

BALTIMORE COUNTY

ACRES OF  
OPPORTUNITY

Value-Added Agriculture,  
Agritourism and Craft Beverage  
Regulatory and Policy Review

PREPARED BY

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JANUARY 2024



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Baltimore County embarked on an extensive review of policies and regulations impacting value-added agriculture, agritourism, and farm-based craft beverages. With just 1% of Americans as full-time farmers, and Maryland farmland encompassing 2 million acres of vital crops and livestock, Baltimore County's regulatory review project is important for safeguarding the state's largest commercial industry. As defined in Maryland Code, agriculture serves the public interest through maintaining readily available food sources near metropolitan areas, encourages the preservation of open space as an amenity necessary for human welfare and happiness; and prevents incompatible open space land conversions due to economic pressures. [1]

Baltimore County is home to 708 farms encompassing 76,123 acres in farmland predominantly in nursery and greenhouse, grains, and vegetables. [2] 334 county farms report sales under \$2,500 indicating opportunity to support smaller-scale operations. [3] As statewide data shows robust growth in segments like direct marketing, value-added processing, and agritourism, modest regulatory changes can empower county farmers to innovate.

Farmers navigate unpredictable factors from weather and spotted lanternfly infestations to consumer demand, commodity market fluctuations, and development pressures encroaching on operations. Agriculture carries distinct challenges beyond other sectors, demanding rapid innovation and financial resilience to respond to rising costs and evolving consumer preferences against a backdrop of environmental unpredictability. Wide-ranging change puts pressure on agricultural operations daily, making innovation and expansion the foundation for generational families to survive. Outdated policies carry risks to the heritage of farming etched into Maryland's state seal.



Following extensive research, *five key opportunities* emerged for constructing an ecosystem where agriculture can responsibly thrive in Baltimore County:

- 1 Adopt Clear Definitions for Key Activities:**  
Precisely defining key activities focusing on applicability and reducing regulatory ambiguity.
- 2 Develop Streamlined Approval Pathway:**  
Coordinate County and state guidelines under integrated protocols.
- 3 Expand Allowable On-Farm Enterprises:**  
Empower small-scale and public-facing operations through flexible allowances.
- 4 Enhance Right-to-Farm Protections:**  
Provide mediation resources to balance neighborhood relations amidst growth.
- 5 Launch an Agricultural Advisory Body:**  
Formalize an agricultural advisory committee to inform economic development policymaking, help to articulate the functions of the planned Office of Agriculture, and identify clear points of contact for the agricultural community based upon specific issues. This body would also make zoning recommendations and weigh in on county legislation.

This report has multiple data inputs. Interviews with county officials focused on increasing farmer support through streamlined pathways, while conservation district and University of Maryland Extension furnished field expertise. Surveying agricultural operators, adjacent county models and select case studies provided further insight from stakeholders closest to the regulations and procedures. With farmers seeking creative sustainability amid rising pressures, achievable recommendations identified through this research provide Baltimore County steps to become an agricultural innovator.

## FIVE ZONING REFORMS WOULD ALIGN BALTIMORE COUNTY WITH MORE AGRICULTURAL-FRIENDLY FRAMEWORKS:

- 1. Enable Diverse Agritourism Offerings:** Invite agritourism diversification through updated allowances.
- 2. Authorize Small Value-Added Enterprises:** Craft policies that encourage entry and innovation.
- 3. Waive Select Public Hearing Requirements:** Simplify special exception rules for common farming practices.
- 4. Spotlight the Equine Industry:** Incorporate terminology in agricultural definitions.
- 5. Stimulate Priority Agricultural Segments:** Develop strategic incentives and initiatives for emerging sectors.

The zoning matrix analysis shows peer counties across Maryland utilizing practical steps like expanded definitions, streamlined approvals, flexible allowances, and right-to-farm protections to remove obstacles for agricultural enterprises to innovate. While broader policy and regulatory modifications take time, small zoning tweaks offer low-hanging fruit to signal a supportive policy stance. The keys to driving change include reframing restrictive perspectives, strengthening communication channels between agriculture and government, and embracing practical solutions that farmers need to responsibly implement progress.

Below is a snapshot highlighting how select counties treat these topics in their zoning codes. You can check out the matrix on the Agriculture Law Education Initiative's (ALEI) website.

		Anne Arundel County	Baltimore County	Calvert County	Charles County	Dorchester County	Frederick County	Howard County	Kent County	Montgomery County	Prince George's County	Queen Anne's County
<b>INCLUDED WITHIN THE DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURE / FARMING</b>	AGRITOURISM									X		X
	VALUE-ADDED	X										
	FARM ALCOHOL											X
<b>DEFINED SEPARATELY</b>	AGRITOURISM	X		X	X			X	X		X	
	VALUE-ADDED			X	X		X	X				
	FARM ALCOHOL	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>USE PERMITTED BY RIGHT</b>	AGRITOURISM					X		X		X		X
	VALUE-ADDED							X				X
	FARM ALCOHOL					X*			X			X
<b>USE PERMITTED BY APPROVAL</b>	AGRITOURISM	X		X	X							
	VALUE-ADDED									X		
	FARM ALCOHOL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
<b>SPECIAL EXCEPTION PROCESS</b>	PUBLIC BOARD HEARING	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
	ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE		X									
	DECIDED BY OFFICE / OFFICIAL									X		

# ACRES OF OPPORTUNITY:

Agritourism, Value-Added Agriculture, and Craft Beverage  
Regulatory and Policy Review

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## SCOPE OF WORK

The Baltimore County Department of Economic and Workforce Development is committed to creating new opportunities and expanding the Value Added-Agriculture (VAA), Agritourism, and Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production industries within Baltimore County. In mid-2023 Grow & Fortify, LLC and Cultivate + Craft, LLC were engaged to conduct a regulatory and policy scan of these three agricultural sectors.

Agritourism, which encompasses educational and recreational farm activities, and VAA, marked by value-added agricultural enterprises, are thriving, but face significant challenges posed by complex and inconsistent regulatory frameworks. Discrepancies between state and county requirements often result in conflicting regulations, which hinder the growth of these vital sectors. These industries serve as linchpins in Baltimore County's economy, driving job creation and economic growth. A BEACON study highlighted that the VAA sector alone supports nearly 74,000 jobs and contributes over \$20.6 billion annually to Maryland's economy. [4]

## METHODOLOGY

To address these challenges and leverage opportunities, our approach involved in-depth research encompassing the regulations, policies, challenges, and opportunities within the VAA, Agritourism, and Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production industries. Our research involved a comprehensive analysis of Baltimore County's regulatory landscape, comparing it with similar jurisdictions within Maryland and other states.

Additionally, we explored the intersections between these regulations and local and state regulatory agencies, along with land preservation programs. We also conducted stakeholder engagement to gather practical insights and assess the potential economic impact of supporting these industries. Our findings will lay the groundwork for practical and prioritized recommendations aimed at fostering a regulatory environment that supports industry growth, innovation, and economic prosperity for agritourism enterprises.

## Comparison to Other Jurisdictions

Additionally, we compared Baltimore County's regulations and policies with those of other Maryland counties and other states, identifying best practices and potential models that could benefit Baltimore County's VAA, Agritourism, and Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production industries. This broader perspective offers insights into how Baltimore County can align itself with industry-friendly regulations and policies to remain competitive and encourage growth.

This comprehensive research project seeks to address existing regulatory challenges, enhancing policies, and fostering economic growth. These recommendations made in this report will provide a clear path forward for Baltimore County to cultivate a supportive environment that encourages innovation, job creation, and economic prosperity. Our commitment is to assist Baltimore County in realizing the full potential of these industries and positioning itself as a state leader in agricultural innovation and sustainability.

## DEFINITIONS

### Value Added-Agriculture (VAA)

VAA refers to agricultural enterprises that modify or process raw agricultural products to increase their value to consumers. [5] This transformation results in increased revenue for the farmer, producer, or processor. VAA encompasses a diverse range of activities in which agricultural businesses alter, market, produce, or process products to add income. These activities include but are not limited to processing, packaging, and marketing farm products, as well as producing value-added goods like jams, cheeses, wines, and other processed agricultural products. VAA includes both capturing value, as well as creating value.

**CAPTURING VALUE** occurs through changes in the distribution of value in the food and fiber production chain. These changes are generally efforts to capture more of the value in the supply chain (consumer's dollar), and includes direct marketing, vertical integration, producer alliances and cooperatives.

