



# Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Larry Hogan, Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor  
Joseph Bartenfelder, Secretary  
Julianne A. Oberg, Deputy Secretary

Maryland Agricultural Commission

The Wayne A. Cawley, Jr. Building  
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
www.mda.maryland.gov

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry

410.841.5882 Baltimore/Washington  
410.841.5914 Fax  
800.492.5590 Toll Free

## Maryland Agricultural Commission Minutes November 4, 2020

### Present:

Ag Education: Martha Clark  
Agritourism: Kelly Dudeck  
At Large Ag Service: Matthew Levi Sellers  
Food Processing: Cheryl DeBerry  
Livestock: Sean Hough

Poultry I: Michael Levensgood  
Poultry II: Michelle Protani-Chesnik  
State Grange: Clifford Newsome Jr.  
Turf: Tom Warpinski

### Absent:

Agribusiness: Thomas Mullineaux  
Ag Education: Martha Clark  
Aquaculture: Talmage Petty  
At Large Ag Service: Frank Allnutt  
Consumer: Carroll Shry Jr.  
Dairy II: David Pyle  
Direct Farm Market: Amy Crone  
Equine: Michael Pons  
Farm Bureau: Jonathan Quinn

Forestry: Elizabeth Hill  
Field Crops: Donald Maring  
Nursery I: James Raley  
Nursery II: Ray Greenstreet  
Organic Farming: Matthew Nielsen  
University: Dr. Craig Beyrouty  
Veterinary: Dr. John Brooks  
Viticulture: Matthew Corey Spies

### MDA Staff:

Steve Connelly  
Julie Oberg  
Cassie Shirk  
Kevin Conroy  
Joe Bartenfelder  
Rich Colburn  
Jason Schellhardt

### Guest

Stacy Kubofcik MARBIDCO  
Steve McHenry MARBIDCO

### Approval of Minutes:

October minutes were approved 1<sup>st</sup> by Martha Clark and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Warpinski.

## **Commodity Reports:**

### **Martha Clark- Ag Education:**

- MAEF Virtual annual meeting will be on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Registration was due the first of the week but sure that if you still wish to register, they will still take it today or tomorrow.
- The silent auction will be from November 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>. If you go online to the MAEF website you will see the auction items.
- Some schools have gone back to 4 day shifts; others such as Howard County will be closed till February.
- Notice for the 4H executive director position has been posted and the salary has been posted at \$74,000 and up.
- Will send a copy of the job description if you would like to send it to anyone.
- Everyone is working on budget reports and how to fundraise money during COVID-19.
- Scholarships in January for the 4H awards will be virtual.

### **Levi Sellers Ag Services:**

- October is harvest season for hemp farmers.
- Thank Kevin Conroy and Jim Drews for their responses to the hemp industries request and the extension of the hemp pilot program.
- Follow more inline with USDAs extension of the pilot program as well.
- The current permits have been extended to December to allow more feed back from the USDA as to what their guidelines moving forward for the 2021 growing season will be.
- Received a letter from Jim Drews and MDA stating what Kevin highlighted with the two permit options for the 2021 growing season.
- Looking forward to the 2021 growing season.
- An issue that occurred in West Virginia in their Hemp industry and this issue highlights how well the MDA has done with the hemp pilot program. There were issues with compliance testing that was getting slow return results back to the farmers to be able to harvest crops out of the fields.
- 100 tests as of October 23<sup>rd</sup> still had not come back with results. It was explained that the equipment had broken down and caused a huge bottle neck for farmers to get crops out of the field.
- This issue has not occurred in MD due to how the MD hemp program was established and allowance of testing to go through multiple facilities other than one or two.
- These changes to the 2021 growing season will help progress the hemp industry in MD.
- Bill 9420 has been withdrawn currently stating there is no peer reviewed research to backup the health claims and they are waiting on more research and a study by the Baltimore Counties Commission on Environment Quality before the 2021 growing season so the bill has been halted at this time.

### **Kelly Dudeck- Agritourism:**

- Have had some great weather this year which has been great news for our agritourism folks. With that said a lot are closing this weekend or next weekend for the upcoming weather.
- The ones that have adapted and have come up with say a fire pit or a tent and getting more people out to the farm safely have done really well.
- Those that have chosen to do the same old thing are struggling a bit.

