

spotlight

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A PUBLICATION FOR VOTING MEMBERS OF MARYLAND FARM BUREAU



BUDGETS TIGHT IN 2008 MD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By Valerie Connelly
MFB Government Relations Director

With three weeks to go, the theme for the 2008 session is “belt tightening and budget cutting.” This is unfortunate. Many of us thought that after the November special session that raised so many taxes, the state’s financial house would be in order. The farm community was certainly counting on a better budget picture to fund many of our long standing needs – including new agland preservation programs targeted at young and beginning farmers, programs to sure up the dairy industry and additional investment in farm BMPs like cover crops.

Fortunately, legislators who have been working to finalize the 2010 Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund have been able to protect at least \$25 million per year. The program was downsized by half for the next two years. In 2010, the program should be back up to the full \$50 million set aside during the special session. The bills pending before the General Assembly now will direct how the funds will be allocated. The authorization language codifies the BayStat program that Governor O’Malley created last year. Under BayStat, the Governors’ staff must constantly evaluate the funds spent on Bay clean up measures and demonstrate that progress is being made. This is important for the farm community. We want accountability in this effort. We want to know that every dollar spent on farms, in urban areas for stormwater management and in suburban areas for development standards is actually resulting in less pollution in the Bay. Ten years from now, we do not want someone to conclude that more must be done by farmers because funds were unwisely spent.

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Why I Support the Farm Bureau PAC

By Bill Edwards
S.B. Farms
Hurlock, MD



Bill Edwards

Very few of us enjoy or even like politics. For the most part our knowledge consists of what we read in the newspaper or what we hear on the evening news. Most of us only get involved if it directly affects us personally – and then only begrudgingly. “Why can’t politicians just do what’s right for the people,” I often lamented?

Some years ago I came to personally know my state delegate and opened a dialog. It’s amazing what can be learned by asking a few questions and then listening to the answers. I learned that our elected officials, in most cases, really do want to do what is best for us. But how do they know what we want or need unless we communicate with them? They don’t really. Since my “awakening,” I have made it a point to know each of my elected officials. I stay in contact with them too. They all have a weekly “update” that is sent out during the legislative session, there are newspaper articles, etc. that provide information so that one can keep abreast of most of what is going on and provide an opinion or insight to one’s elected official if need be.

I came to realize that even with this amount of involvement more needed to be done. After all, I was only talking to three of the entire state’s legislature. That’s when I learned about the Maryland Farm Bureau Political Action Committee. The PAC gives all of us in agriculture a real voice and influence that an individual doesn’t possess.

For each election cycle our PAC tracks the voting records of every elected state official, provides background information on each, sends each a ques-

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Maryland Farm Bureau

Spotlight

Susan G. Summers, Editor
12221 Fingerboard Road
Monrovia, MD 21770
(301) 865-1045 • Fax (301) 865-1057
e-mail: ssummers@comcast.net

Designed by Jennifer C. Hankey,
HDI Corporation
PO Box 3583 • Frederick, MD 21705
(301) 668-3333 • (301)668-3334 fax
e-mail: jhankey@hdicorporation.net

USPS 012-269-ISSN1080-3556
(410) 922-3426 mdfb1@erols.com
website: www.mdfarmbureau.com

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Budgets Tight in 2008 MD General Assembly

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The 2010 bills, SB 213 and HB 369, have cleared their house of origin and are expected to be finalized in the next three weeks. Farm Bureau and our ag coalition were successful in amending the bills to make sure farmers will receive additional BMP assistance through the Maryland Agricultural Cost Share program. We were also able to have the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at University of Maryland added to the BayStat subcommittee. This body will make the funding allocation recommendations. We want to make sure someone with access to the latest agricultural research is involved. We were also able to strike language in the original bills that would have prevented farmers from receiving financial assistance for something they are required to do by law or regulation. We were concerned that if the new CAFO/MAFO rule is adopted, farmers might be barred from assistance to implement their conservation plans. And, we supported a Senate floor amendment to strike language that would have allowed additional funding for enforcement activities.

In the dairy arena, there were several bills introduced this year. Legislation by Del. Paul Stull and Sen. David Brinkley creates a Maryland Dairy Farmer Emergency Trust Fund. The bill allows MDA to develop a program for financial assistance to dairy farmers when the price of milk drops below the cost of production. Budget concerns have stripped the mandatory \$5 million per year from the bill. However, there will still be authority to create the program at MDA. We will have to continue to lobby the Governor for funding through the annual budget process.