**CREATING VALUE** occurs with the addition of actual or perceived value to a customer for a superior product or service. The objective is to create additional value where none existed before. New products, enhanced product characteristics, services, brand names or unique customer experiences may create additional value for farm products. [6]

Although this report will look at VAA, Agritourism and Farm-Based Craft Alcohol production in three separate sections, it is important to note that all three are generally accepted as value-added agriculture activities. Capturing, and creating, value, is a common factor in all three sectors

### Agritourism

Agritourism, as defined in the 2023 Legislative Session through Ch. 805, Section 4-212 of the Maryland Code, Land Use, refers to activities conducted on a farm offered to the general public or invited guests. [7] These activities serve purposes such as education, recreation, or active involvement in farm operations. The definition encompasses a wide range of experiences, including farm tours, hayrides, corn mazes, seasonal petting farms, farm museums, guest farms, pumpkin patches, "pick your own" or "cut your own" produce, camping, incidental outdoor stays, classes related to agricultural products or skills, and picnic and party facilities offered in conjunction with any agritourism activity. Local jurisdictions have the flexibility to adopt this definition through local ordinances, resolutions, laws, or rules.

# Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production

Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production in Maryland pertains to the establishment and operation of a plant for the production, storage and sales of beer, wine, spirits, cider and mead at a designated location as described in the business's state alcohol manufacturing license. [8] Maryland offers various classes of licenses for farm-based craft alcohol producers, each with specific regulations and purposes. In addition to county and state oversight, farm-based alcohol producers are also federally regulated by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FARM-BASED INDUSTRIES

### Maryland

In 1985 the General Assembly of Maryland declared that it was in the general public interest of the State to foster and encourage farming activities to:

1. Maintain a readily available source of food and dairy products close to the metropolitan areas of the State;
2. Encourage the preservation of open space as an amenity necessary for human welfare and happiness; and
3. Prevent the forced conversion of open space land to more intensive uses because of the economic pressures caused by the assessment of the land at rates or levels incompatible with its practical use for farming. [9]

Maryland's agriculture industry stands as a cornerstone of the state's economy, boasting 12,400 farms that cultivate a diverse range of commodities across approximately 2 million acres of land. [10] This industry serves as a lifeline for many Marylanders while making a substantial contribution to the state's economic well-being as the number one commercial industry.

Value-added agriculture - an integral part of the agricultural landscape - transcends the farm gate to stimulate job creation and present newfound opportunities for suppliers, farm equipment manufacturers, and packaging providers. A 2018 BEACON study unveiled the impact of value-added agriculture on Maryland's economy. This sector alone supports close to 74,000 jobs and infuses over \$20.6 billion annually into the state's economic bloodstream. [11] Notably, this economic engine also bolsters Maryland's fiscal resources by adding nearly \$875 million to the state's bottom line. To place these figures in perspective, the output of value-added agriculture equals approximately 5.9% of Maryland's personal income and 5.4% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). [12]



The 2017 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) census brought more encouraging news. It was the first attempt to gauge the benefits of direct sales and value-added processing, which revealed impressive results for Maryland. [13] The value of food directly sold from farms to consumers doubled from \$28 million in 2012 to \$54 million in 2017. [14] What is even more remarkable is that the number of farms employing this sales approach increased by only 2%. Moreover, direct sales to retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regionally branded products generated \$63 million from 319 farms, while the value of processed or value-added agricultural products reached \$45 million from 506 farms. This data demonstrates the growing significance of these sectors in the state's agricultural landscape.

Agritourism, another thriving industry, plays a pivotal role in Maryland's economy. It contributes over \$162 million to the state's economic activity and sustains more than 1,000 jobs. [15] According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, approximately 295 farms in Maryland augment their income through agritourism activities, encompassing farmers markets, farm visits, and county fairs. [16] Beyond its economic impact, agritourism serves the noble purpose of educating the public about agriculture's vital role in the local economy, quality of life, and environment.

Agritourism provides farmers with a platform to showcase their products and bolster Maryland's agricultural industry. Maryland's Best Program, initiated by the Department of Agriculture, champions locally grown products like fruits, vegetables, meats, and wine. Remarkably, for every \$1.00 invested in marketing these products, there's a return of \$15.00 for the farmers and the state alike. [17] Agritourism transforms farms into destinations through retail sales, u-pick experiences, corn mazes, and farmers markets, contributing significantly to the tourism industry in Maryland. [18]



The trio of Value-Added Agriculture, Agritourism, and Farm-Based Craft Alcohol Production plays a pivotal role in Maryland's economy, fostering economic diversification, promoting the state's agricultural capacity, creating community gathering places, and nurturing the growth of Maryland's thriving tourism industry. While agriculture poses environmental challenges, adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices can transform it into a positive force for conservation, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation. Balancing the needs of agriculture with ecological sustainability is essential for the long-term health of both agricultural systems and the environment. These industries exemplify the synergy between economic prosperity, agricultural sustainability, and tourism enrichment in Maryland.

# Baltimore County

Baltimore County boasts a rich agricultural tradition, firmly rooted in its history and thriving to this day. As of the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the county was home to 708 farms, with 76,123 acres in farmland, and an average of 108 acres. [19] However, 334 of these farms had reported sales of less than \$2,500, which indicates that slightly under 50% of county farms are extremely small-scale, startups, or homestead operations.

In 2017, the total market value of agricultural products sold in Baltimore County amounted to \$67.5 million, ranking 13th in the state. [20] Nursery and greenhouse were a substantial contributor to this figure, generating \$29.6 million in sales followed by grains with \$21.2 million. [21] 15% of farms sell directly to consumers which further enhances the local food system. [22] Baltimore County offers numerous on-farm experiences, including farm-based craft alcohol producers, pick-your-own farms, agritourism events, farmers' markets, in addition to the Baltimore County and Maryland State Fairs.

Baltimore County has one of the largest and most economically significant equine communities in the state, yet equine activities are not recognized in the county's definition of agriculture. Based upon the most recent data available in the 2010 Equine Census, the county has the largest equine inventory (8,950), the greatest total assets (\$829 million), and is second only to Frederick County in the total number of equine related acres (20,500). [23]

Lastly, the county has 70,869 acres of protected farmland, waterfront, stream valleys and natural lands through Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, Rural Legacy, County, Maryland Environmental Trust/Local Land Trusts, and regulatory-RC4/RC6 Conservancy Area programs. [24] This preservation of agricultural lands and open spaces demonstrates that the county is committed to preserving its agricultural base; a key component to maintaining a healthy agricultural community, however, is to permit, and encourage, the types of value-added agriculture activities that will also maintain economic viability.

One of Baltimore County's other strongest tools for land preservation has been its Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL), a zoning boundary designed to manage growth and development in the county. The URDL serves as a delineation between areas designated for urban development and those reserved for rural or agricultural purposes. The purpose of this line is to help guide and control the expansion of urban development, preserving the rural character of certain regions and promoting sustainable growth. [25]



# VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE

## REGULATORY SCAN

Baltimore County's zoning code presents several regulatory challenges for value-added agriculture. Many value-added activities require special exceptions, leading to uncertainty for agricultural businesses. Unlike other Maryland counties, Baltimore County lacks clear definitions related to value-added agriculture, on-farm manufacturing, agricultural processing, and other valued-added activity definitions which creates regulatory ambiguity. The County's use allowances restrict opportunities for value-added production, discouraging potential growth in this sector.

**"Agriculture, Commercial"** - The use of land, including ancillary structures and buildings, to cultivate plants or raise or keep animals for income, provided that the land also qualifies for farm or agricultural use assessment pursuant to § 8-209 of the Tax-Property Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, as amended. Commercial agriculture includes the production of field crops, dairying, pasturage agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, aquaculture, apiculture, viticulture, forestry, animal and poultry husbandry, the operation of an equestrian center, horse breeding and horse training and includes ancillary activities such as processing, packing, storing, financing, managing, marketing or distributing, provided that any such activity shall be secondary to the principal agricultural operations. [26]

**"Farm"** - Three acres or more of land, and any improvements thereon, used primarily for commercial agriculture, as defined in these regulations, or for residential and associated agricultural uses. The term does not include the following uses as defined in these regulations: limited-acreage wholesale flower farms, riding stables, landscape service, firewood operations and horticultural nursery businesses. [27]

## POLICY SCAN

Firstly, we've identified that the current process, which property owners must navigate to determine whether their structure or activity qualifies as agricultural and is therefore exempt from county building permits, is characterized by a lack of clarity. [28] This process can leave property owners puzzled about their obligations. Furthermore, a significant source of confusion arises from the disparities between state and county building permit exemptions for agricultural structures. Notably, the county's exemption is more expansive which leads to confusion among property owners who may struggle to determine which regulations apply to their specific operations. [29]

Adding to these complexities is the absence of a centralized system to monitor and oversee proposed structures and activities. This lack of oversight can lead to inconsistencies and accountability challenges, potentially jeopardizing compliance. Lastly, special exceptions introduced for businesses, as documented in the policy, introduce an additional layer of uncertainty. The absence of clear definitions in the regulatory review process amplifies the confusion among business owners. [30]

## CHALLENGES

Baltimore County mandates special exceptions for certain agricultural activities related to value-added production. [31] These exceptions create additional hurdles for businesses wishing to diversify their operations. In comparison to other counties, Baltimore lacks clear definitions for value-added agriculture activities. Furthermore, the current structure of usage allowances limits applicants' ability to fully leverage additional opportunities for value-added activities.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for improvement in Baltimore County include the creation of a user-friendly online form for property owners to request agricultural building determinations. This online form has the potential to streamline the process and make it more accessible. Another avenue for enhancement involves the inclusion of an agreed-upon expert to review forms and associated documents. This designation should come from the Office of Agriculture and would provide consistent and knowledgeable evaluations in collaboration with other regulatory departments.

