



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

Jenna Guzman, Communications Director

SMCG TV 95 Station Manager

Media Inquiries: 301-475-4200, ext. 1342, or PIO@stmaryscountymd.gov

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**Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland and St. Mary's County
Government Issue Joint Statement on Regional Agricultural Center**

LEONARDTOWN, MD –The Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland (TCCSMD) and St. Mary's County Government today issued a joint statement regarding the future of the Regional Agricultural Center (RAC).

For the past seven years, the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), a division of TCCSMD, and St. Mary's County Government have worked together tirelessly to bring the RAC to fruition. This ambitious project was envisioned to expand Southern Maryland agriculture, opening new markets, strengthening existing ones, and serving as an economic engine for the region.

The RAC was designed to offer a comprehensive suite of services, including a regional butcher shop cut and wrap facility, apprenticeship programs and job training, a warehouse and distribution site, and others.

Despite considerable efforts of all involved, the project was unable to move forward. Significant challenges, including the COVID-19 Pandemic rising costs of construction, and regulatory delays, have hindered the project's progress over the past several years. While the goal of providing these services to the community remains, the current plan of housing all of them under one roof in a unified Regional Agriculture Center (RAC) is no longer economically feasible.

To ensure that the region continues to work towards having a butcher shop cut and wrap facility (one of the highest priorities of the original RAC plans), TCCSMD/SMADC will soon issue an RFP for private businesses to apply for a grant that works toward that goal. A few parties have already expressed interest in applying for this grant, demonstrating a shared commitment to advancing Southern Maryland's agricultural industry.

While this pivot may be disappointing, it is a necessary step to move the project forward. TCCSMD, SMADC and St. Mary's County Government remain dedicated to supporting local farmers and businesses. We will continue to explore innovative solutions to bring these vital services to the region.

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