

Thrive

Sustainable Agriculture in Calvert County

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Welcome

... to the first edition of *Thrive*, a quarterly newsletter focusing on sustainable agriculture in Calvert County, Maryland.

The Board of County Commissioners of Calvert County wants to protect the future of farming in the County and directed staff to look for ways to promote sustainable agriculture.

The Sustainable Agriculture Workgroup was formed with members from the Soil Conservation District, the Department of Economic Development, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Office of

Agritourism: The Future is Now

By Mark Volland of the Department of Economic Development of Calvert County

As the sun sets on Maryland's historic tobacco buyout program, area farmers are looking to diversify their incomes. One enterprise meeting with increasing success in Southern Maryland is agritourism -- the touring of agricultural areas to see farms and participate in farm activities.

Calvert County is a prime region for agritourism. Its proximity to the Washington, D.C. area, natural beauty and abundant resources make the county a strong draw for travelers. The benefits include increased farm revenues, new market opportunities for farmers and consumers, and community education on farming.



Typical agritourism activities at working farms include farm tours, hay rides, corn mazes and educational classes. Business opportunities involving farm animals include animal husbandry, commercial stables and horseback riding clubs. These options nicely complement standard farming operations and help build strong ties between people and regional farms.

Throughout Southern Maryland, farmers are diversifying in other ways as well. In **value-added agriculture**, farm commodities are processed into consumer products through commercial farm kitchens, wineries, farm breweries and roadside markets. Sites with historical significance appeal to visitors as **heritage tourism** destinations, with additional income available from gift stores, cafés or art galleries. Farm owners also show their environmental stewardship with **ecotourism** opportunities as visitors connect to the environment while camping, canoeing or kayaking, bird watching, walking trails or fishing.

While there is no single prescription for developing a successful agritourism business, the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service offers these key points for new operations:

- Start small and grow naturally
- Make decisions based on good records
- Follow demand-driven production
- Get the whole family or partners involved
- Evaluate continuously
- Ensure adequate capitalization
- Create a high-quality product
- Keep informed
- Plan for the future
- Persevere

See Agritourism, page 2



Agritourism, from page 1

A vital resource for Southern Maryland farmers pursuing agritourism is the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission. As part of the tobacco buyout program, the commission was created to help stabilize the region's farm economy in tobacco's wake. It has worked with farmers and related businesses to develop and expand market-driven agricultural enterprises in the region. The commission offers educational programs, workshops and grants to farmers to learn more about agritourism programs.

The So. Maryland, So Good campaign is also part of this effort. Through advertising and coordination across five counties, the campaign is building links between buyers and growers while promoting the advantages of buying local farm products. A related initiative is Southern Maryland Trails, a collection of itineraries that leads visitors to area farms, art studios, restaurants, and other sites. Farmers can become members of So. Maryland, So Good and be listed in the So. Maryland, So Good Farm Guide by applying online. The Web site also features information on farm resources, including farm bureaus, implement dealers, wholesale buyers and much more.

While Calvert County has preserved more land than all of its neighbors, the challenge is how to keep the land working and contributing to the local economy – and to farmers' bottom lines. Agritourism is one proven option. Check the resources below to learn more.

Resources

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service
<http://attra.ncat.org/>

Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
301-274-1922 or 301-870-2520, www.somarylandsogood.com
■ Provides guides on local farms, harvests, markets, agritourism opportunities, marketing materials & educational seminars

Maryland Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
301-934-7583, www.sbdchelp.com

■ Provides low- or no-cost guidance and training to help small business owners
■ Offers courses and seminars on business plans, financing, business expansion and business issues-insurance, licensing, etc.

Calvert County Department of Planning and Zoning
■ How-to guides and information available at:

www.co.cal.md.us/residents/building/planning/howtoguide/


■ The Zoning Ordinance can be found at
www.co.cal.md.us/resident/building/planning/

Calvert Agriculture Website
www.calvertag.com

■ General information about agriculture in Calvert including lists of local farm products, news, links and organizations

Maryland Cooperative Extension **Training the Next** **Generation of Farmers**

By Herb Reed



With the increasing age of active farmers, the small number of farm sons and daughters electing to take up the family farm as a vocation and the near demise of the teaching of agriculture in high schools, many in agriculture rightly wonder how the next generation of farmers is going to be trained.

As the agricultural extension agent in Calvert County, I have several thoughts on this. The first is that we in Extension still see the 4-H and Youth program as the best opportunity for not only training youth in agriculture but also for showing them the possibilities for a young person interested in agriculture.

We also encourage youth to consider the opportunities at the University of Maryland and other Land Grant universities for training in agriculture and related areas.

In addition, I have offered beginning farmer courses for minimal cost at the extension office in Prince Frederick. These courses are particularly suitable for those coming from non-farm backgrounds who may have strong management and entrepreneurial skills but lack agricultural knowledge. Early retirees are one group that may be attracted to these courses.

In the future, I would like to include experienced farmers – and their farms – as resources in teaching these courses to provide some practical education beyond the “book knowledge.”