In the quest for improvement, it is essential to address the nuances between state and county building permit exemptions to reduce confusion and promote compliance. Additionally, providing written determinations and notices to applicants can serve as educational tools, offering a clearer understanding of regulatory requirements. Focusing on the approval process for agricultural buildings, instead of broad zoning changes, can provide vital support for agritourism while still prioritizing public health and safety. Expanding processing as a permitted use is another avenue to assist farms, and the alignment of definitions with the goals of value-added agriculture can bring much-needed clarity to the regulations.

## MODELS

The leaders in value-added agriculture in Maryland can be assessed based on their permissive zoning regulations and support for VAA activities. Montgomery County stands out for including "primary agricultural processing" in its farming definition. [32] Anne Arundel County lists "primary agricultural and value-added processing" under its farming definition. [33] Calvert County defines "value-added agricultural products" and allows them across zoning districts, signaling support. [34] These supportive County approaches provide clear definitions and flexibility for farmers to expand operations.

## RECCOMENDATIONS

- **Adopt Definition for Small-Scale Farms:** Consider establishing a smaller acreage threshold or range that will allow small-scale growers to start farm businesses and activities on plots smaller than the current definition of 3 acres, as often seen in urban and suburban (residential or industrial) zones.
- **Empower small-scale Value-Added Production:** Authorize small-scale value-added production, such as jams, sauces, and baked goods crafted from locally sourced ingredients, as allowable farm activities. Establish partnership with the local health department and Office of Agriculture for efficient permitting processes.
- **Simplify Agritourism Permitting:** Exempt modest agritourism uses of existing farm structures from extensive permit requirements, with a focus on ensuring structural soundness and safety.
- **Encourage Diverse Agritourism Activities:** Permit pick-your-own produce operations, farm tours, corn mazes, and similar agritourism pursuits on farms without the need for change of occupancy permits.
- **Enhance Clarity with Clear Definitions:** Provide precise and comprehensive definitions related to value-added agriculture and agritourism in the zoning code, reducing ambiguity and facilitating compliance.
- **Streamline Zoning for Increased Permissiveness:** Simplify zoning regulations to create a more permissive environment for value-added and agritourism opportunities on agricultural land.
- **Establish a Senior Agricultural Manager Role:** Consider the establishment of a Senior Agricultural Manager position dedicated to assisting farmers with permitting and regulatory issues.
- **Prioritize Agricultural Business Sustainability:** Make it a top priority to support value-added activities as a pivotal means of sustaining Baltimore County's agricultural community.
- **Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee:** Consider the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee, appointed by the Executive, with duties related to conferring with the Office of Agriculture, advising the Executive & Council, and to make recommendations that “may be necessary to maintain a healthy agricultural economy in the County.”
- **Provide Farmer Representation throughout Special Exception Process:** Attorney fees can be prohibitive for any business owner that is required to proceed through the Special Exception Process in Baltimore County. Either task the Agricultural Senior Agricultural Manager to provide insights into effective pro se representation and response to public comments, or establish an agreement with the county Conflict Resolution Center or private agricultural mediators to facilitate neighbor disputes expressed during the Special Exception proceedings could reduce the disadvantage to farmers operating on small margins.

Implementation of the recommendations will involve a collaborative effort with farmers, agricultural organizations, and community stakeholders. To ensure the long-term sustainability of these changes, continuous tracking of their impacts on Baltimore County agriculture is important.

# AGRITOURISM

## REGULATORY SCAN

Baltimore County's zoning code requires special exceptions for most activities, adding complexity and uncertainty to the approval process. This requirement discourages potential agritourism ventures. For example, as outlined in Section 404.4, farm owners in zones R.C.2, R.C.3, R.C.4, R.C.20, and R.C.50 must navigate through a special exception process for a farm market and meet standards as outlined in Section 502.1. [35] This creates barriers to entry and inconsistent outcomes based on approval authorities. Furthermore, it's exacerbated by the lack of a clear and encompassing agri-tourism definition in the code. The use tables in the regulations limit the permitted uses for agritourism activities, including special exceptions for most activities including alcohol production, camps, farm bakeries, and riding stables.

## POLICY SCAN

To create a more supportive environment for agritourism, a key focus should be on land preservation and policy-zoning integration. Evaluating the alignment of land preservation programs with agritourism helps preserve farmland while promoting sustainable practices. Moreover, amending zoning codes to better coordinate policies and zoning regulations create a more favorable environment for the industry.

## CHALLENGES

Addressing the challenges in promoting agritourism in Baltimore County requires a strategic approach to realign with the state's overall embrace of farming. At this time, it's unclear if agritourism is defined as part of agriculture. It's crucial to tackle the patchwork of varying agricultural zone requirements within the county that create confusion and uncertainty. The existing special exception processes present significant hurdles alongside the absence of well-defined activity classifications. However, Baltimore County's regulations diverge significantly from agricultural peer counties across Maryland. The prevalent special exception requirements and narrow allowances deter innovation and have no equal elsewhere. At the same time, streamlined procedures and right-to-farm policies enable robust support across the state. This contrast signifies a philosophical gap that incremental zoning tweaks cannot resolve. To shift towards cooperatively nurturing agriculture, Baltimore County must bridge this regulatory divide. Updating the underlying perspective would allow integrated policies to holistically support the agricultural industry's future in alignment with the state.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Implementing a uniform and consistent set of zoning regulations throughout the county would greatly enhance clarity and facilitate the development of agritourism ventures. Streamlining these processes would significantly reduce the time and financial burdens associated with launching agritourism businesses. Clear, concise, and inclusive definitions for agritourism activities should be established to remove ambiguities, providing businesses and regulators with a common understanding of what constitutes agritourism.

## MODELS

Howard, Montgomery, and Dorchester Counties show various models for flexible, expansive allowances of agritourism. Expansive definitions, flexible accessory use permissions, and unrestricted allowances actively promote agritourism, while the implementation of standards or limitations addresses associated concerns.

Howard County defines "agritourism enterprise" broadly as incidental to farm operation. [36] The county permits agritourism activities as accessory uses and provides a flexible and business-friendly approach. Montgomery County integrates agritourism within farming definition which allows accessory agricultural education and tourism activities. [37] This approach empowers farmers by positioning agritourism as a right implicit in owning a farm. Regulations set a cap of 10% of farm structure space for agritourism. Dorchester County permits agritourism activities without limitation. There are no restrictions on seasonal festivals, classes, trails, mazes, and more. [38] Unlike the more densely populated Montgomery and Howard County, Dorchester does not extensively define agritourism or place zone limitations; this is in line with the nature of the county.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Adopt the state definition of agritourism**, developed by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.
- **Expand allowable agritourism activities** in suitable agricultural zones and recognize agritourism as agriculture.
- **Develop precise and consistent definitions** for essential terminology.
- **Adopt Definition for Small-Scale Farms:** Consider establishing a smaller acreage threshold or range that will allow small-scale growers to start farm businesses and activities on plots between .5 acres and larger, as often seen in urban and suburban (residential or industrial) zones.
- **Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee:** Consider the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee, appointed by the Executive, with duties related to conferring with the Office of Agriculture, advising the Executive & Council, and to make recommendations that "may be necessary to maintain a healthy agricultural economy in the County."

- **Provide Farmer Representation throughout Special Exception Process:** Attorney fees can be prohibitive for any business owner that is required to proceed through the Special Exception Process in Baltimore County. Either task the Senior Agricultural Manager to provide insights into effective pro se representation and response to public comments, or establish an agreement with the county Conflict Resolution Center or private agricultural mediators to facilitate neighbor disputes expressed during the Special Exception proceedings could reduce the disadvantage to farmers operating on small margins.
- **Implement simplified permitting procedures** for commonly conducted agritourism endeavors ensuring communication and collaboration amongst departments.

