

STATE DESIGNATIONS

We support the 1998 designation of milk as the official beverage of the State. #98

We support the 1962 designation of jousting as our state sport and oppose any efforts to change this designation.

STATE FFA

Maryland Farm Bureau recommends to the State Department of Education that a full-time permanent position be established to serve FFA youth in Maryland. This position should be field-based under the direction of the Vocational Technical Division.

STRAY VOLTAGE

We support legislation that would require utility companies to conduct tests on lines every 6 months and maintain neutral voltage levels of less than 1 (one) volt. This could be monitored by county electrical inspectors.

We urge public utilities and their regulatory agencies to use all proven technologies available to assist in the control of "stray voltage" that can adversely effect humans and livestock.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Maryland agriculture is sustainable and has been for over 300 years. We recognize that there are five key factors for a successful sustainable agriculture:

1. It has to be profitable for farmers.
2. It must work to conserve soil, water and nutrients with voluntary programs.
3. It must provide a good quality of life, for farmers and farm workers.
4. It must also provide an abundant food supply.
5. It must preserve resources (farmland and the communities) that support agriculture. #97

TAXES

Admission and Amusement Tax

Recreational activities that are carried out in conjunction with a farm operation should be exempt from Admission and Amusement Tax. #99

Income Tax

We support a state income tax credit for those whose place of work is within a 5-mile radius of their primary residence. #99

Inheritance Tax

First and foremost, we support the elimination of the state inheritance tax. Until then, we support adding nieces, and nephews to the current list of qualified descendants who currently pay the lineal tax rate on inherited property. #2001

Property Tax

We support the Maryland law that provides that lands that are actively devoted to farm or agricultural use, shall be assessed according to that use. #97

The Maryland Farmland Assessment Law requires that farmland valuation should be based on the land's productivity. However in recent years, there have been some appeals in Washington County regarding the assessment of orchard land. The hearing examiners in these cases recommended that the rate of assessment on orchard land be based on the applicable soil productivity maps furnished the local assessment office by the state. Therefore, we recommend that the State Department of Assessments and Taxation follow this procedure with all of their orchard assessments.

We request that the State Department of Assessments and Taxation establish a Conservation Land Classification with an equitable assessment for agricultural ground used for erosion control and water conservation, (i.e. grass waterways, diversion terraces, etc.) when built under "Best Management Practices" or approved by NRCS, and thereby further encourage the landowner to establish these practices and help "Save The Bay".

When a farm joins an Ag Preservation District, a house and lot on that farm have certain restrictions placed on it. This house and lot (part of the district) should be taxed at a different rate than a single house and lot.

We support the nursery industry's efforts to amend the property tax law to clearly provide an exemption from the property tax for all growing crops, whether planted directly into the earth, in containers or otherwise, and whether such crops are grown indoors or out in a nursery environment. #97

We urge clarification of the law to ensure that the property tax exemption applies to all growing crops, whether planted directly in the earth or grown in containers indoors or out. #2000

We support a 100% tax credit on agricultural buildings. #2001

Real Estate Tax

We support a change in state law to extend the exemption from transfer and recordation tax to transfers of real estate used primarily for family-operated agricultural or small business use - including residences reasonably related to those uses - to a corporation, partnership, limited liability company, or any other business entity, if the transfer is established for the purpose of estate planning or family business succession planning by sworn affidavit or other reasonable proof. #98

Sales and Use Taxes

Maryland Farm Bureau supports the continued exemption of agricultural items from the state sales tax.

In order to clarify and prevent abuse of the sales tax exemption for certain ag purchases, we recommend an affidavit to be available for signing by the purchaser, in lieu of a tax-exempt card. #2001

We believe that clothing should be tax-exempt in Maryland. #2001

TIMBER HARVESTING - STATE LAND

Poor management of timber is a waste of one of our most valuable renewable natural resources. We urge the Department of Natural Resources to harvest the timber on all state-owned lands in a timely manner and on a sustained yield basis.

We strongly urge forestry management plans and soil conservation plans on all state properties. All timber sales should be put out for competitive bid.

We oppose any further restrictions on farmers who harvest their own woodland.

