

OUTSTANDING COUNTY PROGRAM

Wicomico County

Please describe a County program in depth that you feel is unique to your county.

Deer Management Initiative

On July 30, 2018, three different farmers contacted our County President, Charles Wright IV, concerning deer crop damage. Two of these farmers were from Wicomico and one from Somerset. Due to these calls and other conversation with several other farmers Wicomico Farm Bureau started an action plan to address the deer damage within Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester Counties.

Wicomico Farm Bureau contacted Colby Ferguson, MFB, to ask for assistance from MFB in setting up a meeting with the three lower shore counties and representatives of Maryland DNR. Charles and Colby contacted Paul Peditto, Director of Wildlife & Heritage Service DNR, about our concerns and the wishes of farmers in the three lower shore counties. After a few days of communication, an August 16th meeting was scheduled with our farmers, MFB, Colby Ferguson and Trish Hildebrand, along with two representatives from DNR Wildlife Heritage Service (a program director and a deer management specialist). Our county President requested DNR to bring maps of each county that contained state and federal woodlands. These lands are for public hunting, leased hunting rights and preserved with no hunting. This idea proved critical later.

Several discussions were held between Wicomico FB & MFB before the meeting. On August 16th at 10am, we met in the Wicomico County Extension Office. Over fifty farmers packed the room along with MFB Colby Ferguson and Trish Hildebrand, and two DNR Wildlife Representatives. Charles explained the ground rules that the meeting would be organized, respectful, and each county would get their ideas heard. We used the maps of each county to identify "hot spots" for severe deer damage. Landowners were also in attendance as their rental value is affected by deer damage. Senator Jim Mathias and Delegate Charles Otto both attended the two-hour meeting. Both provided farmers insight on their role helping use through legislative and regulatory changes.

Once everyone was heard it was apparent that the worst deer damage is occurring around these state-owned lands. Other notes of concern:

- DNR is not managing deer or state owned land.
- DNR is not providing easy access to these properties.
- State forest land used to have many acres of food plots now these are near zero.
- The promotion of public hunting land by MD DNR is not adequate.

Wicomico Farm Bureau will continue to spear head the following initiatives along with Somerset and Worcester Counties:

- Have maps remade showing damaged acres.
- Start a Doe Harvest Challenge in the January rifle season that rewards hunters for shooting does.
- Work with our elected officials to back off funding for open space forest purchases on lower shore.
- Work with elected officials and DNR Wildlife to increase food plots within forested lands.
- Work with elected officials and DNR Wildlife to provide funds to enhance access to the center of these forested tracts by vehicle.

This meeting was a perfect example of how FB's grassroots system works. It was also interesting that over 95% of the farmers in attendance are FB members.