## FARM-BASED CRAFT ALCOHOL PRODUCTION

While farm alcohol production has grown across the state, overall, Maryland still lags behind other surrounding states in its support for breweries, wineries and distilleries. As a result, in 2004 Governor Robert Ehrlich commissioned the state's Wine and Grape Advisory Committee to develop a report to "identify strategies to facilitate the growth of Maryland's commercial vineyards and wineries and to offer recommendations to strengthen and expand Maryland's grape and wine economics and their markets." [39]

Cited in the report is that "In their initial phases, rural wineries bring with them investments exceeding \$1 million. However, in the long term, they produce stable rural employment of between five to 10 employees per unit. In addition, there is significant tourism generated by their presence. Wineries enable the growth of business in rural communities. Roughly estimated, for every \$3 spent in wineries, tourists will add \$1 additional to the local economy. In rural areas where wineries are successful, restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and boutiques are all given greater visibility. By enriching the cultural diversity of rural areas, states become better able to entice urban visitors. In the long term, encouraging such growth produces healthier rural economics, and promotes the preservation of the State's rural landscape." [40] Although the article specifically referenced wineries, farm breweries and farm distilleries have similar levels of impact.

### REGULATORY SCAN

In Maryland there are two specific alcohol manufacturing licenses that reference farm alcohol production: the Class 4 Winery [41] and Class 8 Brewery [42] licenses. Each license specifies any minimum ingredient requirements, permitted activities, and overall scope of authorization. In 2010 and 2019, respectively, the Maryland Wineries Association and Brewers Association of Maryland passed industry modernization acts, which created greater flexibility, and reduced regulatory burdens, for both on- and off-farm wineries and breweries; this led to significant growth in both industries.



In 2019 Baltimore County developed the “Guide to Opening a Craft Beverage Business in Baltimore County” [43] to better support those who wanted to start an on- or off-farm brewery, winery or distillery. The purpose was to lay out in clear terms the county, state and federal process to establish a licensed alcohol manufacturing facility. For the purposes of this report, for the most part, only farm-based craft alcohol producers will be addressed, as any breweries, wineries or distilleries not located on agricultural land is beyond the scope of this report. Currently, farm-based alcohol production occurs primarily in RC (Rural Resource Conservation) zones.

In 2023 there were nine farm-based craft alcohol producers operating in Baltimore County, including 5 wineries and 4 breweries. [44] Boordy Vineyards, located in Hydes in the Long Green Valley, is not only one of the oldest farms in the state (est. 1725), but also the oldest winery, originally established in 1945 by Philip and Jocelyn Wagner, one of the pioneers of East Coast wine. [45] Given Baltimore’s agricultural heritage there is tremendous opportunity to capitalize on farm-based craft alcohol production.

Unlike most counties in the state, Baltimore County requires that every farm-based craft alcohol producer goes through the Special Exception process. While this process does allow for community input it effectively pushes farm-based alcohol producers to secure a land use attorney to go through what have been time-consuming and expensive processes. While those who currently own land in the County may more easily be able to navigate the process, there have been several instances in the past 5-8 years of business owners interested in buying land in Baltimore County to select other counties. This has created an impression among anyone looking for agricultural land to open one of these businesses that it is not a friendly place in which to do business.

## POLICY SCAN

While zoning bills over the past several decades have created a framework for the establishment of breweries, wineries and distilleries, the current zones and permitted licenses have created a confusing and inconsistent approach to farm-based alcohol businesses. Not only does specifying license classes lead to issues (outlined below), but some of the definitions and requirements built into the definitions create inconsistencies from both agricultural operation and state alcohol law perspectives.

## CHALLENGES

Currently, the only zone that permits all three kinds of alcohol production (beer, wine and spirits) by Special Exception is the RC2 zone. As a result, farm-based distilleries are effectively prohibited in the County. Additionally, while there have been past suggestions by industry groups to update the county’s alcohol code for both on- and off-farm craft alcohol producers, no substantial changes have been made since the 2019 guide was released. During that time, several other counties have adopted language to support farm alcohol production, recognizing the important agricultural, economic, tourism and community place-making benefits that these businesses bring to the state.

## Winery-Specific Challenges

- Not permitted in RC3 and RCC zones, although farm breweries are permitted.
- Wineries in RC5 zones are required to have a minimum of 50 acres, which is one of the strictest acreage requirements in the state.
- RC4 and RC6 zones specifically delineate that these zones require a winery as an accessory use to agriculture.
- The County winery definition states that wholesale distribution is permitted for wine produced on-premises; this is in direct conflict with the Maryland Class 4 winery license, which permits Alternating Proprietorships, where a licensed winery is permitted to make wine at another Maryland licensed winery. This wine would then be brought back to the Baltimore County farm winery to be sold for on- and off-premise consumption and distribution.
  - For example, Winery X in Baltimore County only has enough tanks to initially make two red wines and two white wines. But they really want to have a rosé wine, and sparkling wine, in their offerings (because everyone loves rosé and sparkling wine!). So they take their grapes to Winery Y (located in Baltimore County or another Maryland county) and that licensed winery works in collaboration with Winery X to make those two wines to their exact specifications. This flexibility is critically important for smaller startups who lack the capital to purchase the equipment they would like when starting out.
- Additionally, the County's winery definition identifies "wine tastings" as a temporary promotional event, versus wine tasting being a standard business practice for a winery with a tasting room. This also conflicts with the state's winery license, which explicitly permits wine sampling and sales.

## Brewery-Specific Challenges

- Although Class 8 farm breweries are in RC-8 and RCC zones, the RC3 and RCC zones only permit a Class 6 manufacturing license. The problem with specifying this particular license is that only one brewery in the entire state holds this license, a pub at Camden Yards. Given that no brewery is ever recommended to secure this license, it effectively cuts farm breweries out of those two zones.
- Additionally, breweries do not appear to be permitted to contract brew, which is in direct conflict with the state Class 8 Farm Brewery language, which allows breweries to work with another licensed brewery to produce a limited amount of beer for them.
- Lastly, the County's brewery definition identifies "beer tastings" as a temporary promotional event, versus beer tasting being a standard business practice for a brewery with a taproom. This also conflicts with the state's brewery license, which explicitly permits beer sampling/tasting and sales.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Under existing leadership, and with the support of county agencies, Baltimore County has a tremendous opportunity to become a desirable location for farm-based breweries, wineries and distilleries. In fact, Recommendation 53 in the “Maryland Wine: The Next Vintage” report cited the need for the industry to “identify various county regulations affecting vineyard and winery establishment, allowing prospective wineries and vineyards to gauge viability or expansion based upon county zoning requirements, local taxation, land use assessments and farmland preservation incentives.” [46] Although the report is now almost 20 years old, the fact that Baltimore County has requested this 2023 value-added agriculture report demonstrates that the current desire to understand the potential opportunities to amend county regulations that have historically dissuaded current, and new, farm based businesses from selecting the County for their brewery, winery or distillery.

## RECCOMENDATIONS

- **Remove the Class 6 License from the zoning use table** for alcohol production. Only one business in the state uses this license.
- **Consider changing the use from Special Exception to Conditional or Permitted for farm-based alcohol producers.** Most other counties in the state have Special Exception hearings via their Zoning Board of Appeals process, which does not include an Administrative Law Judge. This process still allows, and encourages, public comment and participation, while reducing the perceived need to secure legal representation.
- **Adopt a Farm Alcohol Producer definition**, which encompasses the on-farm production of beer, wine, spirits, cider and mead. This creates the flexibility for a farm to add another component of alcohol production if they so desire (i.e. a winery adding a distillery license, or a brewery adding a winery license). Eliminate the farm winery, farm brewery and farm distillery definitions. This is the direction that several other counties (Anne Arundel, Charles, Montgomery, St. Mary’s, Washington) have taken to simplify their zoning, definitions and permitting process.
- **Create acreage consistency across all types of farm alcohol producers and zones;** the majority of counties have one acreage minimum across all zones.
- **Update the County’s “Guide to Opening a Craft Beverage Business in Baltimore County”** to reflect updated state license classes, regulatory authority, and key contacts. Include Baltimore County Tourism in any update work and encourage craft alcohol producers to be in coordination with Tourism as part of the startup process.
- **Encourage the County Office of Tourism to coordinate with the state craft alcohol trade associations** to promote farm-based breweries, wineries and distilleries through the Maryland Craft Beverage App, existing wine trails and events where Baltimore County producers will be in attendance.
- **Develop a specific checklist for startup farm-based alcohol producers.** This should be coordinated with other county agencies but managed by the County’s Office of Agriculture. Montgomery and Frederick Counties serve as very good models.

# OFFICE OF AGRICULTURE: STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Interviews with county departments and agricultural stakeholders reveal a shared interest to improve regulatory processes through cooperation between farmers and regulators. However, unclear, inconsistent regulations across agencies pose substantial obstacles.

Recommendations focused on:

1. Establish an Senior Agricultural Manager, or Director, within the Office of Agriculture.
2. Create standardized permitting pathways and online portal for operators.
3. Address regulatory gaps to facilitate mutual understanding.

Nearby counties provide potential models for success. Harford County utilizes a business navigator within the Department of Economic Development to assist farmers through regulatory processes while an Advisory Board informs on agricultural economic development priorities. Montgomery County codifies its Office of Agriculture's role in developing the agricultural economy, fostering preservation, administering conservation programs, and performing duties as assigned by the County Executive. [47] Baltimore County's Office of Agriculture can provide farmers with a centralized, coordinated resource amongst departments and stakeholders.