- There is concern with the winter and how to deal with indoor spaces. A lot of the tasting rooms are choosing to close their doors due to lack of space but will continue to do delivery and curbside pickup.
- Could be even more of a shortage this year with Christmas trees. More people looking to get out to a farm for Christmas trees meaning they will go faster this year.
- Rough year for vines, some wineries will not be making reds at all this year.
- A lot of crop failure due to late frost and late season rain.
- Maryland wineries association is doing a new program and how to help Maryland Wine and the Maryland Wine program.

#### **Sean Hough- Livestock:**

- Similar concerns in livestock world due to lack of processing plants and getting animals in and the back log that has occurred.
- Prices are down on the commodity side on both cattle and pigs.
- Cattle prices dipping is surprising because the feeder calves are going to the stock yards and being sold but the prices are just down a little.
- Pork exports to China are lower than hoped which is why pork prices are also low.
- National level red meat production through October: pork production is up 1.8%, cattle is down 1%, lamb is down 8%, and veal is down 14%. Surprising that the production levels are down this much.
- The number of head being processed is down which shows that they are getting more meat production for less animals which could be caused by the back log to get to the processing plants.
- Getting more meat with less head.

#### **Michelle Protani- Chesnik- Poultry:**

- September, October, and November were a continuum of weather impacts much like the prior two months from dry and hot to humid and hot. All which impact poultry with the rapid change of weather conditions. October was an exceptionally wet month with over 6 inches of rain in our part of Wicomico County.
- The uncertainty in poultry agriculture continued, the depopulation has seemed to come to a halt thankfully for those growers who lived in fear that their flock would be next. It creates an unimaginable stress for the farm family. Older aged birds continued with some as old as 78 days reported. Ours were again much older than the average age moved, this was reflected in electric bills. Those extra days ran the electric bill up by over 7,000.00 dollars. This time it was not due to Covid but bird health in the field and the need to sick birds out before healthy birds. This is costly to both the company and the farmer.
- It has returned to Delmarva and vaccinating has resumed unfortunately after a break from it for the past few years. This will have a definite impact on bird respiratory health in the upcoming cold months. I fear it may be years again before it is discontinued. Oral vaccine is in very short supply.
- Lay out times have continued to be all over the board again. Times I have heard of have been anywhere from 14 days to over 6 weeks. This creates a serious cashflow problem for those going without birds for long periods of time. Mid Atlantic Farm Credit offered a Lunch Break seminar on how to manage finances during the long lay outs, it was much appreciated. I don't anticipate the long layouts slowing down as Mike Levengood stated at an earlier ag commission meeting "we have a glut of poultry housing" on the shore,
- The best thing that occurred in October was the Farmer Round Table held by Our Governor Larry Hogan and Delaware Governor John Carney. The Governors gave a

much-needed stimulus to the family poultry farms. I am as most are grateful for the acknowledgement that contract poultry has been left out of the federal Covid assistance programs. The reasoning being that we do not bear the risk since we don't (hold title) own the birds. As you have heard me comment many times if a person who has borrowed 2 to 5 million dollars to build one of the farms or like us who are older and it is our only source of income does not have risk than I don't know what risk is.

- Governor Hogan with Secretary Bartenfelder set up a program to provide \$1,000.00 per poultry house for up to 5 houses on a farm and an additional \$1,500.00 per house if the birds were depopulated. While this won't take care of the mortgage or interest for some of those who have payments of \$30,000.00 to 40,000.00 quarterly, it still is help. I am a firm believer that life needs to be approached from the aspect of a glass half full not half empty. I am most grateful for this assistance, knowing fully the financial burden COVID-19 has put upon state government. The process to apply that was put in place is simple and seamless. It was by far the best I have seen in government! We applied on October 16<sup>th</sup> the day of the round table. The check has not been received yet.
- I had the privilege to address the Governor as Chair of the Agricultural Commission at the round table. I communicated the concerns and needs of poultry farms and of the rural communities. I described the human stress factors that are occurring because of Covid and how concerns over finances and illness are taking a toll on our rural communities. Even if it is just a mobile unit that goes to the rural areas to provide basic health testing and guidance to mental health specialist that it would be a significant help for these rural families as we are short on the shore on health care providers. I have faith Governor Hogan will take steps to find the much-needed help for the shore. Delmarva Farmer did a piece on the round table see attached.
- <https://americanfarmpublications.com/poultry-growers-balk-at-exclusion-from-federal-relief-programs/>
- Maryland Department of Environment has collected their fees, but to date I have not heard of any permits being issued or paperwork sent for public purvey.
- Upon checking the MDE CAFO report I did find two in Queen Anne's county that seem to have some activity occurring. This is unfortunate that only two appear to being processed out of over 600 or more farms.
- The environmental community continues to attack poultry agriculture, Kathy Phillips the Coast keeper has received a grant from the now defunct Town Creek Found for 3 million dollars. It appears she is working hard to scare up a fear of tainted wells on the lower shore, the past eight days or so two articles have appeared about dangers to drinking water from CAFOS. See attached article. [https://www.oceancitytoday.com/news/high-nitrate-levels-found-in-local-well-water/article\\_517e5310-1a20-11eb-b908-a78b3ad474d0.html](https://www.oceancitytoday.com/news/high-nitrate-levels-found-in-local-well-water/article_517e5310-1a20-11eb-b908-a78b3ad474d0.html)
- Animal welfare activists are also busy at it with a whole blueprint on how to control how farmers raise their animals It all boils down to let's keep them from eating meat. This applies to all animal ag not just chickens.
- Cyber-attacks are also another way anti ag activist are targeting animal agricultural, it is scary and easy to be a target. See attached article.
- <https://www.meatingplace.com/Industry/Blogs/Details/95055>
- More anti meat news scientists now say we should tax it, so people eat less. See attached <https://www.meatingplace.com/Industry/Blogs/Details/95055>

