

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE LAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
2009 ANNUAL REPORT**

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

The St. Mary's County Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board was created by Section 2-504.1 of the Agriculture Annotated Code of Maryland. The Board is to be comprised of five members, at least three of whom shall be owner-operators of commercial farms who earn 50 percent or more of their income from farming. Each member of the Board shall be appointed for a term of office of five years with no member serving for more than two consecutive full terms. Members of the St. Mary's County Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board are as follows:

George Baroniak, Chairman
James Spence
Dr. Henry Virts
Dr. William Boyd
M. Kathy Bailey

The St. Mary's County Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board strives to meet the duties outlined in Section 2-504.1 of the Agriculture Annotated Code of Maryland, specifically:

- To advise the county governing body with respect to the establishment of agricultural districts and the approval of purchases of easements by the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation within the County.
- To assist the county governing body in reviewing the status of agricultural districts and land under easement;
- To advise the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation concerning county priorities for agricultural preservation;
- To approve or disapprove an application by the county for certification under §5-408 of the State Finance and Procurement Article;
- To promote preservation of agriculture within the county by offering information and assistance to farmers with respect to establishment of districts and purchase of easements; and
- To perform any other duties as assigned by the county governing body.

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE LAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
2009 ANNUAL REPORT**

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS FOR THE PAST YEAR

- Due to budget shortfalls the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) did not accept applications for the FY 2010 or FY 2011 easement cycles.
- The Board approved one Child's Lot Requests and one request to place Wetlands Mitigation on an Easement property. The Board has worked with the Department of Public Works and Transportation to create a land bank of possible eligible non-easement properties for future Wetland Mitigation projects. The Board responded to a request from easement property owners to take a stand against the expansion of an assisted living facility adjoining a block of more than 500 acres of permanently preserved land.
- The Board sponsored its 6th Annual Agriculture Land Preservation picnic on August 23, 2009. Approximately 50 people attended.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

- There is interest to participate in the MALPF program from landowners to place easements on 31 properties encompassing 2,202 acres. It is estimated that \$22,022,140 would be needed to cover the cost of these easements. In 2009, 1,102.425 acres (9properties) were placed under easement. Hopefully by the end of 2010, 716.37 additional acres will have been placed under easement however unless the State accepts additional applications for the FY 2011 easement cycle there will be no additional MALPF easements preserved.
- The Board of County Commissioners set the transfer of development rights fee in lieu at \$20,000. While any collections will assist in funding the agriculture land preservation program, the price set limits what a developer will pay for a transfer of development right. To date \$234,000 has been collected from fee in lieu paid to the county.
- In order to have a successful Installment Purchase Agreement program, a dedicated funding source must be identified. Based on the condition of the economy, this will be difficult to do. The County must also determine which IPA structure will be utilized. If the County decides not to incur future debt to pay for the easements, the IPA program offers little benefit to the County. If the County accepts future debt and leverages bonds to purchase easement, the IPA program will preserve a greater amount of acreage in the County.
- The Board finds it increasingly difficult to provide recommendations to the MALPF Board which are taken into consideration when a County landowner makes a request to the MALPF Board. The local Board consists of members who are very familiar with many properties in St. Mary's County. They utilize common sense to review individual

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY
AGRICULTURE LAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
2009 ANNUAL REPORT**

requests before forwarding them to the MALPF Board with a recommendation. It is a challenge to educate the MALPF Board on the differences landowners in Southern Maryland face due to the influence of the tobacco industry on properties versus the rest of the state.

PLANS FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

- The Board will continue to meet on a bi-monthly basis with 2011 meetings beginning in January.
- The Board will continue to review requests from current easement properties and easement applications when the State accepts them in the future.
- The Board plans to assist the Rural Preservation Task Force with recommendations to implement an IPA program and other agriculture related issues within the County.
- The Board plans to support proposed legislation which would freeze tax assessments on properties that go into permanent agriculture land preservation programs.
- Continue to provide input to the BOCC on proposed legislation as it pertains to farming and agricultural land preservation.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

- The Board will continue to promote the various land preservation programs throughout the County.
- The Board plans to hold its annual Agriculture Land Preservation Picnic.