A survey of sixteen Baltimore County agricultural operators reveals substantial obstacles posed by unclear and contradictory regulations. These align closely with perspectives shared in interviews with both farmers and regulators. Over 80% of survey respondents reported facing regulatory hurdles that impacted their activities, citing inconsistencies, lack of guidance, permitting delays, and land use limitations.

The prevalence of ad hoc interpretations and approvals adds an element of uncertainty and intimidation for agricultural investments. Nearly 70% endorsed an authorized Office of Agriculture to assist farmers in navigating processes. Over 90% sought improved communication and facilitation between regulators and agricultural businesses to foster mutual understanding. Survey respondents and interviewees alike highlighted nearby Maryland counties as demonstrating more agriculture-friendly frameworks. The present gaps can be overcome through formalization of supportive roles, streamlined procedures, enhanced dialogue, and recognizing farming's shifting demands in a sustainable future.

# COMPARISON TO OTHER STATES

Vermont, New York, and California have much more robust frameworks supporting value-added agriculture through clearer regulations, funding, marketing, and strategic planning compared to Maryland's county-by-county approach.[48]

## Vermont

Vermont boasts a well-developed approach to VAA, which includes clear definitions and statewide allowances for value-added activities. In addition, Vermont offers grants and technical assistance to farms for business development. [49] This state takes pride in its "Made in Vermont" branding and marketing initiatives. [50] Furthermore, value-added agriculture is a key component of Vermont's Farm to Plate strategic plan, showcasing a comprehensive commitment to supporting value-added agricultural endeavors, especially dairy, meat and processing facilities. The Vermont Farm to Plate 2022 Annual Report highlighted that, in 2021, total purchases of local food and beverages in Vermont reached \$371 million, representing 16.1% of total food purchases in Vermont, and is an increase of \$61 million in local food purchases from 2017. [51] This indicates that their efforts to create a clearinghouse of resources; foster collaborative efforts across agencies and organizations; and constantly engender state legislative support, has positively impacted agricultural businesses, increased food access and kept these issues at the forefront of the state's efforts.

## New York

New York has established a favorable environment for VAA by enabling it through statutes that support farm operations. [52] The state provides funding and incentives for on-farm value-added infrastructure, bolstering the growth of value-added products. [53] The "Taste NY" program in New York plays a pivotal role in promoting value-added products with robust marketing efforts. Their strategic plan emphasizes the importance of continued growth in the value-added sector. Notably, farm-based alcohol producers are not only permitted, but encouraged, to sell other New York farm alcohol producers' products. This approach enhances the offerings for the public and promotes New York brands.

## California

California supports VAA by allowing the sale of value-added products at certified farmers' markets statewide. [54] This facilitates access to markets for producers engaged in value-added activities. Additionally, value-added facilities in the state are eligible for grant funding through various programs, creating opportunities for business growth. The "New California Grown" branding initiative promotes value-added goods, further enhancing their visibility and desirability. [55] Regional associations in California provide valuable marketing support for value-added operations, fostering the growth of this sector.

# RIGHT TO FARM POLICIES & THEIR IMPLICATIONS

## Maryland Right-to-Farm Law

In 1981, Maryland enacted a progressive Right-to-Farm Law aimed at safeguarding the state's agricultural interests. This legislation places limitations on nuisance claims against farms that have been in operation for more than one year and diligently adhere to applicable practices and regulations. [56] Key features of the Maryland Right-to-Farm Law include protection from nuisance claims and mediation requirements. Farms meeting these criteria are shielded from being deemed a public or private nuisance due to normal agricultural impacts, including noise, odors, and dust. [57] This provision is vital in preserving the agricultural heritage of the state, especially as urban sprawl encroaches on farmland. The law emphasizes mediation as the first step in resolving disputes related to agricultural nuisances. Before lawsuits can proceed, parties involved must engage in this conflict-resolution process. Importantly, the law does not preempt local oversight, allowing individual counties to implement their own regulations to complement state law. [58]

## Baltimore County Right-to-Farm Ordinance

Baltimore County, aligning with the state's approach, has adopted a similar Right-to-Farm Ordinance. This ordinance offers protection to farms that have been operating for over one year and follow best management practices and regulations. Key components of Baltimore County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance include shielding from nuisance claims and zoning violations oversight. [59] The County's code explicitly states that inconveniences associated with agricultural activities, such as noise, fumes, and dust, shall not be considered interference with the enjoyment of neighboring properties. [60] This provision upholds the principle that established farms should not be unduly hindered by complaints related to routine agricultural practices. Baltimore County designates the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board to review zoning violations related to agricultural activities. However, the ordinance lacks a formal mediation procedure, unlike some neighboring counties. [61]

## Comparison to Other Counties

A comparative analysis of right-to-farm policies across neighboring counties reveals variations in the extent of protection and dispute resolution mechanisms. [62] Carroll County stands out for establishing a comprehensive mediation process. [63] It has created an Agricultural Reconciliation Committee tasked with resolving disputes before they escalate to lawsuits. This proactive approach enhances conflict resolution and reduces the burden on the legal system. Howard County takes a firm stance by prohibiting nuisance claims unless the farm is in violation of laws or established agricultural practices. [64]

Kent County takes a proactive step by mandating right-to-farm disclosures during property transfers. [65] These disclosures inform residents about the agricultural nature of certain properties, ensuring that potential buyers are aware of the presence of farms and the associated activities. Baltimore County does not have a similar notification requirement.[66]

In 2012, in the face of rapid development and a countywide effort to protect its agricultural areas, Prince George's County developed strong regulations to protect a wide range of agricultural operations - including agritourism activities and farm alcohol production - from nuisance actions. [67] The mechanism to mediate landowner disputes was the establishment of an Agricultural Reconciliation Committee, which operates under the County's Agricultural Resources Advisory Committee, and reports directly to the County Executive and County Council. The composition of the Reconciliation Committee includes members of the agricultural community, including a County Farm Bureau representative; a member from a real estate interest; and one member of the community not engaged in agriculture. Additionally, upon the transfer of property in certain zones, the seller is required to provide the buyer with a right to farm notice in writing. [68]

## CONCLUSION

Baltimore County has the potential to make a huge impact in supporting agricultural producers. Value added agriculture, which includes agritourism and farm-based craft alcohol, is one of the state's fastest growing sectors of agriculture. The biggest hurdle this industry faces is having no clear path forward, which stymies progress. Maryland's VAA businesses are growing and changing at a much faster pace than local and state government regulations and policies, but this could be changed by creating a framework that is set up to be more supportive and adaptive to on-farm businesses.

Additionally, Baltimore County's location in the state, and its proximity to three cities of significant size (Baltimore, Washington DC, and Philadelphia) means that the promotion of the county's agritourism sector could have a positive impact on the county's bottom line. In the aftermath of COVID-19 spending by visitors surpassed pre-pandemic levels by 4% in 2022. With growth of more than \$3 billion, visitor spending reached \$19.4 billion. [69]

Especially heightened since the onset of COVID, consumers now show a much stronger inclination to buy from, and support, local businesses; protected by its nationally acclaimed land preservation and growth management program Baltimore County's scenic countryside is the perfect setting for those seeking an authentic rural, and on-farm, experience.

Visitors to Maryland topped 43.5 million in 2022, growing to 103% of pre-pandemic levels. The number of visitors to Maryland grew by more than eight million trips in 2022, an increase of 23.7%. [70] Visitor spending of \$19.4 billion generated a total of \$30.3 billion in total business sales. This total economic impact included more than 187,200 jobs, and \$2.3 billion in state and local tax revenues. [71]

In other words, tourism is a significant contributor to the state’s economy, and an area in which Baltimore County could capitalize, both through attracting local, regional, national and international tourists. Baltimore County’s proximity to one of the region’s busiest airports, Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, which sees more than 62,000 passengers per day, [72] is also an opportunity for the increased promotion of agritourism.

Farmers need as many tools as possible to keep them on the farm. Keeping land in agriculture means that farming must be profitable; farming is both agricultural and commercial, and the diversification of agricultural activities is designed to create additional revenue streams for agricultural businesses who wish to undertake the risk, and expense, of value-added agriculture, agritourism and farm-based craft alcohol production.





# CASE STUDY 1: BLACK LOCUST HOPS & FARM BREWERY

**Owners:** Ché & Lisa Carton

**Location:** Freeland

**Sales Include:** Beer, Seltzers,  
Merchandise, Pelletized Hops

**Where Sold:** On-Farm Taproom

Che and Lisa have owned their farm for twelve years; they purchased the property through a USDA program with the goal of growing hops on a commercial scale, and starting a farm brewery. They also have a small orchard on the farm. One of the handful of commercial hops producers in the state, they began supplying pelletized hops to a number of local breweries in 2006, and then opened their brewery in 2022. They've developed a strong local following for their beers, pulling in customers from both Maryland and Pennsylvania.



