

A news release from the Maryland Department of Agriculture

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New Toolkit Available for Communities, Farmers, Local Officials Highlights  
the Changing Needs of Maryland Agriculture

ANNAPOLIS, MD (May 16, 2011) – The Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture (GICA) today launched a "toolkit" designed to help Marylanders understand farming in the State and how they can support it.

"Understanding and Responding to the Changing Needs of Maryland Agriculture: A Toolkit for Local Communities" aims to provide local communities and officials with a better understanding of the current state of Maryland agriculture. The toolkit suggests tools, methods and resources that will help farmers, their neighbors and local officials better work together towards creating communities that support both profitable agricultural production and a high quality of life.

Maryland farms comprise roughly one-third of the State and are economically invaluable to rural economies. Nearly 14 percent of the State's workforce is engaged in Maryland's food and fiber sector, which exported nearly \$450 million worth of products in 2009. However, rapid changes in a global marketplace and a developing Maryland have forced many farmers to find new ways of doing business. The GICA toolkit outlines many of these changes.

"As the face of Maryland agriculture continues to evolve, it is critical that decision makers and neighbors understand the changing context in which their farmers operate, and how communities can help create a sustainable industry ready to meet the food production challenges of today and tomorrow," said Secretary of Agriculture and GICA Chair Buddy Hance. "We hope this toolkit can be a resource to Marylanders interested in understanding how they can support their local farmers, and to farmers who are trying to access resources and information."

Housed at the Maryland Department of Agriculture, GICA is a public-private and interagency workgroup that works to promote better collaboration and cohesion across State agencies and with citizens in an effort to support Maryland's agricultural sector. As a result, the toolkit includes broad-based input from a wide variety of contributors, to present a comprehensive look at the industry. The guide includes numerous policy options, informational resources, and points of contact for topics pertaining to agriculture, including market access, on-farm processing, conservation practices land-use conflicts, food safety, and wildlife management.

The toolkit can be found online at:  
[www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/gica.toolkit.pdf](http://www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/gica.toolkit.pdf).