



Agriculture, Seafood and Forestry Board - Feb 12 2026 Minutes

Thursday, February 12, 2026 at 12:00 PM

26737 Radio Station Way, Suite C., Leonardtown, MD THIS AGENDA IS TENTATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE - TIMES ARE APPROXIMATE A part or all of the meeting may be conducted in closed session

1. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Call to Order

2. ROLL CALL

- A. Confirmation of Quorum (2 minutes)
Members Present - Scott Bacon, Ben Beale, John Delozier, Sydney Garner, Erin Melanson, Jim Moore, Jeff Pharis, Alan Polk, Joseph Wood, Bruce Young
- B. Welcome Guests (2 minutes)
Joan Bearden, St. Mary's County Farm Bureau
Jordan Jones-Cordero, College of Southern Maryland
Chuck Borges, Maryland Senate Candidate
Cynthia Greb, Director, St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development
Emily Lacey, St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development
Lisa Ledman, St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development
- C. Approval of Minutes (2 minutes)
I move to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2025 Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board Meeting.

Moved by: James Moore

Seconded by: Ben Beale

Motion Carries

- D. Election of Officers
I move to table the Election of Officers to the April Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board Meeting.

Moved by: James Moore

Seconded by: Richard Polk

Motion Carries

3. PRESENTATION

- A. College of Southern Maryland, Vertical Agriculture Program (20 minutes)
Jordan Jones-Cordero, Agriculture and Allied Careers Instructor,
Maryland Center for Environmental Training (MCET), College of
Southern Maryland

The College of Southern Maryland has offered a Vertical Agriculture Program consisting of 3 courses at 40 hours each and then a partnership with 40 hours on farm experience since October 2024. Vertical agriculture is a system of farming, often indoors, in which plants are grown in stacked trays instead of across expansive fields, maximizing production while saving on space and water. Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland has scholarships available for those interested in participating in this program. There are currently no vertical farm operations in St. Mary's County. A possible expansion on this Program could include an Agri-business course to focus on business and financial planning.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Agricultural Reconciliation Committee (5 minutes)
Subcommittee membership includes Kaitlin Fraer, Connie Gunn, Jeff Pharis, Michael Sirk, and Joseph Wood
No update at this time.
- B. Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board (5 minutes)
Subcommittee membership includes Scott Bacon, James Moore, Alan Polk, Michael Sirk, and Joseph Wood

I move to approve the presented land swap to cure a violation on MALPF File # 18-02-18

Moved by: James Moore

Seconded by: Scott Bacon

Motion Carries

I move to approve the Pre-Existing Dwelling Relocation Request on MALPF File # 18-17-05.

Moved by: James Moore

Seconded by: Joseph Wood

Motion Carries

5. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Agriculture Updates (5 minutes)
Sydney Garner shared information about the upcoming Southern Maryland Agriculture Resource Fair to be held on February 25, 2026 at the Barns at New Market and a National Agriculture Day presentation to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County on March 24, 2026.
- B. Seafood/Aquaculture Updates (5 minutes)
Jeff Pharis informed the Board that oyster season is in full swing and the Department of Natural Resources reports that shellfish spat was reported in the fall to be the highest it has been in the last 41 years. the Blue Catfish operation in St. Mary's County is in the process of getting up and running. There is concern over the DC sewage spills in the Potomac River and how a river closure will affect the watermen. Mr. Pharis also spoke of the success of the Waterman's Association of St. Mary's County's annual Crab Basket and Buoy Christmas Tree fundraiser.
- C. Forestry Updates (5 minutes)
Alan Polk shared with the Board of a fire earlier in the day affecting a Shavings Mill located in Leonardtown. Ben Beale shared information about proposed legislation to alter qualifications to be a forester.
- D. Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (5 minutes)
Sydney Garner stated that applications for the upcoming easement cycle are due to her office by May 15, 2026. To date 3 completed applications have been submitted.
- E. Rural Legacy (5 minutes)
Sydney Garner shared an updated from Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development. SMRC&D has settled two properties within the Mattapany RLA, totaling 249 acres and are heading to settlement for two properties soon, totaling and additional 107 acres. They are starting the easement process for another two properties, that will total 78 acres. Each of their Annual monitoring visits have gone well, there are no issues to report.
- F. Farmers Markets (5 minutes)
Emily Lacey shared that the Barns at New Market Winter Market is open on Saturdays from 10 am until 2 pm. The Seasonal Market will be opening in April with the Seasonal Building being open Monday - Saturday 8 am until 5 pm and the Value Added Building being open Saturdays only from 9 am until 3 pm.

The California Farmers Market will open in May on Saturdays only from 9 am until 12:30 pm.

The Home Grown Farm Market is open year round on Saturdays from 9 am until 1 pm.

G. Legislative Updates (5 minutes)

No update at this time.

H. Annual Report (5 minutes)

I move to submit the St. Mary's County Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board's 2025 Annual Report.

Moved by: Bruce Young

Seconded by: James Moore

Motion Carries

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. Board Member Open Comment Period (15 minutes)

Bruce Young invited members of the Board to the St. Mary's County Soil Conservation District's Cooperator Dinner on February 20, 2026 at the Bay District Volunteer Fire Department. The cost of the dinner is \$40 per person.

Jeff Pharis shared that the Tidal Fish Advisory Committee sent a letter to the Governor to request the promotion of wild oysters. He requested a similar initiative locally.

Erin Melanson voiced concern that local grape growers are aging and there is a need for them to partner with younger farmers to keep the vineyards thriving.

B. Partner Updates - Time Permitting (5 minutes)

Joan Bearden invited members of the Board to attend the St. Mary's County Farm Bureau Banquet on March 7, 2026 at the Bay District Volunteer Fire Department. St. Mary's County Farm Bureau also hosted their Annual Legislative Dinner in January where topics of discussion were deer and data centers (electricity and water requirements).

7. ADJOURN

I move to conclude the February 12, 2026 Agriculture, Seafood & Forestry Board Meeting.

Moved by: Richard Polk

Seconded by: James Moore

Motion Carries