### **Michael Levensgood- Poultry:**

- An avian disease the chicken community is familiar with -- **laryngotracheitis (LT)**, a highly contagious respiratory disease affecting chickens -- is affecting several Delmarva farms this fall. Growers, chicken companies, and allied businesses servicing farms and farmers all have a role to play in preventing the spread of LT, and the current cases

underscore how essential it is to practice good biosecurity **at all times**, not only when an outbreak commands our attention. This disease is not as devastating as Avian Influenza (AI), it just adds work for the farmers with increased mortality if their flock gets sick, while also adding more precautions to prevent catching it.

- DPI sent the following to Legislators: Good day Senators and Delegates from Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore. I just wanted to share with you a statement that DPI has drafted and sent to at least one media channel at this point in regards to the Maryland Matters article on the Lower Shore and Unhealthy Drinking Water Due to CAFOs.
- *"This report misleads by claiming to find a 'dramatic increase in CAFOs' without disclosing that the authors started to count them just when the Maryland CAFO permit was first created. Across Delmarva, we've actually seen a decrease in the number of farmers raising chickens in the report's timeframe, from 1,667 chicken growers in 2009 to 1,325 growers in 2019 and only a slight increase in the number of chicken houses in operation – 4,911 in 2009 to 5,114 in 2019. Farmers and the thousands of others working in the chicken community who live in these counties, just like their neighbors, welcome more data and information about environmental conditions in the region – that's why DPI forged ahead with an innovative ambient air monitoring network this year that is managed by environmental regulators and is supplying never-before-collected public data to all Marylanders. Safe drinking water is important to everyone- after all, farmers and their chickens drink the same water their neighbors do. However, the suggestion of a moratorium on new and expanding chicken farms is not a practical solution to drinking water concerns. It's concerning to see that reports like this, part of a \$3.5 million campaign against agriculture funded by the Town Creek Foundation, are misstating the scope and practice of how chickens are raised on Delmarva. Maryland chicken farms are already regulated as no-discharge farms, where any manure is under cover, minimizing any possible leaching concerns. Maryland farmers have a proven, decades-long record of reducing phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment contributions to the Chesapeake Bay." We are still digging through the report itself, but we will share that the reporter for *Maryland Matters* inaccurately described a number of things that are not correct:*
- DPI is not familiar with what a factory farm is and we certainly do not have them on Maryland's Eastern Shore.
- While the number of laying hens may produce more manure than the Maryland Zoo, the birds raised on the Lower Shore are broilers, that are not in the houses year-round like laying hens and therefore do not create that much manure a year.
- Manure, like any fertilizer, is applied to farm fields under strict regulations as part of nutrient management plans. The requirement of farmers to report manure generation and where manure is transported has been part of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's process for many years – not just since last year.
- Broiler litter is not liquid.
- \$1.5 million available for precision nutrient management, soil health.
- Through USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project Sustainable Chesapeake, \$1.5 million is available to EQIP-eligible Maryland farmers in Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester Counties. Management practices to be funded include:
  1. Precision nutrient management
  2. Multi-species cover crops
  3. Poultry mortality freezers
  4. Grassed waterways
  5. Drainage water management and saturated buffers
- With this RCPP funding the maximum cap for precision nutrient management is \$40,000/year, rather than \$10,000/year through EQIP. Interested individuals should call or

visit their local USDA NRCS office to confirm eligibility and complete an application by November 20, 2020 to be considered for FY21 funding.

