

Agriculture, Seafood and Forestry Board  
Meeting Date: Thursday, December 11, 2025  
Generated by Lisa Ledman  
Approved February 12, 2026

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 12:00 PM

## 2. ROLL CALL

### A. Confirmation of Quorum

Members present included Scott Bacon, Ben Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, Sydney Garner, Connie Gunn, James Moore, Jeff Pharis, Alan Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

### B. Welcome Guests

Emily Lacey, St. Mary's County Economic Development  
Lisa Ledman, St. Mary's County Economic Development  
Heuer, St. Mary's County Economic Development  
Viv Marrek, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust  
Joan Bearden, St. Mary's County Farm Bureau  
Sabrina Dobbins, Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission  
John Delozier

### C. Approval of the August 14, 2025 Minutes

I move to approve Minutes from August 14, 2025 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting. Motion by Connie Gunn second Alan Polk

Final Resolution: Motion Carries

Yea: Scott Bacon, Ben Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, Connie Gunn, James Moore, Jeff Pharis, Alan Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

## 3. PRESENTATION

### A. Farm to School Program

Ben Beale and Kaitlin Fraer gave a presentation to the Board about the Farm to School Program. The program is a partnership between St. Mary's County Public Schools and many local farming organizations that bring locally produced foods into school cafeterias while also offering hands-on learning activities to students through stations which usually include growing fruits & vegetables along with farm equipment, farm animals, nutrition, dairy, aquaculture, and/or value-added.

### B. SMADC Farm Equipment Grant Program

Sabrina Dobbins highlighted current farm equipment available to rent for Southern Maryland farmers and announced that the application period for the next grant will be January 5 through 31, 2026. Ms. Dobbins also informed the Board about SMADC's Mini Grant Program which is

designed to assist new and beginning farmers with small start-up projects, and to assist experienced farmers who are looking to diversify or expand a current agriculture project. The Mini-Grant Matching Funds Program deadline for applications is December 31, 2025.00

#### 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 at this time.

##### B. Agriculture Reconciliation Committee

Subcommittee membership includes Kaitlin Fraer, Connie Gunn, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood.

No update at this time.

#### 5. OLD BUSINESS

##### A. Agriculture Updates

Ben Beale updated the Board that commodity crops prices are below break even prices, and due to the weather there was an above average grain crop while soybeans had low yields. Vegetable crops had a decent production and prices however tomatoes were hurt by excessive summer heat. Beef and livestock prices are at record highs while herd sizes are low. Global prices and global demand are affecting local pricing. President Trump announced a \$12 billion Farmer Bridge Assistance Program in early December 2025, providing one-time payments to U.S. farmers to counter market disruptions from trade issues and high costs, bridging them to new support from the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" starting in late 2026.

Bruce Young stated that Cover Crops numbers are lower than they have been for the last 5 years because the Maryland Department of Agriculture reduced the program's base payment and incentives. The Maryland Department of Agriculture is currently determining a state wide definition of Agriculture.

##### B. Seafood/Aquaculture Updates

Jeff Pharis shared with the Board that the St. Mary's County Watermen's Association sold baskets and buoys to local businesses and individuals. They then created tree that is displayed at the Leonardtown Wharf. Proceeds from the Basket Tree will go to oyster planting in 2026. Mr. Pharis also updated that wild oyster harvest and production are both up over the last 3-4 years and as such the watermen are in need of promotional assistance to sell their product.

##### C. Forestry Updates

Mr. Sirk spoke about his membership on the Maryland Forest Conservancy Board. This 200 member Board is made up of local, volunteer-driven groups (one for each county and Baltimore City) established to promote responsible forest management, educate the public, and support state conservation goals like the Forest Conservation Act and Forest Conservation and Management Program. They work with local governments and landowners, focusing on regional

needs for tree preservation, habitat, water quality, and sustainable use, offering resources and fostering community involvement in stewardship.

#### D. Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)

Applications for the next MALPF Easement Offer Cycle will be open in St. Mary's County between January 1 – May 15, 2026.

#### E. Rural Legacy

Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust (PTLT) – Viv Marek updated the Board that the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust would be closing soon on an 86-acre Easement. There are an additional 250 acres of property awaiting Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Navy REPI approval. There is no update on the proposed Rural Legacy Area Expansion in Huntersville.

Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) –Lisa Ledman told the Board that the Southern Maryland RC&D recently received DNR approval on a 50-acre Easement that will be closing soon. Bruce Young also shared that all Easement Monitoring was completed in November 2025.

#### F. Farmers Markets

Emily Lacey shared that the Home Grown Farm Market is open Saturdays from 9 am until 1 pm. The California Farmers Market is closed for the year. There will be a vendor meeting on January 14, 2026

The Barns at New Market Seasonal Market is open Saturdays from 9 am until 3 pm. until December 20, 2025. The Winter Market will be opening in mid-January 2026.

### 6. NEW BUSINESS

#### A. Legislative Updates

No update at this time.

#### B. Annual Report

Draft copies of the Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Annual Report were distributed to the Board.

I move to table the vote to approve the Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Annual Report until the February 2026 meeting. Motion by Michael Sirk, second Alan Polk

Final Resolution: Motion Carries

Yea: Scott Bacon, Ben Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, Connie Gunn, James Moore, Jeff Pharis, Alan Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young

#### C. 2026 Meeting Schedule

Lisa Ledman shared the dates for the 2026 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting Schedule:

February 13, 2026

April 9, 2026

June 11, 2026

August 13, 2026

October 8, 2026  
December 10, 2026

D. Board Member Open Comment Period

Scott Bacon and Stephen Reeves recognized this as their last meeting serving on the Board. The Board thanked them both for their contributions.

B. Partner Updates

Bruce Young shared that invitations would be forthcoming for the Soil Conservation District's Cooperators Dinner which will be held on February 20, 2026 at the Bay District Volunteer Fire Department's Social Hall.

7. ADJOURN

I move to adjourn the December 11, 2025 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting.

Motion by Stephen Reeves, second by James Moore

Final Resolution: Motion Carries

Yea: Scott Bacon, Ben Beale, Bonnie Browne, Kaitlin Fraer, Connie Gunn, James Moore, Jeff Pharis, Alan Polk, Stephen Reeves, Michael Sirk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young