

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to improve the integration of Baltimore County Agriculture into the Baltimore-Washington marketplace while creating a more favorable regulatory and economic development environment. Many of the recommendations highlight the need to support small and transitional farms whose survival depends on high intensity, urban fringe production.

The ten recommendations incorporated in this document fall within three broad categories or focus areas. The focus areas are largely independent with some level of interactivity. The focus areas are briefly described below.

Targeted Impact on Farm Profitability

Focus I: Ag Development and Marketing

Top-line (revenue) growth.

Greater financing alternatives.

Investment opportunities to reduce recurring operating expenses.

Focus II: Training and Education

Increased labor efficiency (return on human investment).

Increased labor availability, and Improved labor qualifications.

Focus Area III: Public Policy and Regulation

Reduction of costs due to regulatory procedures.

Increased revenue potential from value-added production or retail sales.

I. **Agriculture Development and Marketing** – This focus area targets improvements in access to local and regional markets at both the wholesale and retail levels. Market development activities look to expand the capability of individual farms to integrate retailing and agritourism activities while developing a positive brand image for Baltimore County's agricultural products.

This focus area also concentrates on improving the capability of individual operations to effectuate strategic and operational changes on the farm. Business development support includes counseling, concept development, land access, and financing support with the intent to support growth and transition in the agricultural economy. Beyond individual farm businesses, additional programming is recommended to enhance the agribusiness policy climate and encourage infrastructure development to support industry sector growth. In this regard, economic development projects generally have the largest fiscal participation from government and Non-Governmental Organizations.

II. **Training and Education** – This focus area distinguishes itself from Agriculture Development and Marketing by focusing on developing the future human capital needs of agriculture beginning with creating a base of well qualified farm leaders and a source of new and renewing farm operators. Recommendations under this focus area also highlight the need to create a reliable source of skilled and unskilled labor which can meet the needs of modern agricultural practices for the range of industries already present in the County.

III. **Public Policy and Regulation** – Activities in this focus area are dedicated to land use, environmental, health, and transportation policy support needs that are intended to bring local conditions in line with regional competitors. By example, this may include modifying or extending nuisance suit protections to farmers who operate under good management practices or expanding the allowed distribution and value-added uses on a farm so that Baltimore County producers can compete directly with farmers across the line in Pennsylvania.

Successful implementation of these recommendations will involve a multidisciplinary effort supported by private industry and agricultural operations, state and local agencies, and local community organizations. The partnerships necessary will be driven by the specific implementation needs of each recommendation. Funding support for each respective recommendation must also be built independently on the merits of the recommendation and evidenced needs.

Recommendations are presented and described on the following pages.