

Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Completed Interviews (73)

Agro-Ecology Center Board Members (16)

Harry Hughes	Former Governor
Steve Weber	President, Maryland Farm Bureau
John Griffin	Washington Sewer and Sanitation Commission
Gerry Truitt	Former director, Delmarva Poultry Industry
Nina Houghton	Board Member, Aspen Institute
Will Baker	Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
King Burnett	Board Member, Maryland Environmental Trust
Ajax Eastman	Maryland Conservation Council
Fran Flanigan	Executive Director, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Tom Fretz	Dean, University of Maryland
Brian Frosh	State Senator
Bruce Gardner	Professor, University of Maryland
Ron Guns	State Delegate
Charles Jamison	Farmer
Cal Lubben	Maryland Forestry Association
John Toll	President, Washington College

Local and State Government Agency Representative (17)

- Montgomery County Agricultural Development Department
- Baltimore County Dept. of Environmental Protection & Resource Management
- Carroll County Agricultural Land Preservation Program
- Harford County Dept. of Economic Development
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Program Open Space
- Maryland Office of Planning, Comprehensive Planning
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Secretary of Agriculture
- Former Secretary of Agriculture
- Maryland Department of Agriculture, Marketing
- Maryland Department of Agriculture, Resource Conservation
- Maryland Department of Agriculture, Pesticides and Plant Industries
- Maryland Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Land Preservation
- Forum for Rural Md., Dept. of Business & Economic Development
- National Forest Service
- National Park Service

Natural Resource Industry Groups/Interests Representatives (17)

- Individual Farm Operators (3)
- Delmarva Farmer Newspaper

- Vegetable Growers Association
- Maryland Pork Producers
- Maryland Agriculture Council
- Agricultural and Community Development, Inc.
- Maryland Nurserymen and Greenhouse Growers Association
- Maryland Cattleman's Association
- Association of Forest Industries
- Forest Industry Task Force
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation
- Delmarva Poultry Industries
- Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts
- Maryland Grain Producers
- Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association
- Bell Nurseries
- DuPont Agricultural Products

Environmental Activist and Land Preservation Organization Representatives (12)

- Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Maryland Office Director
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Clagett Farm
- Maryland Environmental Trust, Executive Director
- Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, Director
- Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, Director
- Gunpowder Valley Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy, Maryland Office
- The Nature Conservancy, Nanticoke Watershed Project
- Save Our Streams
- Partners in Flights
- Environmental Law Institute
- Audubon Society, Pickering Creek

Elected Officials (4)

- U.S. Congressman
- Wicomico County Council President
- Former state senator
- Cecil County Commissioner

Educational Institutions (6)

- University of Maryland, Wye Research and Education Center
- University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Studies
- University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Professors (2)
- University of Maryland, Central & Western Research Stations
- Frostburg State University, Appalachian Environmental Lab,

Interview Questions

1. What changes in agriculture and forestry practices have occurred in Maryland in the past two decades in response to environmental concerns? What spurred these changes? (Consider regulations, economics, incentive programs, population shifts, etc.)
2. What is the key challenge facing the agriculture/forestry/natural resource industries in Maryland? Why this issue at this time?
3. What other issues present major challenges for Maryland's agriculture/forestry/natural resource-based industries and why?
4. Relate these challenges to the economic viability of agriculture/forestry/natural resource-based industries within Maryland.
5. From an economic perspective, what crops/practices are no longer viable in the industry? What continues to be viable or holds promise of being viable in the future?
6. From an ecological perspective, what crops/practices appear to pose problems for Maryland's natural environment?
7. How can the problems/issues you raise be addressed or ameliorated at the state and/or local level in Maryland?
8. Do you think that a collaborative effort to develop a research agenda, public policy initiatives, and/or outreach efforts to agriculture/forestry communities and to the environmental activist community would be a beneficial way to address these issues? What barriers would need to be overcome for this to occur?
9. What are your specific suggestions for actions to be undertaken? Can you suggest a strategy for dealing with the issues you have raised?
10. What means currently exist for resolving the differences among groups that have a stake in the resource-based industries and in environmental activism in Maryland? How effective are they?
11. What would you consider an acceptable outcome from a collaborative effort?
12. If you were the head of the Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, what is the first thing you would propose?

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Interview Summary Display Material

The following was material prepared for use in three round-table discussions as part of the Needs Assessment project being conducted for the Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc. by American Farmland Trust, Maryland Farm Bureau, and The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. It is a distillation of the over 70 individual interviews conducted recently with representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations, education institutions, government agencies and elected officials. This summary is intended for discussion purposes.

1. What changes in agriculture and forestry practices have occurred in Maryland in the last two decades in response to environmental concerns? What spurred those changes?

