



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

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Maryland Agricultural Commission

Agriculture | *Maryland's Leading Industry*
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January 23rd, 2025

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Harrison Palmer, Executive Secretary

Re: Senate Bill 240 - Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

The Maryland Agricultural Commission is charged with the duty of advising the Secretary of Agriculture, proposing agricultural improvements, promoting State agricultural industries and products, and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. Since its inception in 1961, the Commission has continued to grow and evolve its membership to ensure that it is on the cutting edge of agricultural advancements and emerging industries. A 1990 survey of Commission members encouraged the inclusion of the rapidly growing nursery industry. Within a decade, this industry was the [#2 agricultural commodity](#) in the state, and by 2018 generated over [\\$1.376 billion](#) in agricultural product sales per a Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association survey. Today, the Nursery representative serves as Chair of the Commission, highlighting the valuable foresight and awareness of the Maryland Agricultural Commission as it makes recommendations to restructure membership in this proposed legislation to embody the future of the industry.

In 1916 a 9-member State Board of Agriculture was established and charged with enforcing the agriculturally related laws of Maryland, as well as serving as the Board of Regents for the Maryland State College of Agriculture, later named the University of Maryland. In 1961, the legislature formed the Agricultural Advisory Board of Maryland to identify challenges within the agricultural industry and bring them to the attention of the State Board of Agriculture. 7 years later, this Advisory Board doubled its membership with the spirit of being more representative of the agricultural sector and became the Maryland Agricultural Commission. The Maryland Agricultural Commission proposed the development of a Department of Agriculture in 1971 within the Executive Branch to adopt the duties of enforcing agriculturally related laws and separate the dual responsibilities of the State Board of Agriculture and University of Maryland Board of Regents. Today, the 31-member Maryland Agricultural Commission serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Agriculture, comprised of Governor-appointed members in industry-specific seats to bring key voices to the table and advance the industry by providing recommendations and consideration on the initiatives of the Department.

Over the past 63 years the Commission has kept its finger on the pulse of agriculture in Maryland and carried out its charge through the establishment of standing committees focused on key issues of the time, including budgets, legislation, pollution, livestock and wetlands. These committees empowered the Commission to leverage the expertise of its appointed members and make policy recommendations regulating pesticides, poultry and livestock inspection, farmland assessment, and dozens of other State and Federal legislative proposals to ensure that the farmer voice was prioritized. In February 2024, the Commission engaged in a survey to identify key priorities that impact Maryland agriculture and connect missing industries that are not represented on the Commission but are integral in the success of the whole industry. At the March 2024 meeting, the first draft of their strategic plan was introduced and modified at each meeting until June 2024 when it was unanimously adopted.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. This diverse and comprehensive board of industry leaders throughout Maryland's vibrant agricultural sectors is well equipped to serve and will continue with clear direction to advance the industry within the State. In conjunction with the establishment of working committees they moved to adopt the Young Farmers Advisory Board to now be a standing Committee on Young Farmers with leadership from a newly established Young Farmer seat. The Young Farmers Advisory Board was formed in 2004 and charged with advising the Maryland Agricultural Commission on issues pertinent to young farmers and the next generation of agriculture. Adoption of the Young Farmers Advisory Board into the Maryland Agricultural Commission, as proposed in this legislation, ensures that the future of Maryland agriculture is always considered.

Intentional nomenclature changes to the membership seats as outlined in the strategic plan expand the Agritourism industry to include Value Added Agriculture, amend the Horse Breeding industry to represent the entire Equine industry, clarify the horticulture industry to focus on fruit production which will be a sister seat to the vegetable producer, and engage with the nursery, landscape and greenhouse industry outside of the original Nursery seat. Duplicative Poultry, Dairy, Nursery, and Related Agricultural Service seats were removed to ensure all industries carried an equal voice, and the longstanding tobacco grower position was removed, marking a historic shift from the crop that was once prolific throughout the State. Lastly, several new seats were added to represent growing industries like Controlled Environmental Agriculture and the Urban & Small Farm Sector, and ensure that Historically Underserved Farmers, Veteran Farmers, and New & Beginning Farmers have a seat at the table.

Advisory bodies have played an integral role in spurring the success of the agricultural industry for over 60 years and the evolution of those bodies from a grassroots initiative ensures that its unified voice is fully representative of Maryland's number one commercial industry. Thank you for your consideration of the proposed legislation that makes the statutory changes formulated through several months of examination from the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. B. Palmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Harrison B. Palmer
Executive Secretary