



Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation

FY 2025 Annual Report



A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Stakeholders,

In preparing this year's Annual Report, I took the opportunity to not only review MALPF's accomplishments over this past year, but throughout the history of the Program. MALPF reached a significant milestone during FY25, passing the billion dollar mark in public investment to purchase easements and permanently protect 384,000 acres of farmland! This accomplishment speaks to the combined financial commitment of the State of Maryland and all 23 counties, in addition to the US Department of Agriculture. MALPF continues working to protect Maryland farmland, which includes being a significant contributor in meeting the Maryland the Beautiful Act's goal of conserving 40% of the State by 2040.



Due to the budget cuts in funding for the MALPF program, the MALPF Board decided to merge the budgets of FY25 and FY26 into a single application cycle. While the budget cuts will result in fewer easements being acquired to protect farmland, MALPF is still very busy working on settling the easement contracts entered from the FY23 and FY24 easement cycles (with FY24 being the highest single year funding cycle in MALPF's history). By early winter 2025, MALPF settled 105 of the 110 offers to purchase agricultural easements in the FY23 application cycle; settled 119 of the 148 offer to purchase agricultural easement in the FY24 application cycle; and has entered into 69 contracts to purchase agricultural easements in the combined FY25/26 application cycle, with 9 of those contracts already settled. Due to the scheduled of the combined FY25/26 application cycle, MALPF is still waiting to hear back from several additional offers that have been extended.

The continuous acquisition of MALPF easements speaks to the Program's success in bolstering the agricultural industry by providing an influx of funds to landowners of newly MALPF-eased farms. Even during leaner budgetary times, the ongoing dedication and commitment of the MALPF Board of Trustees, staff, attorneys, appraisers, and all our county partners ensures that the MALPF program will continue to protect Maryland's farmland well into the future.

At the end of FY25, MALPF has preserved 2,881 farms across Maryland, totaling over 384,000 acres of land, at a public investment of over \$1.04 billion. MALPF will be accepting applications for the next easement cycle by July 1, 2026.



This year, I am also pleased to highlight multiple members of the MALPF staff for long term service awards with the State of Maryland. Chana Turner has been with the State for 15 years, with Rama Dilip and I both reaching 20 years with the State. All three of us have worked for multiple State agencies and are proud of our years of service as dedicated Maryland State employees. Maryland Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks and Deputy Secretary Steven Connelly presented each of us with a certificate to recognize our years of service.

It continues to be my honor to serve as MALPF's Executive Director. I remain unceasingly amazed by MALPF's unwavering commitment to recognize and respond to the needs of Maryland's ever-changing agricultural industry.

Sincerely,
Michelle Cable

Michelle Cable
Executive Director

What is the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)?

The primary purpose of **MALPF** is to preserve sufficient agricultural land to maintain a viable local base of food and fiber production for the citizens of Maryland. The state program purchases development rights on farms and restricts them to only agricultural uses by using perpetual agricultural conservation easements, which are recorded in the land records. In other words, the program pays landowners to continue what they have done for years, decades, or sometimes a century or more – farm their land.



Photo: Quade Barn

MALPF easements allow for all types of agricultural operations to be conducted on the farm. The easement defines agriculture/agricultural uses as “any use of the easement property which directly contributes to the production, conversion, processing, storage, or sale of agricultural products generated on the easement property and/or management of products such as livestock, horses, poultry, crops, trees, shrubs, plants, other vegetation, and aquaculture.” It is important that the terms of the easement allow for owners to grow and evolve as the agricultural industry changes through the years.



Established in 1977, and has since grown into one of the most successful programs of its kind in the country.



Eligibility and Criteria

SIZE: The minimum easement size is 50 contiguous acres. If a property is less than 50 acres, a landowner may still be eligible to apply and should visit our website to review Fact Sheet 12, “Small Properties in the Agricultural Land Preservation Program,” or confer with the local program administrator.

If a property is contiguous to an existing easement, the landowner may apply to sell an easement regardless of the acreage.

