, St. Mary's County Economic Development
Emily Lacey, St. Mary's County Economic Development
Lisa Ledman, St. Mary's County Economic Development
John Sterling-Houser, St. Mary’s County Deputy County Attorney
Jenna Guzman, St. Mary’s County Public Information Office
Jessalynn Cockrell, Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development
Viv Marek, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust
Joan Bearden, St. Mary’s County Farm Bureau
Shelby Watson-Hampton, Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission
Jonathon Cribbs, Delmarva Farmer

C. Approval of the June 13, 2024 Minutes

I move to approve Minutes from June 13, 2024 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting. Motion by Michael Sirk, second Bonnie Browne

Final Resolution: Motion Carries

Yea: Benjamin Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, James “Bubby” Norris, Phil Langley, James Moore, Richard Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

3. PRESENTATION

A. 2022 Agriculture Census Update

Ben Beale gave a presentation to the Board titled “Latest Census Show Strong Standing St. Mary’s County Agriculture.” Ben stated that every five years farmers are asked to spend some time responding to the Agricultural Census. The Census provides the best picture of agricultural landscape with a uniform set of data for every county in the country. In February of 2024, USDA released the 2022 Census data. Overall, the news is very good. The number of farms increased substantially in the last five years, from 615 farms in 2017 to 656 farms in 2022. Land in farms acreage also increased from 61,803 acres in 2017 to 64,380 acres in 2022. USDA estimated the market value for agricultural land decreased in the last 5 years from \$9,949 per acre in 2017 to \$8,652 per acre in 2022. St. Mary’s County has approximately 229,533 acres of land area, of which 28% is devoted to farms. The value of total sales from farms also increased substantially from \$25.95 million in 2017 to \$35.27 million in 2022. The majority of farms sales (\$29.2 million) came from crops, including nursery and greenhouse crops. Sales of vegetables, melons, potatoes and sweet potatoes increased substantially in St. Mary’s County from \$2.89 million in 2017 to \$4.50 million in 2022. Subsequently, the number of vegetable farms decreased during the same period from 101 in 2017 to 77 in 2022. Nursery, greenhouse floriculture and sod continue to play a major role in St. Mary’s County agriculture with 50 farms producing \$2.69 million in

sales in 2022, which was very similar to 2017 with 51 farms producing \$2.40 million in sales. Livestock and poultry statistics also remained stable, with 271 farms producing sales of \$5.49 million in 2017 to 286 farms producing sales of \$6.10 million in 2022. The census indicates there are 1,194 agricultural producers in St. Mary's County with 172 of those being defined as young producers (under the age of 34.)

B. 58th Annual US Oyster Festival

Michael Guy from the Lexington Park Rotary spoke to the Board about the 58th Annual US Oyster Festival which is the largest fundraising effort hosted by the Lexington Park Rotary Club. The US Oyster Festival is always held the 3rd weekend in October at the St. Mary's County Fairgrounds. The Lexington Park Rotary has a charitable budget of \$60,000 annually, and \$30,000 of that is dedicated to scholarships for students. Currently there are 60 members of the Lexington Park Rotary Club, with about half of those able to help with organizing the Festival. The Lexington Park Rotary Club partners with other community members to help make the event successful. Mr. Guy introduced Jen Greco as the new event administrator for the Festival. Ms. Greco stated that while she is new to the Festival, she is not looking to make major changes to the organization of the event but rather improve on existing opportunities. Phil Langley questioned the attendance levels of the Festival, Mr. Guy responded that even with raising their ticket prices to \$15 there has not been a decrease in attendance (over 10,000 visitors). Mr. Guy also stated that a majority of the attendees are visitors from outside of the tri-county area. Ms. Greco stated that the Rotary Club is still accepting applications to participate in this year's Festival from vendors and community partners looking to spread awareness to their missions.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board

Subcommittee membership includes Phil Langley, Alan Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, and Joseph Wood. No update.

C. Agriculture Reconciliation Committee

Subcommittee membership includes Kaitlin Fraer, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, and Vacant Member of the Real Estate Community.

The Agriculture Reconciliation Committee met at the conclusion of the Agriculture, Seafood, & Forestry Board meeting.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A. Agriculture Updates

None.

A. Seafood/Aquaculture Updates

Phil Langley expressed concerns with the Board of Virginia's consideration to lift the moratorium of winter dredging female crabs. This could significantly affect the Maryland supply. Crabs have about a 3 year lifecycle. While a female crab only mates once, she can spawn up to 2 times. The price of crabs continues to increase.

B. Forestry Updates

Mr. Sirk stated that the market value for timber harvests is down so there is not much to report in terms of sales.

C. Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)

Priscilla Leitch updated the Board that 7 applications for the FY25 MALPF Easement Cycle were submitted to the State before July 1. These applications encompass just over 700 acres of land. There will be no Easement Cycle for FY26, the State will be combining their FY26 funds into the FY27 Easement Cycle meaning the next application period should open in January 2026.

D. Rural Legacy

Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust (PTLT) – None.

Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) – Jessalyn Cockrell introduced herself at the new Program Director for RC&D. She shared with the Board that RC&D plans to settle on 3 properties, totaling 387 acres, this fall.

E. Farmers Markets

Pricilla Letich updated the Board of the hours for the 3 County sponsored Farmers Markets. The Barns at New Market Seasonal Vendors are open Monday – Saturday from 8 am until 5 pm and the Value-Added Building is open on Saturdays from 9 am until 3 pm. The California Farmers Market is open on Saturdays from 9 am until 1 pm. The Home Grown Farm Market is open on Saturdays from 9 am until 1 pm and will also be open on Wednesdays during the summer from 9 am until 1 pm. Pricilla also shared the upcoming Farmers Feeding the Hungry event dates of August 15, 2024 and September 17, 2024. Ben Beale invited the Board to participate as volunteers if they are available. This program is a partnership between the Commissioners of St. Mary's County, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Human Services and the University of Maryland Extension. He told the Board of how the Commissioners of St. Mary's County have provided funding to purchase local produce. He stated that there have been about 600-800 attendees at each event in the past.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. Board Member Open Comment Period

Joseph Wood expressed concern that the vacant Real Estate position on the Board still remains.

B. Partner Updates

Shelby Watson-Hampton updated the Board that the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland is continuing to explore 2 tracks to bring the Regional Agriculture Center to fruition. The first track to construct a new facility on St. Mary's County owned property has received Health Department approval and the bid process will begin shortly. The second track of purchasing an existing storefront in Charlotte Hall to be retrofitted is also being considered. The Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland will give a presentation to the Commissioner of St. Mary's County at their meeting on August 20, 2024. Joseph Wood questioned the need for the Board form a sub-committee to foster this project but it was decided that the project is moving forward with 2 options and if interested in participating members of the Board can attend the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland public meetings. Kaitlyn Fraer questioned if there is sufficient funding for this project as it has been delayed for many years. Shelby Watson-Hampton responded that additional funding has been added to the project but Chris Kaselemis stated that we will not have a true value of what is needed until the project is sent to bid. Joseph Wood shared that some current producers are worried that the RAC will interfere with their existing businesses. Shelby Watson-Hampton countered that the RAC will actually give additional opportunities to existing producers.

Joan Bearden told the Board that the St. Mary's County Farm Bureau is seeking legislative updates for the next Legislative Session.

7. ADJOURN

I move to adjourn the August 8, 2024 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting.

Motion by Richard Polk, second by Phil Langley

Final Resolution: Motion Carries

Yea: Benjamin Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, James "Bubby" Norris, Phil Langley, James Moore, Richard Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