BLACK LOCUST HOPS

## **Q1: How has the regulatory environment in Baltimore County influenced your business's growth and operations?**

"The Baltimore County Farm Service Agency was fantastic to work with and very supportive. And while every county department seemed to support the project, there was not easy communication between the departments. Some departments wouldn't tell us what to do; they would recommend that we hire a consultant, which gets very costly. We also couldn't get an idea ahead of time how to move through the various regulations that pertained to each department. In some cases the departments were not willing to explain what they needed or required. It was also unclear whether some requirements were policy versus what is in the regulations or code."

## Q2: Have you faced any specific challenges or hurdles when dealing with county regulations in your industry?

“It took us three years to get through the environmental requirements, which slowed down our opening significantly, and required that we put half of our property into a forest easement in order to move forward. We communicated with all of our neighbors about our intentions to start a brewery, so the Special Exception process for us was very reasonable. **The one funny thing is that the community perception of wineries is fine, but breweries are thought to be more problematic, even though the two are very similar.**”

“There seems to be a lot of confusion about state and local health departments and what we can do related to food at the brewery. Our state license permits us to prepare, serve and sell food, but there aren’t clear guidelines as to how we get the kitchen that we need. We’re rule-followers so we want to do the right thing, but it’s **hard when there are different answers depending upon who you speak with.** These delays also cost us time and money.”

## Q3: What opportunities do you see for Baltimore County to attract and expand agricultural industries?

“**Better communication among departments,** and to communicate to businesses a clear understanding of what the departments do and are capable of doing. Institutional knowledge can stifle innovation, but these departments could work collaboratively to figure out a way to yes, versus stepping on each others' toes.”

“Also, to understand and support that **most of us need to have multiple uses on our farms in order to be successful;** agriculture is our focus, but when you have the public visit your farm they are there for the experience, so music and food help create a more welcoming environment. Also, we want to be responsible by offering food when we’re serving beer.”



# CASE STUDY 2: BOORDY VINEYARDS



**Owners:** Phineas Deford, Rob & Julie Deford, Sally & Bayly Buck

**Location:** Hydes

**Sales Include:** Wine, Wine Club, Private Rentals, Public Events

**Where Sold:** Winery, Online, Festivals, Events, Retail Stores



“The Deford family arrived in Maryland in the 1600’s and never left. They moved to the Long Green Valley in the 1800’s settling on Long Green Farm which was established in 1725. The Defords became grape growers for Philip and Jocelyn Wagner, the founders of Boordy, the first bonded winery in Maryland in 1945. The Deford family purchased Boordy from the Wagners in 1980 and moved the winery to their farm. In keeping with an ethos of stewardship, the Defords placed their farm in permanent preservation with the Maryland Environmental Trust.”

## Q1: How has the regulatory environment in Baltimore County influenced your business’s growth and operations?



“The biggest challenges at the County level have been with the inability of the building codes to accommodate the multiple uses that are required in value-added agriculture buildings, particularly historic ones like the barns at Boordy, which date to the 19th century. **This has been a problem since we moved the winery to our farm in 1980.**”

## Q2: Have you faced any specific challenges or hurdles when dealing with county regulations in your industry?

“The neighborhood and community organizations are very vocal about farm-based businesses that involve direct-to-consumer activities, We have always stood up and addressed their concerns. Boordy has been through the Special Exception process twice and we think it’s an important part of the approval process. It provides the legal standing for farm-based businesses and makes their intentions a matter of public record. Each Special Exception hearing is different because every business is different, and it gives the surrounding community the opportunity to have input. **If it could be embedded in another process that might cost less, that would make it easier,** but it’s an important part of the approval process.”

“Also, the Right to Farm is an important part of the overall discussion and it’s important that farm-based businesses are really farming. One vine or one hop plant is not a farm, and **Right to Farm should protect both the original, and expansion, rights of our county’s farms.** It’s distressing to see people take advantage of the work that many of us have undertaken and basically try to have a wedding venue or a rural bar under the auspices of agriculture.”

## Q3: What opportunities do you see for Baltimore County to attract and expand agricultural industries?

“If handled sensitively, with very good planning, Baltimore County could be poised for significant growth. We enjoy easy access to major interstates and cities. Baltimore County is working to better promote its tourism assets; I serve on the Tourism Advisory Commission but am the only rural representative. There is a current project to rebrand Baltimore County Tourism’s website, which will be a critical tool to draw visitors to the area and the rural businesses, because everyone has been operating independently to date. The County is sliced up into wedges by the major highways and roads, so it’s challenging to market and promote as an entity. **I’m excited that the County has an earnest commitment to tourism and that it plans to do what other counties and states have done for their local farm-based industries.**”

# CASE STUDY 3: PRIGEL FAMILY CREAMERY



**Owners:** Bobby and Pam Prigel

**Location:** Glen Arm

**Sales Include:** Cheese, ice cream, pet food, butter, grass-fed beef, pork, the Wonderfarm Club, creamery tours, workshops, baked goods

**Where Sold:** On-Farm Market, Online, Satellite Shop, Farmers Market



The Prigel family has been farming in the Long Green Valley for over 100 years and five generations. John Mathias Prigel moved to the property - now Bellevale Farm - as a sharecropper in 1895, and Prigels have been dairy farming here ever since. The 300-acre farm received its organic certification in 2008. Although they no longer maintain USDA organic certification, the practices remain the same. The family maintains a closed herd of 150 cows who are milked twice a day. That milk becomes cheese, ice cream and pet food sold at their creamery, which opened in 2010. This decision was made because, although the cost of inputs and production increased, fluid milk prices remained stagnant. In 1989 there were almost 1,500 Maryland dairy farms; as of 2023 only ~300 remain (Maryland's Dairy Industry: 2020 Annual Report).

## **Q1: How has the regulatory environment in Baltimore County influenced your business's growth and operations?**

“From a larger perspective, there was no future in conventional dairy farming, so the first step for the farm was to go grass-based, then organic and then take it into a value-added form, so processing was the logical next step. Our original business plan was to process milk, have reduced fat yogurt, ice cream, and then balance production with cheese. But **when the County approved our project - the lawsuits started**, so the cheapest thing to move into was ice cream. Initially we only had milk and ice cream. **Because of the lawsuits we lost all financing**, so we didn't have the equipment to do on-site processing. As a result **the cheese is made in Pennsylvania.**”

“Ice cream alone is not a sustainable thing because it’s so seasonal; every winter there is no money and no people. So we’ve expanded into sandwiches and other food products, using our own ingredients from the farm, and done any event you can imagine where we can promote and sell our products. When it’s nice we’re busy, and if it’s cloudy or the weather changes then we’re not busy. Although the Farm Market has been very helpful, we need something much more secure, because it alone is not reliable enough to support the farm and to support the entire operation.”



“The county was supportive of our expansion into processing; they permitted us to do everything under the existing regulatory framework, but **area residents with a lot of money were able to get the project into the court system and wanted to use that avenue to essentially bankrupt the farm.** It would have been helpful for the county to be able to deter this kind of thing. A Right to Farm system that had a mediation component to it might have prevented the lawsuits from happening. **Farmers shouldn’t be looked at as guilty right from the beginning for wanting to diversify their businesses.** And when citizens don’t understand how farming works the perception from home buyers is that the land should be bucolic and rolling hills.”

“As a result, one of our new ideas is to **start a non-profit, called Wonder Farm; it would include agricultural education,** which we’ve already been doing through summer camps. **The goal is to understand and appreciate agriculture;** learn about soil, grass, cows, and then milk the cows, make butter, make biscuits, and learn what real food actually is. This could also include providing educational packages to camps, after school clubs, teachers, homeschoolers, and workshops for adults, as well as hosting school tours.”

“We are rich in land and products, but not in cash flow. The non-profit could receive grant funds to offset the cost of the education development and activities, but also to pay the farm a fair price for milk, cheese and eggs for the programming. This enables the farm to be able to better afford donating our fresh products to local food pantries and partners.”

## **Q2: Have you faced any specific challenges or hurdles when dealing with county regulations in your industry?**

“For us it’s been **navigating the relationships between the County and the State,** especially regarding Health Department requirements. We also must make sure that any rentals on the farm are tied to the farm products since we have easements, so understanding the relationships between the state and county easement programs takes a lot of time to understand.”