PRODUCTIVITY: An easement is purchased on land that is either currently being used for producing food or fiber or has the capability to do so. Woodland management and harvesting operations are eligible to join this program. The productivity of the soil as measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Soil Conservation Service Land Classification System is a major criterion. Soil requirements for the property to qualify to participate in the program are:

- At least 50% of the land is classified as Class I, II, or III soils; - or -
- If the land is wooded, 50% of the land is classified as Woodland Group 1 or 2 soils; - or -
- If the reason the land could not meet the above conditions was because of flood-plain or wetland soils, those areas could be excluded as a percentage of land; - or -
- If there is an insufficient percentage of Class I, II, or III soils alone and there is an insufficient percentage of Woodland Groups 1 and 2 soils alone, the land would qualify if the combination of the two exceeded 60%; - or -
- Land with lower soil capabilities may qualify under certain conditions.

LOCATION: Land that lies within the boundaries of a 10-year water and sewer service area plan is generally ineligible unless it has extraordinary productive capability and is of significant size.

DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS: A property must have at least one unused development right associated with the property to sell an easement.

LOCAL CRITERIA: The criteria listed above are the minimum eligibility standards set by the state. The program is administered jointly by the county and state. The county may impose criteria which could be in addition to or more stringent than the state. The county also ranks the applications in order of priority and may be limited by MALPF in the number of applications that are forwarded to MALPF in an application cycle.



2025 Legislative Update

Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025

The FY 2026 budget as introduced included full funding in FY 2026 for the state's land preservation programs funded with transfer tax revenues, which includes MALPF. While proposed funding amounts were lower than recent years due to decreased transfer tax revenue estimates and under-attainment from FY 2024, the amounts proposed were in accordance with statute. However, due to budget shortfalls, the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025 was amended to divert \$25 million per year from fiscal 2026 through 2029 of revenue from the transfer tax that would otherwise be distributed to Program Open Space State Land Acquisition, the Rural Legacy Program, and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program. It is estimated that the \$100 million diverted in FY 2026 to FY 2029 would protect approximately 20,000 acres of land statewide. Of the \$100 million diverted, 52% of those funds are planned to come from the MALPF funding.

House Bill 262/ Senate Bill 240- Department of Agriculture - Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

This bill alters the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission. Among other things, it established The Committee on Young Farmers (Committee) to replace The Young Farmer's Advisory Board (Advisory Board). Previously, the Advisory Board consisted of 20 members, statutorily mandated to consist of six members appointed from various State departments and related programs, and 14 appointed from the general public.

As a result of this legislation, the Committee membership now consists of 10 individuals that will be designated by the MDA Secretary in consultation with the Executive Secretary of the Maryland Agricultural Commission. A member of the Committee is appointed to the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation.

This legislation went into effect on October 1, 2025.

Senate Bill 931 - Public Utilities - Generating stations - Generation and Siting (Renewable Energy Certainty Act)

Among other things, this legislation establishes 1) general conditions and requirements for solar siting; 2) the Public Service Commission (PSC) as authority to approve solar siting locations; 3) a 5% limitation on PSC-approved solar facilities within a Priority Preservation Area (PPA); and 4) authority for local county governments to approve siting within the PPA once the 5% limitation has been achieved.

Statewide, approximately two million acres are located within PPAs. This law enables the PSC to authorize solar facilities to be constructed on more than 100,000 acres of agricultural lands within PPAs statewide. The 5% limitation on siting within PPAs does not include solar facilities in existence before January 1, 2025. Each county is responsible for tracking the acreage impacted by the PPA solar siting limitation and reporting to the PSC when that acreage has been achieved.

This legislation went into effect October 1, 2025.



FY25 Report on the Certification of Local Agricultural Land Preservation Programs

Maryland's Certification of Local Agricultural Preservation Programs, known as the Certification Program, was created in 1990. The goals of the program are to:

- Preserve the important role agriculture plays in maintaining the state's high environmental quality;
- Encourage development of county agricultural preservation programs, which complement the
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation's (MALPF) preservation efforts; and
- Employ agricultural land preservation as a tool to manage growth.

