

Agriculture is a Major Land Use and Industry in the County

Agriculture continues to be a major land use and the primary industry in Cecil County. Cecil County's total land area is 222,284 acres. Of the total land area, eighty thousand acres are devoted to tillable production farmland. Livestock operations include beef cattle, dairy, hogs, poultry, and sheep. Common crops grown here include corn, hay, soybeans, wheat, and barley. Other agricultural operations include horse, nursery crop, mushroom, and orchard operations.

Agriculture is a preferred land use to conserve our natural resources and protect the water quality of the Bay. Farmers use many Best Management Practices to increase farm productivity, reduce soil erosion, and protect the water quality of the Bay. Best Management Practices include cover crops, buffers, diversions, grass waterways, manure storage structures, and constructed wetlands. Other agricultural methods include pest scouting, forest conservation, and the management of nutrients, crop residue, soils, and wildlife habitat.

Through state and county agricultural land preservation programs, farmers may choose to sell or donate their development rights in exchange for placing permanent restrictions on property deeds that prohibit any future residential, commercial, or industrial use of the land.



Sights, Sounds, and Smells of Farming



If you are a home owner in the rural part of the County, you will see, hear and smell things that are quite different from the more urban part of the County. Many farms have their fields near suburban neighbors. Farmers sometimes receive complaints from their new neighbors about routine agricultural operations, dust, noise, and smells. Although in some cases farmers may be willing and able to accommodate requests to modify their operations, the interface between agricultural and residential neighbors requires some cooperation on both sides in order to keep peace in the community

Most farming operations use pesticides to control weeds and insects. Farmers are required by the Maryland Department of Agriculture to have a Pesticide Applicators License, which requires them to attend training and to pass an exam before they are issued the license. After years of testing modern pesticides are approved for use by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Newer generation pesticides are used in very small quantities and are more environmentally friendly.



A big part of farming involves working with conditions that people can't control, especially the weather. As soon as the soil warms up and dries out enough to plant, farmers must get their crops in the ground to take advantage of the maximum number of days in the growing season. Harvesting is also a particularly critical time, and farmers must work every available hour until the crops are harvested from the fields and processed. Part of the urgency is due to the fact that if certain crops get wet during harvest time, the crops could be completely ruined or seriously devalued. During harvest time, farmers

From My Backyard to Our Bay

may be working from dawn to dusk to get their crops in. Also, during this time, harvesting equipment and wagons may need to use the highway to get from fields to barns. Patience from motorists when slow-moving farm equipment is on the road is always appreciated.

When the farm is a livestock or dairy operation, the efficient and environmentally safe disposal of manure is a major consideration. When possible, farmers use manure as organic fertilizer on crop fields, reducing their need for commercial fertilizer, which is both an economic and environmental benefit. Manure is usually stored in a facility that will protect it from runoff and therefore prevent it from being washed from the barnyard into streams. The facility provides storage, but eventually the manure is spread on the fields. Manure handling involves odors, but under normal conditions the odor from manure spreading quickly dissipates.

New homeowners may find themselves living in sight of, and perhaps downwind of, farming operations. Farming is an occupation and a tradition that is often handed down from one generation to another. Agriculture is the foundation of rural communities and farmers expect and hope to live peacefully with their neighbors.

It is critical that a process to address problems with new neighbors is conducted in a manner that allows changes on both sides for a peaceful solution. In some cases, a friendly visit to the farm to learn more about the operation can eliminate many misunderstandings.

Where To Get Help for agricultural information

- Cecil Soil Conservation District 105 Chesapeake Blvd. Suite B-3, Elkton, MD 21921; <http://www.cecilscd.com>; 410-398-4411, extension 3
- Cecil County Maryland Cooperative Extension <http://cecil.umd.edu>; 410-996-5280
- Cecil County Farm Bureau, 20 Peach Rd., Elkton, MD 21921; 410-398-3228 or 410-392-4226; <http://www.mdfarmbureau.com/CountySites/Cecil.htm>;
- USDA-Economic Research Service; <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/agoutlook/April2001/AO280g.pdf>
- Maryland Department of Agriculture; <http://www.mda.state.md.us>; 410-841-5700
- American Farmland Trust; <http://www.farmland.org>; 202-331-7300