The University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Office of Calvert County is in the new Community Resources Building on Duke Street, which was the old Prince Frederick Library. We can be contacted at P.O. Box 486, Prince Frederick, MD 20678, 410-535-3662 or 301-855-1150. Herb Reed can be contacted directly at hreed@umd.edu

Equal Access Programs



Calvert County's Vision for a Farmers' Cooperative

By Bill Clark of Calvert County Soil Conservation District

Earlier this year, the Board of Calvert County Commissioners directed staff to study solutions for agricultural sustainability in Calvert County. Planning and Zoning staff began meetings this spring with various organizations, including the Calvert Soil Conservation District, to discuss options.

One promising idea is a farmers' cooperative that would enter into contracts with local farmers to grow products and market them to major food chains, local restaurants and institutions. The Soil Conservation District was tasked to develop plans for this co-op concept.

The District envisions the construction of a co-op building as a central clearinghouse for locally grown produce and other products. The clearinghouse would find and expand regional markets for crops and products produced right in our own county. It would also work with the farming community on producing specific items for resale at the co-op. The market would contract with local growers to produce crops and other items, pay for the wares, and then resell the goods at retail.

The cooperative arrangement would benefit the farming community through secure contracts and payment for crops at harvest. The purpose of the co-op would then be to expand these markets and thereby increase farmer participation. This would keep our farming community in business and growing – in more ways than one.



Farm Link Programs

Service matches farm owners with new farm entrepreneurs – By the Calvert Farmland Trust

Most of us consider farming a passion, not a job, and seldom contemplate retirement. However, there comes a time when we are unable to carry on.

Whether or not your property is preserved, you have some serious decisions to make. Do you sell, do you turn the operation over to heirs or do you let the farmland revert back to forest? While it appears that our choices are limited, there is another alternative.

Many states and land trusts have started programs that connect new farmers to available farms. These services link retiring farmers or landowners who wish to continue the productivity of their property with new farm entrepreneurs. The potential new farmers wish to move into agribusiness but lack the capital to invest in property.

The process is fairly simple. A database is created listing the farm owner, the type of operation currently on the property and the acreage available. The database also lists the farm seekers. This new farm link program is a tremendous opportunity to keep our farmland productive as the average age of farm owners and operators increases and as the tobacco buyout draws near the twilight of its term.

Calvert County has been recognized as a leader in farmland preservation. County land owners and local land trusts, working with County government, have made great strides to assure that farms and forest lands will survive for future generations. Now is the time to preserve the productivity of our farms and forests.

For more information on farm link programs, contact Calvert Farmland Trust at 410-414-5070 or e-mail cft@chesapeake.net.

Upcoming Events – Save the Date

Southern MD Crops Dinner Meeting, December 4, 2008, 4:00 pm – 8:30 pm; Izaak Walton League, 4200 Gardiner Road, Waldorf, MD. Cost: \$10.00. RSVP: MD Cooperative Extension, Calvert County, 410-535-3662 or Charles County, 301-753-8195

Southern MD Hay and Forage Conference, January 7, 2009, 8:45 am – 3:00 pm, Izaak Walton League, 4200 Gardiner Road, Waldorf, MD. Register by calling the St. Mary's County Extension office at 301-475-4484.

Southern MD Vegetable Meeting, February 11, 2009, Loveville, St. Mary's County, 8:00 am-3:30 pm. Register by calling the St. Mary's County Extension office at 301-475-4484.



Meeting the Regulations

Farm Food Sales

*By Lisa Laschalt, R.S., M.P.H.
Calvert County Health Deptment*

In Maryland, most food produced for sale to the public is regulated by the Maryland State Division of Food Control or the local health department. There are two sets of regulations that farmers encounter when attempting to process and sell food at farmer's markets and roadside farm stands. One governs retail food sales while the other addresses food and drink processing and transportation.

Certain foods made in a private home/farm kitchen are permissible to sell at a farmer's market. These products include: fruit butters made from apples, apricots, grapes, peaches, plums, prunes, quince or

other acidic fruits; jams/jellies/preserves made from oranges, nectarines, blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cherries, cranberries, strawberries, red currant or other acidic fruits; and non-hazardous baked goods (cookies, brownies and most cakes).

Products that require the addition of an acid such as vinegar – such as pickles, pickled beets and relishes – require a food processing license. All cheeses, meats, poultry and milk must be from an approved processing facility. Eggs must come from approved farms.

Through the cooperation of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland State Division of Food and Milk Control, the local health department and the farmer, these regulations help protect the health of the community by preventing the sale of unsafe food.

In Agriculture Preservation? Interested in selling TDRs to the Commissioners?

The deadline for applications to the PAR Program is December 31, 2008.

The deadline for applications to the LAR Program has been extended to December 31, 2008.

Please note: If you are in the Critical Area and considering Agriculture Preservation, the TDR calculation for Districts created on or after July 1, 2009 will change.

Contact Planning & Zoning for more information or applications – 410-535-2348 or cristova@co.cal.md.us