- This funding is available through USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project Sustainable Chesapeake secured in partnership with the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Chesapeake 4R Alliance. For more information about RCPP, EQIP, and NRCS, visit [www.md.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.md.nrcs.usda.gov).

#### **Clifford Newsome- State Grange:**

- National convention will be all virtual.
- Our MD session went really well and passed 10 of the 12 proposal for legislation resolutions that will go to the national.
- Grange numbers have been practicing social distancing and if they meet, they are in an auditorium where they are at least 6 feet apart in some cases 8 to 10 apart.
- There have been fundraisers with take out meals and hope this can continue.
- Fundraising activities have been hard and scarce due to the current COVID-19 situation.

#### **Tom Warpinski- Turf:**

- Weather has been hard and due to the wet conditions it is especially difficult for sod farmers.
- Weather is limiting sales. Growers are having great difficulty mowing new seeding that were put in due to the fields just being way to wet.
- Spreaders are also not able to get on the fields.
- Turf sales is down and this is due to wet weather and COVID-19 delaying progress.
- Sport field renovation is non existent due to the field not being used much throughout the summer due to the effects of COVID-19.
- Lawn care maintenance companies have been staying busy though due to wet weather because grass is growing faster and getting crews out is difficult.
- Sod supply is low due to excessive moisture. When it is this wet there is root die back which weakens the turf and causes it to become non harvestable because it doesn't hold together. Set back months waiting for the root systems to tighten up again to be harvested.
- December 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Turf Grass Council will have winter turf conference virtually.
- February 22<sup>nd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> Turf Grass Producer International will have mid-winter conference and field day in Austin, Texas.

#### **Staff Updates:**

##### **Steve McHenry:**

- Have 27 applications for our value-added producer grant program which funds capital equipment. Of these applications 20 have been approved and a notice has gone out this week on those.
- Our small acreage next generation program has received two applications for small farm purchases in Calvert and Frederick counties so that program is moving right along.

##### **Jason Schellhardt:**

- Season 8 Maryland Farm and Harvest is set to premier November 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm.
- Continue to promote relief package and send out postcards to eligible farmers in the next week.

**Cassie Shirk:**

- No update on the legislative session.
- The issues with the Styrofoam ban and egg cartons being exempt has been resolved.
- MDE push out guidance to the local health departments and Deanna Baldwin from MDA let her group know that egg cartons were exempt from the Styrofoam ban.

**Kevin Conroy:**

- Hemp industry new regulations to go into effect.
- Incorporated the regulations that were based on the 2018 farm bill to administer the hemp farming program
- Congress the beginning of October decided to extend pilot program until the end of September 2021 so the two programs will run concurrently.
- USDA opened up the regulations on their level to make changes but we are unaware of those changes all we know is that it will be easier to grow hemp.
- Farmers have options to grow hemp under the pilot program rules or under the new rules that are in affect now and will be required to follow after October.

**Steve Connelly:**

- Contract grower's application process we have 517 applications in and once they come in and we verify them with a list from MDE or they are sent over to the nutrient management shop to verify the number of houses.
- 160 of the applications have already been sent over to the comptroller.
- Those that have sent in applications should be receiving checks by the end of next week.
- Takes about 2 weeks for the comptroller's office to cut a check.
- Under the CFAP1 bonus program we have received 358 applications.
- Of those 128 have gone to the comptrollers.
- Reminder that CFAP2 is open right now and the deadline is December 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Dairy Margin Coverage program is open and closes on December 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Go to your county FFA office and the deadline is December 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Fiscal and marketing folks at the department are working hard to get the applications processed as quickly as possible.

**Julie Oberg:**

- Steve Connelly and Mark Powell worked hard to make the application process seamless and easy as possible.

**Joe Bartenfelder:**

- Recovery program for poultry farmers.
- Want to give a big shout out to the governor for his support and dedication for this new program.
- A big thanks to Julie and Jason who worked everything out with IT.
- Steve Connelly and Mark Powell who handled the applications coming in and forwarding them along.
- The overall process went exceptionally well.
- Cover crop program it has been a wet fall and it is tough not only getting crops out of the field but getting cover crops into the field.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:10am respectfully submitted by: Jessica O'Sullivan