

# What Farm Bureau's Government Relations Team Does For You

The Maryland Farm Bureau's leadership and staff work tirelessly to make sure government officials at all levels understand the impact that new laws and regulations have on your farming operation. Your job is to farm and produce the best product you can. You don't have the time or the energy at the end of your long day to review the hundreds of government proposals that are pending and explain exactly how they might impact you. Through Farm Bureau, you have a highly trained staff of professionals to do that for you. Our job is to attend meetings, write position papers, negotiate with bureaucrats and make sure that your net income and quality of life is improved - rather than diminished - by government action.

Here is a list of what we do for you:

## Advise You about bills in the Maryland General Assembly and the U.S. Congress -

The Government Relations staff reviews over 2000 bills introduced in the state House and Senate each year to determine whether or not there will be an impact on farmers and rural residents. We advise you of those bills and their impacts in our weekly publication *Hotline*. We also work closely with the American Farm Bureau Federation's Washington staff to monitor federal proposals. We often call on you to write or phone your representatives to demonstrate the strength of our grassroots numbers.

Testify On Your Behalf before Legislative Committees - We spend almost every afternoon from January to April in Committee rooms in Annapolis. Because farm businesses are so diverse, policies that propose to change taxes, labor laws, infrastructure funding, and much more must be monitored. While farmers are busy producing food and fiber, our staff explains to committee members (many of whom have no knowledge of the agricultural industry) exactly how the bills will impact you. Generally, we argue in favor of proposals to reduce regulation. We oppose proposals that add to your expense or paperwork burden. All of our policy positions are taken from the Maryland Farm Bureau policy book, which is amended each December by the voting delegates at Farm Bureau's annual meeting.

In Recent Years, Farm Bureau has Successfully Passed or Defeated the following initiatives:

- Defeated state-wide septic tank upgrade mandates, which would have unfairly burdened rural residents;

- Defeated intrusive and costly fertilizer and pesticide reporting requirements;
- Protected the confidentiality of agland preservation bids;
- Passed enhancements to the Maryland Agland Preservation Foundation and defeated efforts to redirect funding to other uses;
- Protected funding for vital farm and rural development programs like MARBIDCO and the Soil Conservation Districts.
- Passed renewable energy generation and use promotion programs;
- Passed language to protect rural communities in the greenhouse gas reduction program and environmental standing law;
- Passed the Maryland Dairy Farmer Emergency Trust Fund to assist farmers when milk prices drop below the cost of production;
- Passed the 2010 Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund to allocate \$50 million per year for non-point source projects, most of which will be spent on farms to install BMPs like cover crops and waste shortage structures;
- Passed legislation to give poultry litter more value by allowing energy companies to burn it to meet Tier 1 Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards;
- Passed the Farmstead Cheese Production Pilot Program to allow dairy farmers in Maryland to produce cheese on the farm;
- Protected the economic interest of the dairy industry by defeating efforts to allow completely unregulated sales of unpasteurized milk;
- Prevented consideration of legislation to make nutrient management plans public documents;
- Negotiated significant changes to the MDE permit proposal for Confined Animal Feeding Operations;
- Defeated a proposal to require labeling of food derived from cloned animals;
- Defeated numerous proposals put forth by animal rights activists targeting the animal livestock industry;
- Continually defeat bills to ban the bear hunt in western Maryland;
- Defeated new water fees that would have dramatically increased the cost of irrigating fields - The fees would have ranged between \$500 and \$5000 per year per water use permit - The average impact would have been between \$1000 and \$20,000 per year per farmer - The overall cost to the ag community would have been \$1.9 million per year;
- Passed legislation to extend the firearm season for deer hunting
- Defeated legislation to require state and federal criminal background checks on every person who wanted to apply pesticides or would come in contact with pesticides;
- Passed a bill to allow farmers to take a tax credit for investment in conservation tillage equipment such as "deep no-till rippers";
- Supported passage of a "check-off" program to promote MD's horse industry;