Counties able to demonstrate they have an effective program to preserve productive farmland, and forests are eligible to participate in the Certification Program. Local preservation programs consist of a combination of preservation tools such as low-density agricultural zoning, purchase or transfer of development rights programs, right-to-farm policies, support for agricultural businesses, and the designation of agriculture as the best use of certain lands.

To qualify for and retain certified status, counties are required to designate a Priority Preservation Area (PPA). Counties concentrate their preservation efforts and program funding into their PPAs to preserve large contiguous blocks of agricultural and wooded land.

Participation in the Certification Program by interested counties is voluntary. Certified counties enjoy the benefit of retaining 75% of their locally generated agricultural transfer tax revenue, while non-certified counties retain 33%. All retained revenue must be spent or encumbered for qualifying land preservation expenditures within six years of collection, otherwise those collected funds will revert to MALPF. The increase in participating counties' share of the agricultural land transfer tax helps to support and enhance their preservation programs in ways that best meet local goals and needs.



In FY25, Washington, Talbot, Prince George's and Harford counties submitted their recertification reports for joint action by the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) and the MALPF Board. To determine eligibility for recertification, MDP reviews each county request against the Certification Program's regulatory requirements and then makes a recommendation to the Secretary of Planning and the MALPF Board.

As of June 30, 2025, 17 of the 23 counties are now certified. Recertification reports were due on October 1, 2025, for Calvert and Caroline counties, whose certification periods end on June 30, 2026 (extensions are available). Interim certification reports are due from Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Kent, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's and Worcester counties.

A 5-year recertification period is required by law for county farmland preservation programs that MDP and the MALPF Board determine to be consistently effective in achieving preservation goals.

MALPF Board of Trustees Field Trip

The MALPF Board of Trustees (“Board”) continues to hold its monthly meetings virtually, with the Board, MALPF staff, county partners, landowners, and other interested parties participating either through their computers, or by phone. The virtual Board meetings have been efficient and successful, with the Board electing to maintain meeting virtually rather than returning to in person meetings.

MALPF field trips are not Board meetings, serve instead as learning opportunities, and as a chance for Board members in attendance to interact with each other and MALPF staff. Through field trips, Board members and staff get to meet the landowners, and to learn about their farms, and about the diverse and myriad types of agricultural operations (including forestry) throughout Maryland.

This year the MALPF Board visited the Rosie Cheeks Distillery, located on Iron Roses Farm in Frederick County, owned by Lee and Kristy Rosebush. Mr. and Ms. Rosebush, who purchased the farm more than a decade after the easement was established, were gracious hosts and tour guides, shared that the existence of the easement factored into their consideration when they were looking at farms to acquire. Once they purchased the farm, they started the process of establishing a moonshine distillery, including coming to MALPF for various approvals as well as navigating the County permitting process. They have enjoyed amazing success since opening the distillery, and Rosie Cheeks Distillery has won multiple awards, including “Best in Class” in the 2023 East Coast Craft Spirits competition.



MALPF Board and staff learned how the farm operation of corn, beans, apples, and other fruits are used in their distillery process. It was fascinating to learn about the operation, which is truly a multi-generational, family endeavor. There was of course some responsible sampling of just a few of the many moonshine offerings at the end of the visit, in the comfort of their on-site Tasting Room.

The Board looks forward to field trips continuing in 2026. Getting out and meeting the farm owners, and seeing the farms in person, provides both Board members and staff opportunities to see the tremendous impact that the MALPF program has made around the State.



Stewardship

In 1983, the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) Board of Trustees adopted a policy to inspect 10% of the Foundation's easements each year. County Program administrators agreed that they would perform the inspections. In the mid to late 1990's MALPF partnered with the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), a federally funded program through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which required all of their easements to be inspected annually. MALPF currently holds over 2,700 easements and this number increases every year.



The inspection offers an opportunity for the landowner to meet with a MALPF representative to discuss their easement. It is a time to build relationships. It is a time to review a document that might be so old that the original grantor can't remember the details. Or it could be a time that a new landowner gets introduced to the nuances of the easement program.

