



## **Agriculture, Seafood and Forestry Board - Apr 09 2026 Minutes**

Thursday, April 9, 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. The Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board's April 9, 2026 Meeting was called to order at 12:00 pm.

### **2. ROLL CALL**

- A. Confirmation of Quorum  
Members present -  
Scott Bacon, Forestry, 3rd term expires 12/31/2030  
Ben Beale, Ex Officio University of Maryland Extension  
Bonnie Browne, Community Member, 1st term expires 12/31/2029  
John Delozier, Agriculture, 1st term expires 12/31/2030  
Justin Cheseldine-Gass, Seafood, 1st term expires 6/30/2027  
Kaitlin Fraer, Community Member, 1st term expires 6/30/2029  
Sydney Garner, Ex Officio St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development  
Connie Gunn, Real Estate Community Representative, 1st term expires 12/31/2029  
Priscilla Leitch, Agriculture, 1st term expires 12/31/2029  
Erin Melanson, Agriculture, 1st term expires 12/31/2030  
Alan Polk, Forestry, 2nd term expires 12/31/2029  
Michael Sirk, Forestry, 2nd term expires 6/30/2026  
Joseph Wood, Agriculture, 2nd term expires 6/30/2026  
Bruce Young, Ex Officio St. Mary's County Soil Conservation District  
  
Members not present -  
James Moore, Agriculture, 1st term expires 6/30/2027  
Jeffrey Pharis, Seafood, 1st term expires 6/30/2030

- B. Welcome Guests (2 minutes)  
Sabrina Dobbins, Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission  
Joan Bearden, St. Mary's County Farm Bureau  
Elizabeth Beales - Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)  
Jessalyn Cockrell, Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)  
Viv Marreck, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust  
Cynthia Greb, 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  
I move to approve the minutes of the February 12, 2026 Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board Meeting.  
Moved by: Connie Gunn; seconded by: Bruce Young  
**Yea:** Michael Sirk, Erin Melanson, John Delozier, Priscilla Leitch, Kaitlin Fraer, Richard Polk, Bonnie Brown, Scott Bacon, Joseph Wood, Ben Beale, Bruce Young, Justin Cheseldine, and Connie Gunn

**Motion Carries 13-0**

- D. Election of Officers  
I move to elect Scott Bacon as the Chair of the Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board.  
Moved by: Bruce Young; seconded by: Ben Beale  
**Yea:** Michael Sirk, Erin Melanson, John Delozier, Priscilla Leitch, Kaitlin Fraer, Richard Polk, Bonnie Brown, Joseph Wood, Ben Beale, Bruce Young, Justin Cheseldine, and Connie Gunn  
**Abstain:** Scott Bacon

**Motion Carries 12-0**

I move to elect John Delozier as the Vice Chair of the Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board.

Moved by: Ben Beale; seconded by: Bruce Young

**Yea:** Michael Sirk, Erin Melanson, Scott Bacon, Priscilla Leitch, Kaitlin Fraer, Richard Polk, Bonnie Brown, Joseph Wood, Ben Beale, Bruce Young, Justin Cheseldine, and Connie Gunn

**Abstain:** John Delozier

**Motion Carries 12-0**

### 3. PRESENTATION

- A. Rural Legacy  
Jessalyn Cockrell, Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development, gave a presentation to the Board on the Maryland Rural Legacy Program. Maryland's Rural Legacy Program provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resources, agricultural,

forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource-based industries. The program creates public-private partnerships and allows those who know the landscape best – land trusts and local governments – to determine the best way to protect the landscapes that are critical to our economy, environment and quality of life.

The program encourages local governments and land trusts to work together and determine how best to protect their vital working landscapes. In St. Mary's County both the Southern Maryland RC&D and the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust are partners.

Land conservation investments are targeted to protect the most ecologically valuable properties that most directly impact Chesapeake Bay and local waterway health. St. Mary's County has 2 designated Rural Legacy Areas, the Huntersville Rural Legacy Area and the Mattapany Rural Legacy Area.

To participate in the Rural Legacy Program, there is no minimal size of property requirement, but the property must have development rights to extinguish. Landowners can elect to donate an easement on their property or have financial compensation based on an approved County Easement Valuation System which is determined using the average offer prices of MALPF Easement offers.

The Land Trusts submit applications for State funding annually in February. the Land Trusts can leverage this State funding with County funds and funds available through the Navy's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program.

- B. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)  
Elizabeth Beales, MALPF Program Administer, gave a presentation to the Board on the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation Program.

Created by the General Assembly in 1977, MALPF purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties, representing a public investment of over \$900 million. Since 1980, MALPF has purchased easements on over 2,500, permanently preserving over 350,000 acres.