A whole host of management practices were cited, based essentially on a greater awareness of the connections of land and water. Most changes occurred as a result of voluntary and incentive-based programs. Other causes of the change:

- Chesapeake Bay Program
- Education
- Farm economics
- Urban pressures
- Public opinion
- Industry initiatives
- Regulations

Changed practices that have produced new worries are:

- Confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's)
- Monocropping
- Increased chemical inputs from no-till farming

2. What are the key challenges facing agriculture and forestry in Maryland?

Low profitability of ag industry was considered key. (5)

Associated problems include:

- **Development pressure:** fragmentation of resource base, incompatible uses, increased land values. (7)
- **Regulations:** practical and psychological effects of inflexible regulations, costs can't be passed on to consumers. (3)
- **Environmental Concerns:** scientific understanding of impacts is evolving; how to transition to production systems that can be sustained economically and environmentally (1)

3. How can these issues be addressed at the state and local level?

There is no shared vision of the role agriculture and forestry play in Maryland's future. Because of this, both industries are left out of state's Smart Growth and economic development strategies. (1)

Public Actions

- Maryland state government should be far more involved in promoting the industries, paying attention to the special needs of Maryland farmers. (2)
- Local governments should incorporate industry viability into their economic development agendas and planning and zoning decisions. (1)

Non-public Actions

- Environmental organizations should learn more about the industries whose practices they seek to change. (3)
- The agricultural industry should be more actively involved in developing solutions.

4. What should the role be for Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology in addressing these issues?

- Keep track of 'big picture' – economic viability is key. (5)
- Develop and fund a research agenda focused on practical results. (1)
- Educate policy makers about economic and scientific needs of industries as well as implications of policy decisions. (5)
- Cultivate innovative partnerships within public and private sectors. (3)
- Seek methods to connect the public more directly to ag/forestry industries. (2)

5. What should the center's first steps be?

- **Research** – Provide better scientific and economic data to inform future decisions.
- **Communications** – Develop an education agenda centered on *emerging* issues of the environment and economic viability.
- **Policy** – Create a forum where policy makers, representatives of the industries and non-profits, and citizens can come together for informed discussion and debate to create more effective public policy.

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Round Table Discussion # 1 – Maryland Commission on Agriculture

NOTES

1. What has spurred the changes in agriculture and forestry in recent years?

- Population increasing
- Technology
- Government regulations
- Inheritance taxes
- Economic survival
- Public perception of value of products
- Huge conglomeration of businesses

2. What are the key challenges facing agriculture and forestry in Maryland?

#1 Economics/global markets/commodity prices

- Inability to communicate about the agriculture industry
- Regulations
- Labor shortage/ and regulations and policies surrounding labor
- Shift of political power from rural areas
- Urbanization
- Nutrient management regulations/environmental issues
- Land transfer to next generation

3. How can these issues be addressed at the state and local level?

- Inform/education non-ag community
- Buy local products
- Not too many regulations to make industries non-competitiveness in world markets
- Reorient legislators' attitudes to look at industry impacts of regulations – “Is what you're getting what you want?”
- Establish political clout
- Industry has to get together (in unity there is strength)
- Look at economic impacts of regulations already passed
- Land use policy – what will the state and counties look like in the future
- Look at indirect impacts of master planning and transportation planning on farming
- Establish training for industry to changes to new products (transition).
- Have governor's staff represented on ag commission
- Caution - open space interests and agriculture don't necessarily coincide.

4. What is the role for Agro-Ecology Center?

- Get and keep a balance of interests on Board
- Educate public – become source of information
- Learn about issues (scientific/political)
- Seek fact/science-based objectivity

- Develop workable model and do “what if?” testing.
- Act as catalyst/mediator for disputes
- Develop of trust in ag community
- Work on solutions based on common sense and practical applicability.
- Remain neutral – Board can disagree but continue working
- Change perception of agriculture community as not being environmentalists.
- Watch out for the language problem
 - Agriculture = bad; against environment.
 - Environmentalists = good; regardless of practices
 - Order of words in mission statement
- Look at environmental impacts in totality (use environmental “budget”)
- Hire dalai lama
- Give credit for what farmers have done for environment
- Tourism seen as good because it’s not a smokestack industry but does cause a great deal of pollution.