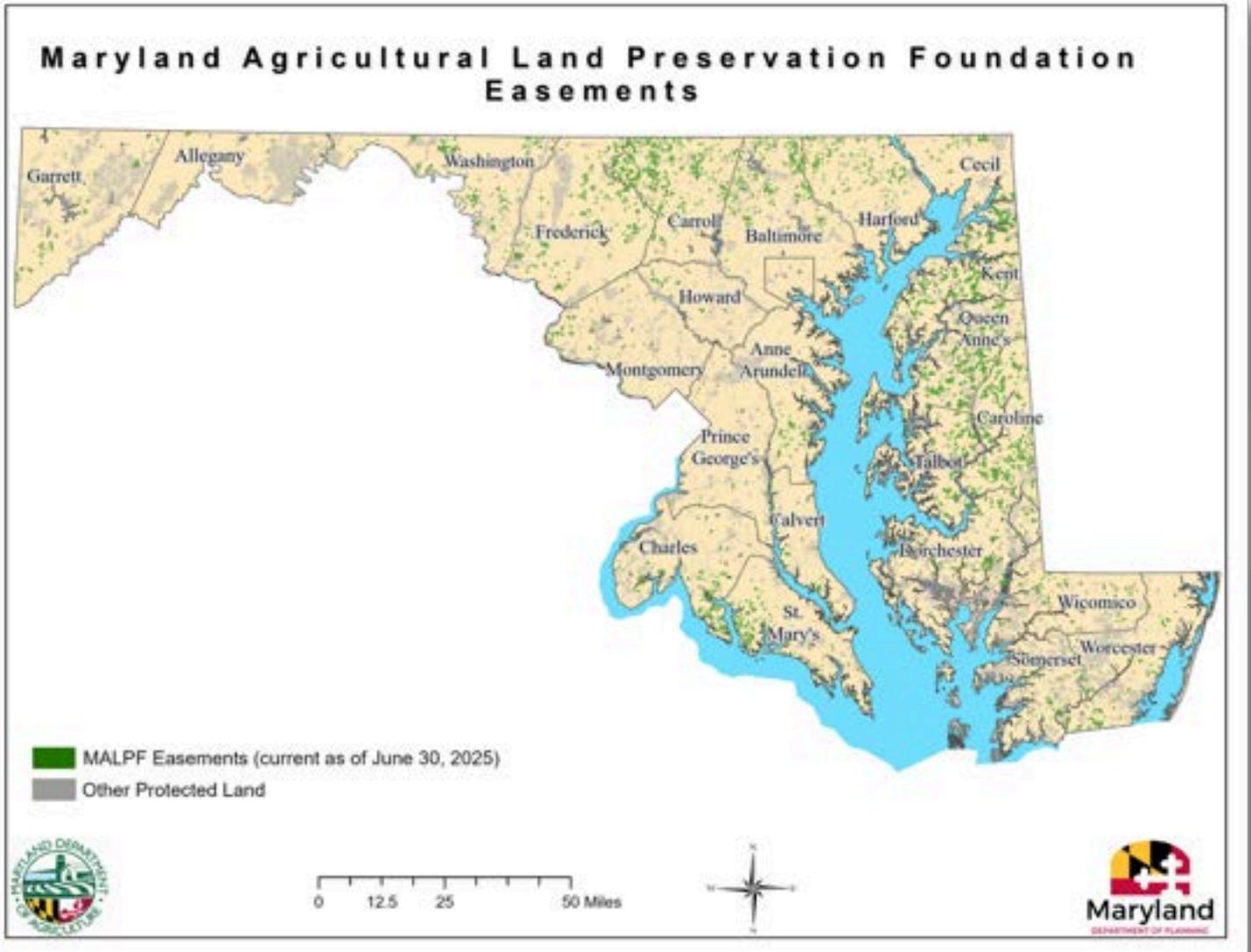
As the number of easements continue to increase, meeting inspection goals will get more challenging. Our County Program administrators wear many hats; they are also responsible for other preservation programs in their counties. Some have embraced new technology and have incorporated the use of drones in their inspections. Having an eye in the sky can significantly reduce the time spent inspecting.