A bill to limit the ability of out-of-state processors to sell milk below cost to Maryland retail and institutional customers was heard in the Finance and Economic Matters Committees. Serious concerns about the impact on Maryland consumers were raised in both the House and Senate. Legislators were worried that with the current economic climate, any bill that could raise the cost of milk to consumers would be ill-received by constituents. Legislators did, however, commit to further study of the issue over the interim and have pledged to take actions to protect the dairy industry in Maryland. Maryland Farm Bureau will work with economists and other experts over the interim to develop the data requested to demonstrate the impact of the current situation on processors and the potential impact of the legislation on consumers.

On the tax front, almost a dozen bills were introduced to change the estate tax law to protect farms. The proposal that received the most interest by the relevant committees was the one that would have eliminated the value of the farm business from the calculation of the estate tax. Under this

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Washington Drive In



Why I Support the Farm Bureau PAC

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tionnaire and then provides all of this to each county's Candidate Evaluation Committee. This committee then interviews each candidate and makes recommendations to the PAC as to which candidates best represent the Farm Bureau's views and policies. The PAC then can monetarily support these candidates to help them get elected.

By helping to elect "farm friendly" politicians we can help the Farm Bureau's full time legislative liaisons advance our policies in the state legislature by having "friendly ears" for them to talk to. In short, money talks.

Like it or not, politics and politicians are a fact of life and for us in agriculture, every year brings more legislation directed towards us in one fashion or another. Our best venue to influence this is the Maryland Farm Bureau PAC. Please help by making a donation each year when you have the opportunity. Or, if you *really* want to help, also volunteer to serve on your county's Candidate Evaluation Committee.

GOOSE CONTROL PROGRAM IS MADE EASIER



By Kurt Fuchs
MFB Assistant Government Relations Director

Maryland's farmers are no strangers to Canada goose issues, but thanks to regulations adopted by the Department of Natural Resources last year, they have a new streamlined option to deal with those that fail to head back north.

Although there was previously a federal permit system to take resident Canada geese, the process was inconvenient and landowners were often approved for the permit only after the damage was done. Now, Maryland farmers need only to contact USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services Office located in Annapolis to request a management and control activities permit in order to address their nuisance resident Canada goose issues. After some brief questions used to verify and assess the extent of the damage being inflicted, Wildlife Services then works with Maryland's Department of Natural to issue the permit to the landowner.

Under this permit, agricultural producers and their employees or agents may control resident Canada goose populations on their property by several methods including nest and egg destruction and lethal take methods. While the destruction of nests and eggs may only be conducted between March 1 and June 30, control activities involving the take of resident geese may be conducted between May 1 and August 31.

Each permittee must keep a log that indicates the date and number of birds killed and the date and number of nests and eggs taken while utilizing the permit so that by September 30th of each year an annual report on the totals of each category can be submitted to USDA Wildlife Services. It is important to remember, that when operating under the provisions of the permit, decoys, calls or other devices to lure birds within shotgun range is prohibited.

This process has been streamlined to a great degree in the hopes that our agricultural producers experiencing crop and property damage from resident geese will be able to more effectively and efficiently control nuisance wildlife before the damage is complete. Do not hesitate to contact USDA's Maryland Wildlife Services field office at the first sign of damage. For permit inquiries contact USDA-APHIS, Wildlife Services at 410-349-8055 or by calling 1-877-463-6497.

County Farm Bureau Membership Honor Roll (As of March 14, 2008)

County Farm Bureau Membership Goals are based upon Regular Members, represented in the first two columns. The last column reports the total members paid, including both regular and associates.

<i>County</i>	<i>YTD Regular Members Paid</i>	<i>Needed for goal</i>	<i>YTD All Members Paid</i>
Allegany	100	26	118
Anne Arundel	750	218	2391
Baltimore	452	110	3233
Calvert	229	61	700
Caroline	310	55	669
Carroll	675	182	1260
Cecil	240	69	588
Charles	201	337	73
Dorchester	185	51	509
Frederick	695	186	1612
Garrett	111	67	132
Harford	366	73	1418
Howard	164	43	840
Kent	209	40	283
Montgomery	274	51	2453
Prince George's	193	43	1546
Queen Anne's	263	49	472
St. Mary's	286	59	596
Somerset	179	49	384
Talbot	235	56	523
Washington	218	52	633
Wicomico	273	86	584
Worcester	230	42	500
Maryland Totals	6,838	1,702	22,217

Ethanol Industry Created 238,000 Jobs In 2007

According to a new economic analysis of the U.S. ethanol industry, conducted by John Urbanchuk of LECG, LLC, a global expert services consulting firm, "the increased activity resulting from ongoing production and construction of new capacity supported the creation of 238,541 jobs in all sectors of the economy during 2007."