5. What should the first steps of the Agro-Ecology Center be?

- Look for successful model for crisis intervention (e.g. oyster issues)
- Take data from needs assessment and evaluate it.
- Amend mission statement based on needs assessment
- Keep it a living process
- Look outside US (Holland) for solutions

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Round Table Discussion # 2 – LEAD Maryland and Water Resources Leadership Initiative (WRLEI)

NOTES

1. What has spurred the changes in agriculture and forestry in recent years?

- Technology
- Markets
- Politics
- Population growth
- Government policies (also land use)
- Economics (4)
- Consolidation (1)
- Globalization
- Education/information
- Environmental awareness
- Public opinion/activism
- Family (lifestyle changes)
- Demographics

2. What are the key challenges facing agriculture and forestry in Maryland?

- Profitability (15)
- Population growth (2)
- Political demographics (fed, state, co) (1)
- Lack of understanding by suburban population (2)
- Environmental constraints (1)
- Technology (e.g. GMO's) fears among consumers
- Communication by industry of what they do
- Sustaining infrastructure
- Disunity in industry (sectors)
- Distrust between agricultural and environmental communities
- Competition nationally and globally in regulatory environment

3. How can these issues be addressed at the state and local level?

- Work on joint projects – environment and agriculture groups
- Practice agricultural leadership
- Respect each other more
- Work on commonalities (look at language)
- Educating public and in schools (MAEF) (8)
- Farm visitation programs (1)
- Put agriculture question on MPSAT test
- Federal government can better target services
- Government can involve more people in process – but respect and act on information
- Greater internal communication among groups and agencies
- Support exchange of leadership group members (4)

- Agri-business incubator project in Jessup (1)
- Look at transportation infrastructure
- Enhance livability of urban areas
- Critical farms programs
- Increased funding for MALPF with look at agricultural economy
- State and local economic development focus on agriculture (3)
- MAEF and LEAD and WRLI (1)

4. What is the role for Agro-Ecology Center?

- Help raise funds for groups in existence
- Inventory what's out there and what's working (5)
- Foster communication between groups, act as facilitator (3)
- Pull research in from elsewhere
- Change players / expand Board
- Make practical use of research
- Study cropping systems that reduce inputs
- Seek input from groups represented by LEAD/WRLI
- Research organic farming systems
- Study economics of innovative on-farm value-added enterprises
- Look at markets
- Be a "common ground" room
- Be neutral/independent

5. What should the first steps of the Agro-Ecology Center be?

- Build credibility, trust (11)
- Articulate AEC vision – what is baseline for info? (3)
- Explore a grassroots vision, rather than that defined by organizations (1)
- Expand board of directors
- Explain who and what AEC is to ag community – quickly! What is their niche? (1)
- Have an advisory board behind the high profile board members. (1)

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Round Table Discussion # 3 – Eastern Shore Tributary Strategy Teams

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1. What has spurred the changes in agriculture and forestry in recent years?

- Population growth
- Production methods
- Labor/markets
- Technology (2)
- Globalization of agriculture
- Regulation/all kinds – positive and negative
- Chesapeake Bay Program
- Competition
- Physical changes in Bay especially water
- Increased scientific knowledge about Chesapeake Bay
- Critical Areas regulations

2. What are the key challenges facing agriculture and forestry in Maryland?

** indicates greatest concern*

****Profitability (trade/markets) (9)***

****Public perception of ag (6)***

- Forest fragmentation (3)
- Land preservation (1)
- Disconnect between individual actions of a farmer and collective action of farmers, ie, scale
- Dealing with regulations
- Environmental impacts
- Demographics, especially farmers' age
- Feasibility of farming – right-to-farm issues
- Preservation of production base : land, people, skills, infrastructure

3. How can these issues be addressed at the state and local level?

- Government can help cover cost of changing due to regulations
- If agriculture is the not highest value use, why try to stop it?
- Education of law-makers and environmental groups about industries
- Diversification of crops
- Support for alternative crops
- Manage state's own forestland for production.
- Provide incentive based program, especially cover crops
- Work on end-product marketing
- Local government can use land use policies to protect land base
- Promote conservation rather than preservation.
- More and faster research and development for industries
- Look to farming as energy production.
- Agri-tourism development (1)
- All groups accept responsibility and be less confrontational. (1)

- Public understanding about inability to pass costs caused by regulation along to consumers
- Environmental groups communicate with others before acting
- Environmentally clean farm recognition
- Give voice to middle ground.

4. What is the role for Agro-Ecology Center?

- Develop objective curriculum for lawmakers and administration about agriculture and the environment
- Develop priorities through consensus about environmental issues.
- Do targeted watershed research
- Provide continuity over long haul
- Be clearinghouse for info/research on marketing, agriculture, environment – ideas and products (1)
- Look at increased productivity of Bay – seafood, etc. to drive actions (1)
- Synthesize research (1)
- Do holistic, socio-economic research to look at:
 - input-output management
 - rising land values
- Examine government commodity controls
- Take care with language – there is sensitivity to terms used(2)
- Market alternative products and processes
- Make what they do people-oriented, not just land and buildings.

5. What should the first steps of the Agro-Ecology Center be?

- Bring together academics – agronomists and ecologists (1)
- Lobby the mission not particular actions
- Lobby for money – get funding from a neutral/stable source to guard objectivity
- Refine mission statement
- Do strategic planning