The mission of MALPF is:

- To preserve productive farmland and woodland for the continued production of food and fiber for all of Maryland's citizens (statutory goal);
- To curb the expansion of random urban development (statutory goal);

- To help curb the spread of urban blight and deterioration (statutory goal);
- To help protect agricultural land and woodland as open space (statutory goal);
- To protect wildlife habitat (ancillary goal); and
- To enhance the environmental quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries (ancillary goal).

Eligibility for the MALPF Program includes:

- The minimum property size is 50 contiguous acres.;
- At least 50 percent of the land shall classify as Class I, II or III soils;
- Land that lies within the boundaries of a 10-year water and sewer service area plan is generally not eligible for the program unless it has extraordinary productive capability and is of significant size.;
- The property must contain development rights.

Applications are ranked at the County level, and different Counties use various approved Ranking Systems. Properties are appraised and landowners are extended offers of 75% of the appraised fair market value. Funding for easement purchase is contributed by the State (via a dedicated real estate transfer tax and an agricultural transfer tax) and County. For Certified Counties, the State offers a matching funds program; for every dollar the County allocates, the State matches it with \$1.50 up to a maximum of \$2,000,000.

#### 4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Agricultural Reconciliation Committee  
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  
Subcommittee membership includes Scott Bacon, James Moore, Alan Polk, Michael Sirk, and Joseph Wood

The Agriculture Lane Preservation Advisory Board met at the conclusion of this meeting.

I move to approve the Unrestricted Lot Request on MALPF File # 18-11-01 with the caveat that the lot is non-subdividable from the Easement.

Moved by: Joseph Wood; seconded by: Richard Polk

**Yea:** Michael Sirk, Richard Polk, Scott Bacon, and Joseph Wood

**Motion Carries 4-0**

## 5. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Agriculture Updates  
No update at this time.

- B. Seafood/Aquaculture Updates  
Justin Chesaldine-Gass mentioned that the wild caught oyster season was coming to an end. He also spoke of the Mitigation Action and Waterman Support (MAWS) Act of 2026 (H.R. 4294) which aims to establish a NOAA pilot program to convert invasive Chesapeake Bay blue catfish into pet and animal food.

Bruce Young told the Board on legislation to establish updated requirements for using nonstructural shoreline stabilization measures. It specifically impacts how these projects are evaluated, particularly regarding when a "living shoreline" is required over hard armoring. He is concerned that the use of oyster shell may take away from watermen who need this shell for oyster spat.

Sydney Garner updated the Board on efforts between Visit St. Mary's and Economic Development to produce education and marketing for local watermen.

- C. Forestry Updates  
Ben Beale told the Board of a Maryland-Delaware Master Logger Program, a voluntary training and education program for loggers who work in Maryland and Delaware. The program helps loggers meet the ever-increasing demands of the logging profession. The courses provide information about current environmental regulations, forestry principles, and safe work practices.

Bruce Young mentioned effective July 1, 2026, significant changes to Maryland's forest conservation laws, including those impacting timber harvesting and reforestation, will take effect, following delays established by the General Assembly in 2024.

- D. Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)  
Sydney shared that MALPF Applications are due to the Economic Development office before May 15, 2026.
- E. Rural Legacy  
Southern Maryland RC&D reported that they were going to settlement soon on a 50-acre parcel.

Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust is awaiting legal review on several easements.

F. Farmers Markets

Emily Lacey shared that the Barns at New Market Seasonal Market is now operating. The Value-Added Building is open Saturdays from 9 am until 3 pm with 50 rotational vendors. The Seasonal Building is open Wednesday - Saturday from 9 am until 4 pm.

The California Farmers Market will be opening May 2nd from 9 am until 12:30 pm and will host 25 vendors

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

G. Legislative Updates

No update at this time.

**6. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Board Member Open Comment Period

John Delozier questioned the use of beef products from Mexico.

Alan Polk spoke about the need to increase the menhaden population.

Ben Beale shared that the University of Maryland Extension is offering a Cover Crop Incentive Program. Mr. Beale also stated that Chopticon High School has 30 students who meet for a Future Farmers of America Chapter and that there is interest in hosting a CASE program there. Mr. Beale requested that St. Mary's County Land Use and Growth Management attend the June Board Meeting to give a presentation on the Agriculture Chapter of the proposed Comprehensive Plan.

B. Partner Updates - Time Permitting

Joan Bearden shared that the Farm Bureau Regional Picnic will be held on May 9, 2026 at Horseman Farms. Ms. Bearden also shared that Farm Bureau awarded 3 scholarships.

**7. ADJOURN**

I move to adjourn the April 9, 2026, Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board Meeting.

Moved by: Connie Gunn; seconded by: Richard Polk

**Yea:** Michael Sirk, Erin Melanson, John Delozier, Priscilla Leitch, Kaitlin Fraer, Richard Polk, Bonnie Brown, Scott Bacon, Joseph Wood, Ben Beale, Bruce Young, Justin Cheseldine, and Connie Gunn

**Motion Carries 13-0**