MALPF is one of the oldest and most successful programs of its kind in the nation. One key to this success is the partnership with the County Program administrators. Their dedication to the MALPF program is displayed through the countless hours spent in the elements, scorching sun, freezing winds, relentless insects. Their names change through the years, but the next one up continues to carry on with the mission.

MALPF remains committed to working with landowners to protect Maryland's farmlands, preserve rural communities, and carry on our state's agricultural legacy. We salute our County Program administrators for their hard work and dedication to preserving Maryland's finest agricultural lands.

MALPF Statewide Easement Map



Easement Settlements in FY25

EASEMENT SETTLEMENTS IN FY25					
COUNTY	NUMBER OF EASEMENTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACRES	ACQUISITION COST		AVERAGE FARM SIZE IN ACRES
			AVERAGE PER ACRE	TOTAL	
Allegany					
Anne Arundel	2	266	\$9,306	\$2,473,296	133
Baltimore	7	501	\$7,600	\$3,806,553	72
Calvert					
Caroline	11	1,090	\$3,131	\$3,412,256	99
Carroll	11	447	\$7,873	\$3,515,407	41
Cecil	5	1,056	\$4,917	\$5,194,017	211
Charles	4	527	\$3,528	\$1,860,523	132
Dorchester	7	1,150	\$2,831	\$3,256,883	164
Frederick	6	854	\$6,769	\$5,781,381	142
Garrett					
Harford	8	533	\$6,007	\$3,200,553	67
Howard					
Kent	9	1,836	\$5,076	\$9,320,800	204
Montgomery	2	344	\$7,232	\$2,488,262	172
Prince George's					
Queen Anne's	16	2,352	\$3,926	\$9,233,234	147
St. Mary's	7	582	\$5,121	\$2,977,974	83
Somerset	4	230	\$4,246	977,413	58
Talbot	4	615	\$4,260	\$2,619,293	154
Washington	11	1,378	\$5,448	\$7,509,060	125
Wicomico	9	923	\$3,152	\$2,909,816	103
Worcester	1	239	\$2,841	\$678,539	239
TOTALS	124	14,923	\$4,772	\$71,215,259	120

AS OF JUNE 30, 2025

Easement Acquisition Costs in FY25

EASEMENT ACQUISITION COSTS - FY25			
As of June 30, 2025			
FISCAL YEAR	NO. OF FARMS	ACQUISITION COST	ACRES
FY77 - FY06	1,708	\$342,578,700	236,259
FY07	70	\$40,297,919	9,592
FY08	106	\$78,270,208	13,810
FY09	79	\$68,588,962	9,787
FY10	68	\$52,814,641	8,816
FY11	14	\$6,783,740	1,527
FY12	41	\$21,217,570	4,692
FY13	16	\$7,925,597	1,773
FY14	52	\$26,302,733	6,117
FY15	33	\$19,569,931	4,324
FY16	31	\$17,719,957	4,219
FY17	28	\$17,062,423	4,481
FY18	56	\$29,561,084	7,402
FY19	46	\$23,838,120	5,530
FY20	65	\$31,486,292	8,335
FY21	91	\$43,127,680	10,656
FY22	82	\$47,777,257	11,240
FY23	69	\$32,873,695	7,448
FY24	102	\$64,371,504	14,012
FY25	124	\$7,125,259	14,923