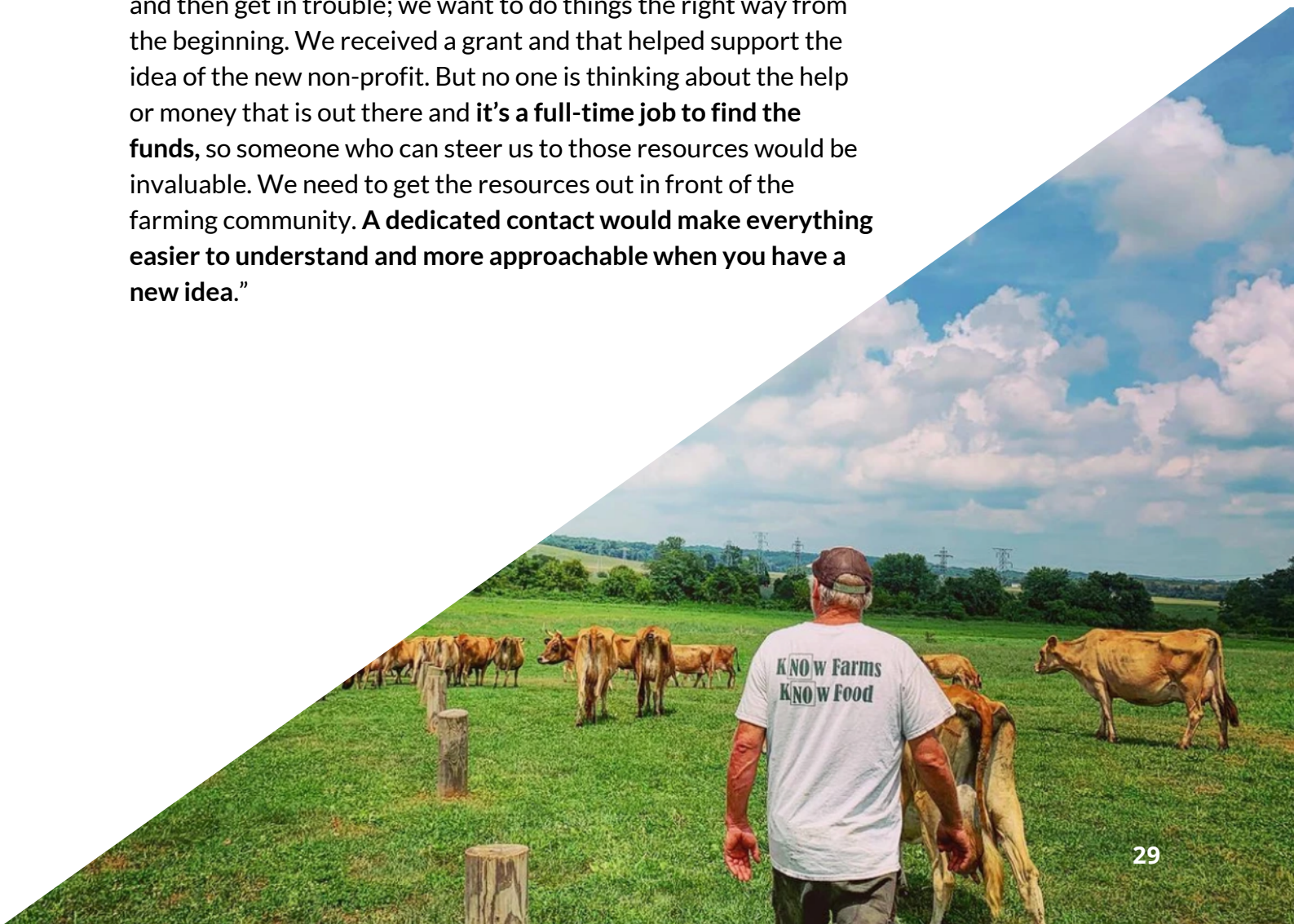
### Q3: What opportunities do you see for Baltimore County to attract and expand agricultural industries?

“There are endless opportunities; the County spent millions to protect 80,000 acres and the best use would be to produce food. The problem then becomes the consumer. We get all the stuff, and have an orchard, and a greenhouse but then it’s up to us to do the work and promotion and wait for people to come buy it.”

“Tourism promotion of value-added agriculture and locally grown doesn’t really exist besides the Ice Cream Trail. What happens after we shake hands and take pictures? We have horses, dairy, wine, vegetables, breweries, and **that could make the whole county a destination**, similar to agricultural regions like Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and the Finger Lakes region of New York.”

### Q4: What suggestions or improvements would you recommend for streamlining or enhancing the regulatory process in Baltimore County to better support businesses like yours?

“Who do we even talk to when we’re trying to figure out what we can do? A very clear contact, and not just a phone call but someone we can walk in and talk to. We don’t want to just do it and then get in trouble; we want to do things the right way from the beginning. We received a grant and that helped support the idea of the new non-profit. But no one is thinking about the help or money that is out there and **it’s a full-time job to find the funds**, so someone who can steer us to those resources would be invaluable. We need to get the resources out in front of the farming community. **A dedicated contact would make everything easier to understand and more approachable when you have a new idea.**”



# CASE STUDY 4: STAR BRIGHT FARM



**Owners:** Helen Norman and Mark Elmore

**Location:** White Hall

**Sales Include:** Bath + Body, Hydrosol + Aromatherapy, Herbs + Teas, Textiles, Workshops, Farm to Table Dinners

**Where Sold:** On-Farm Market, Online

Helen and Mark have owned the more than 150-year-old Star Bright Farm since 1994. Placed into a Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easement in 1996, this certified organic farm is used for herb production, blueberries, flowers and leased for organic vegetable production.

Recognizing that by processing a raw agricultural ingredient into a value-added product creates more profitability for a farm, the family diversified into bath and body products, jams, herbs and teas, hydrosols and aromatherapy products and on-farm workshops. These efforts help maintain and improve the farm for future generations.

## **Q1: How has the regulatory environment in Baltimore County influenced your business's growth and operations?**

"We haven't grown as fast as we would like; we were so exhausted by the initial process when we got going. **There are a lot of things we want to do in the future, but we're worried about the regulatory processes we'll have to tackle in order to do everything.** What farmers want to do to diversify to be profitable is moving a lot faster than county and state regulations, and that slows down everything."

## **Q2: Have you faced any specific challenges or hurdles when dealing with county regulations in your industry?**

"When we called we never knew who we were going to talk to. **We sometimes received different answers from the same department.** Understanding MALPF and Baltimore County regulations was always a fuzzy area. **Being so close to other county, and state, lines, is also difficult when farms in those counties or Pennsylvania have such greater flexibility** in what they can do on their farms, which makes it more difficult for us to compete."



### **Q3: What opportunities do you see for Baltimore County to attract and expand agricultural industries?**

“Creating the agricultural support position in Economic Development was a great first step. There are so many farms doing value-added agriculture now, versus six or seven years ago. The County could work individually with each farm and help them navigate the regulations. Instead of the land of no, let’s have the land of ‘let’s make it happen!’ Develop a more simplified, clear process without so many rules. **Make it easier, less confusing, and less expensive.** The County should promote all of these small farm-based businesses; they drive local and regional tourism and help create community.”

### **Q4: Were there any specific regulatory requirements that carried a significant cost to your project, in both dollars or time?**

“**The Special Exception process was both expensive and time-consuming; it took us three years to pay down the legal fees.** Additionally, we were prohibited from hosting weddings, which would have helped our bottom line and allowed us to improve the farm much more quickly than we have been able to do so far. **No piece of new equipment is less than several thousand dollars, and one wedding would have covered that expense.**”

“**We’re not trying to be billionaires,**” says Helen. “We’re just trying to do creative things and attract people who appreciate and want a more creative experience. It’s very small, it’s niche, but big enough for us.”  
“**Since COVID, people want more local activities in their communities.**”  
People don’t want to drive into the City for entertainment, good food, and some great local beer. They want to find that in their neighborhood. In the 1960s, when I grew up, there were little family-owned value-added agriculture farms everywhere in Baltimore County. You’d go to lots of different farms to get everything, and then all of that went away, but now folks are bringing them back, but with so many rules it makes it really difficult.”