TOBACCO

Master Settlement Agreement

We recommend that as the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) is reviewed by the General Assembly each year the amount to be secured for the Southern Maryland farmers be at least kept at a minimum of 5% according to the original settlement agreement. #2001

Tobacco Taxes

We oppose any increase in the cigarette tax.

We oppose taxing smokeless tobacco products. #96

We propose that cigarette tax money earmarked for agriculture be given directly to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, so it can be distributed faster. #98

Tobacco Industry

We strongly support the concept of a State Tobacco Authority to regulate the Maryland tobacco markets. When the nesting of tobacco is reported, we urge the Authority to follow the procedure it has in place to find the offender and seek the restitution of all inferior tobacco. The Authority should also investigate the possibility of imposing severe fines for the nesting of tobacco and, if possible, implement such a program.

Also, any tobacco being brought in from out of state and sold in our market must be labeled as such before being sold, or appropriate penalties be imposed.

The State Tobacco Warehouse located in Cheltenham, Maryland was built entirely using funds derived from tobacco farmers. Therefore, we urge the Maryland Department of Agriculture to always consider any agricultural use as its top priority and leasing only be considered as a secondary use.

TRANSIENT PAINTERS

We believe that painters who travel through the state offering to paint farm buildings and roofs and spreading and sealing blacktop driveways should be licensed by the state of Maryland.

TRESPASSING

We oppose public access to private lands without permission of the landowner. We propose stricter enforcement of laws protecting property owners from losses due to trespassing, arson, vandalism, littering, poaching, and looting. We urge all citizens to cooperate with law enforcement officers by reporting individuals guilty of such acts and to furnish all pertinent information. Furthermore, property owners should not be held liable for damages or injury sustained by trespassers.

We believe that the \$500.00 maximum fine for convictions of trespassing and property destruction is far too lenient. The judges should be allowed the alternative of sentencing a convicted trespasser to a jail term. Parents or guardians should be required to pay the fine or serve the jail term if a minor is convicted. The offender should be required to pay the property owner for any destruction. In a case of a minor, the parents or guardians should be required to pay.

We support legislation imposing penalties upon those using "off road" vehicles on property owned by others without written permission of up to \$2,500.00 fine, plus possible imprisonment of up to 60 days, along with full restitution to the property owner suffering loss. Furthermore, violators should forfeit their vehicle to the government.

We strongly urge passage of legislation that will make it illegal for trespassers or other persons to interfere with hunting activities that are being conducted legally in accordance with existing laws and regulations. #97

TRIBUTARY STRATEGIES

The formulation of the "Tributary Strategy" will require the cooperation of farmers, government and government agencies to accomplish the projected 40 percent reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus loading. We continue to urge physical data be used to develop realistic information on the involvement of agriculture in nitrogen and phosphorus entering the rivers and streams of our state. Therefore, we support the following: #97

(A) Continued funding for integrated pest management (IPM) systems and the expansion of this program;

(B) Additional and continued research and educational programs on minimizing nutrient runoff into the Bay tributaries from not only agricultural lands but also urban and suburban areas, as well as other commercial uses that use nitrogen-based compounds (I.E. deicing aircraft and parking lots);

(C) The necessary and prudent use of agricultural crop protectants, based on scientific research, as they relate to profitable Best Management Practices (BMPs) which will ultimately result in the Chesapeake Bay improved water quality;

(D) State and/or federal legislation to provide tax incentives or tax credits along with maximum cost sharing for the adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and/or the purchase of equipment that would directly benefit the environment; and

(E) Development of various methods to increase living resources in the Bay in order to increase consumption or filtration of the algae produced as a result of nutrients entering the Bay.

Any state plan requiring buffers as a part of the tributary strategy should:

(1.) Provide control of noxious weeds at state expense.

(2.) Allow landowners to harvest mature trees in a reasonable manner.

(3.) Provide just compensation to the landowner for the loss of productive farmland

and for practices that enhance water quality such as grassed waterways, buffers, filter strips, animal waste, pesticides and fertilizer containment facilities. #97

All tributary teams should have representation from people now or formerly engaged in production agriculture. Any authority given to these teams should be advisory.