Total Easements Acquired through 2025

TOTAL EASEMENTS ACQUIRED				
(As of June 30, 2025)				
County	Total Easements Acquired			PERCENT OF TOTAL
	Number	Acreage	Cost	
Allegany	18	2,010	\$4,100,079	0.52%
Anne Arundel	49	6,073	\$27,856,610	1.58%
Baltimore	275	27,427	\$108,919,852	7.13%
Calvert	35	4,715	\$12,267,678	1.22%
Caroline	261	37,434	\$47,542,076	9.73%
Carroll	422	47,195	\$114,960,751	12.26%
Cecil	113	17,143	\$46,439,322	4.45%
Charles	119	16,624	\$56,276,382	4.32%
Dorchester	118	18,026	\$29,311,040	4.68%
Frederick	186	28,201	\$87,769,115	7.33%
Garrett	63	7,893	\$12,118,036	2.05%
Harford	177	18,219	\$67,852,262	4.73%
Howard	34	4,098	\$8,355,364	1.06%
Kent	142	27,239	\$71,862,903	7.08%
Montgomery	39	5,990	\$26,978,600	1.56%
Prince George's	20	1,972	\$15,524,196	0.51%
Queen Anne's	230	39,213	\$87,125,774	10.19%
St. Mary's	156	15,885	\$70,642,027	4.13%
Somerset	68	7,496	\$13,822,963	1.95%
Talbot	95	14,537	\$41,065,361	3.78%
Washington	111	17,390	\$53,205,581	4.52%
Wicomico	79	9,293	\$19,370,350	2.41%
Worcester	71	10,853	\$20,445,576	2.82%
TOTALS	2,881	384,928	1,043,811,899	100.00%

MALPF Board and Staff

Appointed Board Members

Cricket Goodall, Chair, Member At-Large
Gary Dell, Vice-Chair, Member At-Large
William Buckel, Member At-Large
Sean Hough, Maryland Agricultural Commission Representative
Jenell McHenry, Young Farmer Representative
Tanya Spandhla, Member At-Large
Wayne Stafford, Maryland Farm Bureau Representative
Allen Stile, Maryland Grange Representative
Rev. Ruby Thomas, Member At-Large

Ex-Officio Board Members

Honorable Brooke E. Lierman, Maryland Comptroller
Honorable Kevin Atticks, Maryland Secretary of Agriculture
Honorable Rebecca Flora, Maryland Secretary of Planning

Foundation Staff

Michelle Cable, Executive Director
Chana Turner, Lead Administrator
Rama Dilip, Administrator
Elizabeth Beales, Administrator
Erin Lueders, Administrator
Kim Hoxter, Administrative Officer
Amanda Massoni, Fiscal Specialist



County Program Contacts



MALPF Easement Highlight

Quenponco Farms, Inc.



“

“Our family farm is more than just a piece of land; it embodies our heritage, values, and a sustainable future. As a fourth-generation farmer, I have deep-rooted connections to this land, which has provided us with nourishment, a sense of community, and a bond with nature. It's where we've cultivated crops, raised livestock, and fostered relationships not only within our family but also with neighbors. The farm symbolizes hard work and dedication, a place where we've celebrated milestones and weathered challenges together.

Choosing to protect our farm with a Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easement was a pivotal decision for us. With three children of my own, I am committed to ensuring that this land remains a part of our family's legacy for generations to come. The MALPF program allows us to safeguard our land, ensuring it remains an agricultural resource rather than being developed into residential or commercial properties. This commitment reflects our belief in sustainable farming practices and the importance of preserving open spaces in our community.

By placing an easement on our farm, we've not only protected our land but also contributed to the larger ecosystem of our watershed. Preserving farmland helps maintain water quality, supports wildlife habitats, and combats urban sprawl. It's our way of contributing to a healthier environment while promoting local agriculture.

As landowners in this watershed, we have a unique opportunity to influence the future of our region. I encourage fellow farmers and landowners to consider the benefits of MALPF and similar programs. These initiatives offer financial incentives and technical support, making it easier to protect our agricultural heritage. By working together, we can foster a community that prioritizes sustainable practices and conservation.”

Mike Sirman, President, Quenponco Farms, Inc.

”



Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation

50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
mda.maryland.gov/malpf

Governor Wes Moore
Lt. Governor Aruna Miller
Secretary Kevin Atticks
Dep. Secretary Steven A. Connelly



Photo credits: Edwin Remsberg Photographs,
MDA staff and County Administrators