

Presidents Message – June 2011

It rains and it rains and it rains. Frederick County farmers are suffering because it has been nearly impossible to make hay (except for green chopping and bagging) and, like many farmers in the major soybean and corn production areas of the U.S., they are experiencing delayed planting opportunities and potential reduction in yields due to the very wet and somewhat cooler weather. How this will play out in terms of the financial bottom line at the end of the 2011-12 crop year with the expected higher commodity prices and higher feed and other input cost, is uncertain. As always, it will be an interesting year in agriculture for the farmers of Frederick County.

On the policy and political arena, this has been a very important year. In Annapolis, District 4A Delegate Kathy Afzali and District 3 Senator Ron Young nearly pulled off the biggest and most important bill of the year for Frederick County and Maryland Farmers – an increase in the estate tax exemption for farm related properties from \$1 million to \$5 million. Passage of this measure would save many individual farm families ten's of thousands of dollars in state taxes and legal and insurance cost for estate planning and, in the process, save hundreds of farms and thousands of acres of farm land because the land would not have been sold to pay the estate tax bills. The bill was unique in that it had the publicly expressed support of both Governor O'Malley and Maryland's major environmental groups. Somehow, however, Annapolis politics reared its ugly head and said that the bill could not be permitted this year, it would have to wait, at least, until next year. (Note: when the bill is resubmitted next session, please call, mail, or email your support for the measure to our Annapolis delegation members, the governor, and the relevant committees in support. Believe me, overloading the mail boxes and phone lines of the appropriate officials in Annapolis or rallying in Lawyer's Square in support of this measure will be very, very effective.)

On the local level, some good things are happening. The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is reviewing some of the past county decisions that reduce the ways that farmers can sue their land, which, in turn, sometimes reduced the value of that land. Announcement of the specific regulations or policies under review are posted or announced on the county website, www.FrederickCountyMD.gov or sometimes can be found in local newspaper articles. Of special interest is a recent announcement by the BOCC that it will be accepting appeals from landowners that believe that their land was unfairly rezoned during the recent revision of the County Comprehensive Plan or land for which the owner desires a change in zoning (for example, from Ag to RC or vice versa, from Ag to any other zoning classification). The appeal application period is from June 1 through July 15. Applications and information about the process are available on the Frederick County Community Development Division website, or can be obtained by calling the Director of CDD, Jim Gugel at 301-600-1144 or www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/planning.

A second item of local importance is the preparation of a document by the Frederick County Charter Board (FCCB) that, if approved by the voters, would change the form of government for Frederick County. This form of government would replace the current commissioner form of government that was the form originally authorized in the Maryland constitution. At present, the 12 members of the appointed charter board (9 regular members and 3 alternates) are in process of soliciting as much input as possible from the citizens of Frederick County on their knowledge of, and their opinions and concerns about a charter form of government for the county. The board clearly understands that without substantial input and understanding by voters as to what charter government is and how it can improve the efficiency, effectiveness, openness, and local control of the operation of our county government that the referendum will surely fail. Thus, the most important part of the board's charter preparation is to make the information and decision process as open and as public friendly as possible. To this end, all board meetings are available on the count TV network, FCG TV, channel 19 and webcast at www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/video. In addition, a series of information outreach meetings is scheduled across the county. Some of these meetings are hosted by community organizations and are open to members only. Others are open to the public. The purpose of these sessions is to allow board members to open the discussion about charter government and to encourage the public reaction in terms of questions, concerns, and suggestions about the creation and implementation of charter government in the county. For the farm

community and the general public, Frederick County Farm Bureau and Frederick County Pomona Grange jointly are sponsoring and outreach meeting on Thursday, June 23 at the New Market Grange Hall, 14 North Alley, New Market, MD @ 7:30 pm. I strongly encourage each of you to attend this or any of the other outreach meetings and be prepared to actively participate in the creation of a charter document that, if properly drawn by the board and approved by the voters, will lead to a more effective, efficient and open government for Frederick County. For more information on charter government, the charter board, a schedule of outreach meetings, etc. go to www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/charter.

Finally, there are several FCFB events that you should be aware of and plan to attend. First, our annual picnic will be held on July 21 at Mount Tabor Park in Rocky Ridge, beginning at 11:30 am. Attendees will be treated to great food and fine fellowship. In addition, we always have solid attendance by members of the BOCC our Annapolis delegation, and our national officials or their representatives and it is both enjoyable and instructive to ask questions, and exchange ideas with them on current and upcoming issues. More information concerning the picnic is available later in this newsletter. Also, on July 15 the Miss Frederick Farm Bureau contest will be held at the old Fire House in Woodsboro at 8 pm. This is a great event as some of Frederick County's finest young women compete for the crown and the opportunity to represent FCFB and the agricultural community in public events. During my tenure with FCFB, I have been amazed and pleased with quality of the young ladies that have participated in this contest. Without exception, they are bright, poised, well spoken, and very accomplished. For those of you that never attended this event, please do so. It is a very rewarding and satisfying experience. Thank you for being a member of the Frederick County Farm Bureau. It is, by all reliable account, the best Farm Bureau organization in the state. That is because of you, the members, and the time and hard work you devote to serving your fellow members, the farm community, and the citizens of Frederick County. However, as I have said before, an organization can only be as strong as its membership base. At present, we are lagging a bit in meeting our membership goals. We need your support in retaining existing members and attracting new members, so please, if you have not renewed you membership, then please do so. It is easy. If you have mislaid the application that you have received in the mail, you can renew online at www.mdfarmbureau.com or by phone at 1-410-922-3426. Also, please encourage any friends, family, neighbors, and even strangers to support Frederick County agriculture by joining Frederick County Farm Bureau. Take Care.

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