- Passed legislation to improve the MD Agland Preservation Foundation including bills to allow smaller farms into the ag preservation program, to increase funding to young and beginning farmers, and to protect the right-to-farm of adjacent farmers when lots on preserved acres are developed;
- Defeated burdensome antibiotic reporting requirements for livestock producers;
- Repeatedly defeated legislation to ban leghold traps in Maryland;
- Passed legislation authorizing an "Ag Tag" with proceeds to benefit the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation;
- Defeated onerous limits on swine farm animal numbers;
- Defeated ban on genetically altered seeds containing terminator gene technology;
- Secured funding for rural development and agricultural education;
- Promoted the use of ethanol and other renewable-based fuels;
- Passed legislation for a Dairy Farm Nutrient and Business Management program;
- Defeated an increase in Overtime Wages for Farm Workers;
- Passed an increase in the Cost-Share caps to help farmers pay for expensive conservation practices;
- Secured funding from the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement to help rural areas of southern Maryland transition out of tobacco production;
- Passed legislation to aid in the control of wildlife populations, such as deer, coyotes and geese.
- Defeated an increase in the gasoline tax;
- Passed bills to make it easier to transport farm commodities in trucks - established axle load tolerances; fought to allow farm trucks to pass through areas labeled for local traffic only; increased weight limits for dairy trucks;
- Defended Maryland's Area K tag and expanded the applicable zone; passed legislation to allow K tag use on buses converted to haul watermelons
- Negotiated Reduced rates for Farm Truck Tags & defend the rate annually;
- Passed a bill to give more money to state and county agricultural fair boards to promote agriculture;
- Negotiated changes to the Smart Growth and Rural Legacy Programs to benefit rural residents;
- Defended the sales tax exemption that allows you to purchase farm machinery and supplies tax free;
- Defended the farmland assessment, which gives you a lower property tax rate;
- Passed legislation to allow MD to join the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact - this will increase the net profits of dairy farmers;
- Passed numerous bills to lower the inheritance tax to help preserve farmland;
- Passed a state Right to Farm Law that protects you from lawsuits from neighbors over odor, noise and other regular farm activity;

- In Washington, we have worked with the 10 members of the Maryland Delegation to pass farm aid during drought years; to eliminate the federal estate tax over time and to increase tax exemptions for the self employed. We are currently working to protect the provisions of the federal farm bill , revise the federal H2a program for foreign ag workers and to limit the reach of the federal Clean Water Act.

Coordinate Meetings and Events to Bring Farmers and Elected Officials Together - We schedule trips to Washington and Annapolis each year for Farm Bureau members who want to meet personally with their elected officials. Our annual Day-in-Annapolis brings over 100 farmers together with almost 100 MGA elected officials for lunch and discussion on critical farm issues each year.

Represent Your Interests before State Regulatory Agencies - Our staff works with state officials to keep regulation to minimum and to make government policy work for you. In recent years, staff has worked with the Department of Natural Resources to improve the deer management policies of the state. We served on the Nutrient Management Advisory Committee to minimize the ramifications of the state's nutrient management law. We worked to delay the cover crop planting deadline so farmers would not lose state cost-share because fields were too wet to plant. We negotiated reasonable changes to the CREP to prevent whole farms from being taken out of production. Recently we have been working with MDA and MDE officials to limit the impact and cost of the CAFO/MAFO permit on Maryland producers. Our staff spends many days sitting in crowded agency meeting rooms to protect your interests.

Represent Your Interests at Numerous Coalition Meetings - We work together with the Delmarva Poultry Industry, the Grain Producers, the Pork Producers, the Grange, the Cattleman, the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry, the Horse Council, the Grape Growers and Wineries, the Forestry Industry and many more to better leverage our influence at the state and federal level. We also work cooperatively with builders, local government representatives and industry officials, particularly with regard to onerous environmental or land use proposals. We have even worked out an effective dialogue with some in the environmental community to protect farmland and the economic well-being of the state's farm businesses.

Seek Court Action to Protect the Rights of Farm & Rural Residents - Sometimes a court order to protect the interest of farm and rural residents is our only option. Over the past two years we successfully won court protection for farmer-specific data on nutrient management plans released under the state's Public Information Act. We work with our

national legal staff to identify issues that can only be resolved by the courts and then seeking funding to bring the case.

Research Questions You have About the Law and its Impact on Your Farm - We receive many calls from farmers who are unsure of the law or who need guidance concerning regulations. We serve as a research arm and as a buffer so that individual farmers are not identified when we make inquiries of state enforcement or regulatory officials. We are often able to resolve issues involving citations or other enforcement action through our contacts at state agencies.

Write Informative Articles On Issues of Interest To You and Your Family - Our staff writes articles for your monthly publication *Spotlight* to keep you informed and to let you know what other farmers are doing. We also contribute articles to *My Maryland*, the quarterly publication aimed at non-farm Farm Bureau members. Some months we write about the wildlife damage to crops, zoning changes in one county or another or new labor laws. Other months we write about areas of the law that are unclear so that you can give us guidance and we can pursue changes in the law.

Deliver Up-to-the-Minute Information About State and Federal Activity Concerning Farming at your county FB meetings - The Maryland Farm Bureau staff and leadership travel to county Farm Bureau meetings throughout the year to personally discuss the legislative agenda. This allows us to get immediate guidance from you and allows you to ask questions of us. We also offer our perspective on future legislative actions and on the politics involved in the making of public policy.

Deliver the Farm Bureau Message to Numerous Newspapers and Television - One of the most important ways to influence public policy is to influence public opinion. Our staff and elected leadership spend many hours behind the scenes working with newspaper and television reporters, and now web bloggers, to help them report the facts accurately.

In summary, Maryland Farm Bureau works all year long to promote your agenda and to help improve your bottom line. We know how hard you labor to produce the nation's food and fiber. We thank you for that and we thank you for helping to make Farm Bureau one of the strongest grassroots organizations in the nation!