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

April

- 10 **Allegany** Spring Dinner, Fairgrounds
- 12 **Frederick** County Farm Bureau Young Farmer's Bingo, New Midway Fire Hall
- 15 **Allegany** County Legislative Luncheon, Fairgrounds
- 22 **Frederick** County Farm Bureau Women's Spring Luncheon, New Midway Fire Hall

July

- 18 **Frederick** County Farm Bureau Miss Contest, Woodsboro Fire Hall
- 20 **Allegany** County Farm Bureau Miss Contest, Fairgrounds
- 23 **Frederick** County Farm Bureau Picnic, Mt. Tabor Park, Rocky Ridge
- 26 **Anne Arundel** Get Fresh, Buy Local 2nd Annual Ag Education Day

September

- 23 **Allegany/Garrett** Policy Meeting, Allegany Fairgrounds

October

- 7 **Allegany** County Farm Bureau Banquet, Fairgrounds
- 9 **Frederick** County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, New Midway Fire Hall

(To get your county's activities listed on the calendar, please send the date, event, place and time to Susan Summers at ssummers@comcast.net.)

Maryland Farm Bureau
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FARMERS CLOSE EDUCATION GAP

Over the last 50 years, farmers have closed an educational gap that historically set them apart from other Americans in both rural and urban areas, according to the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service. Today, farmers are more likely than other Americans to have completed high school. They also are more likely than other rural residents to have completed at least some college coursework.

Budgets Tight in 2008 MD General Assembly

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proposal, other assets could be subject to the tax, but the land, equipment, livestock and other farm business assets would be excluded. This bill would have had less of an impact on the state budget than others. But, again because of the \$300 million deficit, it does not look positive for estate tax reform this year. We know this is a priority issue for our members and we will continue to lobby for change.

A bill to increase the state Ag Transfer Tax was offered by Senator Middleton to generate funds for the Next Generation Farmland Acquisition program, the Critical Farms program and the Installment Purchase Program through MALPF. After successfully negotiating the increase down from a 100 percent increase to a 25 percent increase, MFB supported the bill. The Ag Transfer Tax is assessed when land is transferred out of agricultural use for development. The current rate is 5 percent. The new rate, if the bill passes, will be 6.25 percent. The tax is typically paid by the buyer, but it can be negotiated during settlement. The Maryland Young Farmers Advisory Board (housed at MDA) has made passage of this bill one of its priorities for 2008.

Water appropriations and use was expected to be an issue of considerable debate during this session, but the House Environmental Matters Committee decided to take it up over the interim. Chairwoman Maggie McIntosh has challenged her committee members to think of ways to make sure communities have sufficient drinking water while also protecting the rights of farmers to use water for production purposes. Maryland Farm Bureau will create an ad hoc committee of farmers to discuss this issue during the interim as well.

Nutrient management plans have been protected from public review since 1998. A bill introduced late in the session in the Senate, S.B. 964, would require MDA to release plans when requested by a member of the public. The bill also requires plans to be submitted to MDA instead of the annual end-of-the-year summary. Fortunately the bill was filed late and has been held by the Senate Rules Committee. There is not likely to be a hearing on the bill this year, but it may be reintroduced next year. Farm Bureau members should let legislators know how they feel about making nutrient management plans public. If your plan contains proprietary information about your operation that you do not want everyone to have access to, then you should explain that in detail to your elected officials over the summer.

Farm Bureau has worked in coalition with our ag partners to successfully defeat the following proposals: a bill to prohibit the production or sale of foie gras (duck livers) in Maryland; a bill to assess a surcharge on the use of phosphorus by lawn care companies; a bill to ban the bear hunt in western Maryland; a bill to allow the unregulated sale of unpasteurized milk; and a bill to establish a minimum age of 13 for hunting.

For updates on legislative issues during the final weeks of the session, log onto the Maryland Farm Bureau website at www.mdfarmbureau.com. We will continue post updates under the Hotline section. The final Hotline will be posted and mailed about a week after the April 7th conclusion of the 2008 General Assembly.