# APPENDIX 1: RISK LEVELS FOR ADDING VALUE IN AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES

(Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, File C5-05, May 2021)

<b>Table 1. Risk level for capturing or creating added value in agricultural enterprises</b>		
	<b>Capturing</b>	<b>Creating</b>
<b>Production risk</b>		
Production process risk	Usually low (processes known)	Often high (new product or process development)
New producer skills	Low-medium	Medium-high
Regulations/legal requirements	Low-medium	Medium-high
<b>Market risk</b>		
Amount of competition	Usually high	Low-medium
Market access	Low (usually easy to access)	Medium-high (access may be difficult)
<b>Capital investment</b>		
Capital requirements	Low-high (amount needed varies considerably)	Low-high (amount needed varies considerably)
Financing/cash-flow	Low-high	Low-high
<b>Amount of value added</b>		
Low price/profit margin	High (narrow price/profit margins)	Low-medium (potential for wide price/profit margins)

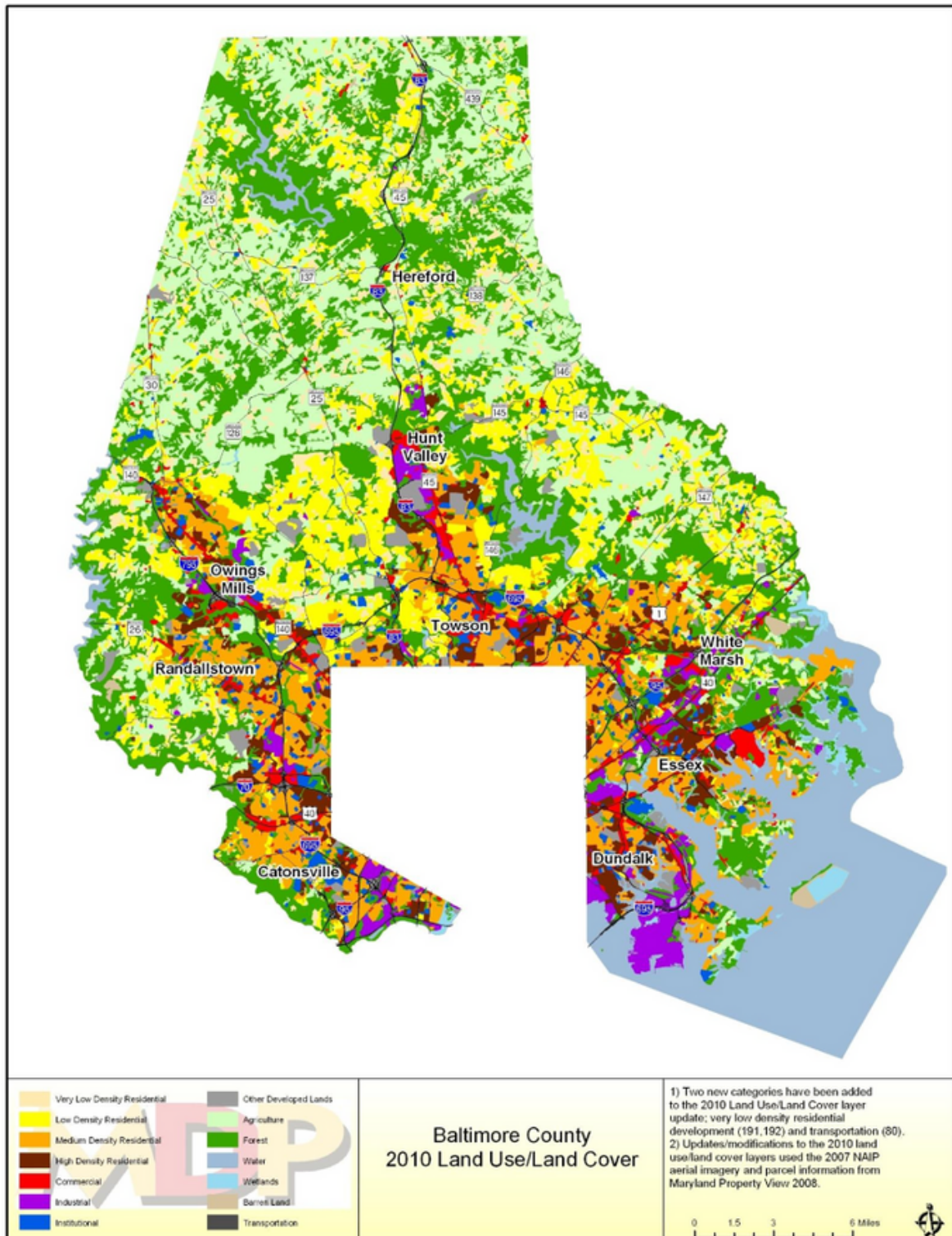
Farmers and small agricultural-based businesses are faced with multiple challenges:

- Encroaching development and the demand for more housing in a highly populated state
- Increasing taxes, the cost of raw materials, shipping, equipment and labor
- Reassessment of portions of their properties as commercial versus agricultural
- Land that goes out of agriculture rarely comes back into agriculture
- Consumers who no longer understand where their food comes from, and are not tied to agriculture in any personal way

Establishing systems that work with farmers, and not seemingly against them is good policy and Baltimore County is well positioned to become that model.

# APPENDIX 2: 2010 COUNTY LAND USE PROFILE

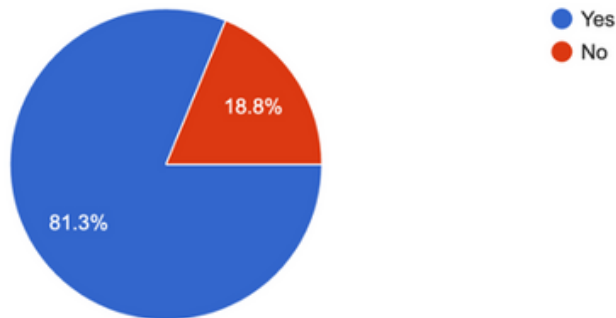
(Maryland Department of Planning, Land Use/Land Cover Map,  
<https://planning.maryland.gov/Pages/OurWork/landuse.aspx>)



# APPENDIX 3: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER QUESTIONNAIRE

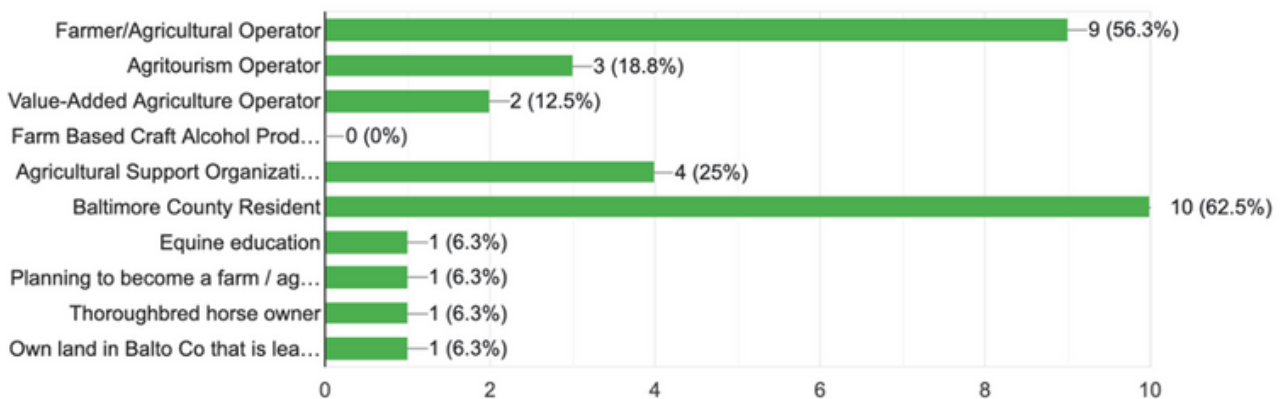
## 1. Do you reside or farm in Baltimore County?

16 responses



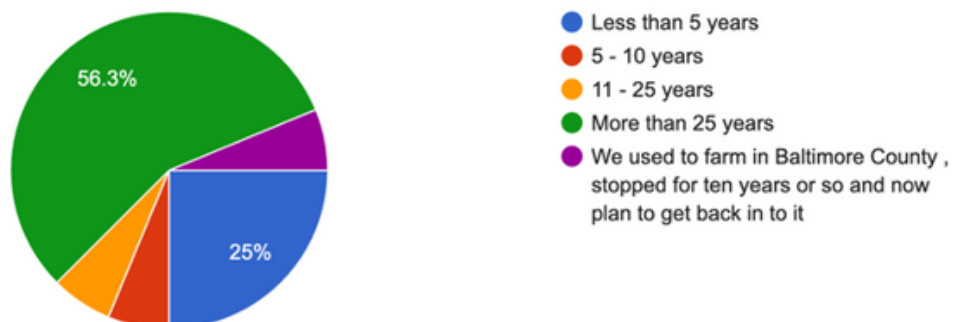
## 2. Please select your role in the agricultural sector (select all that apply)

16 responses



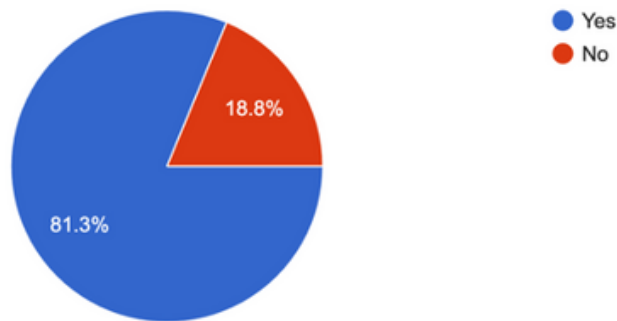
## 3. How long have you been involved in agricultural activities in Baltimore County?

16 responses



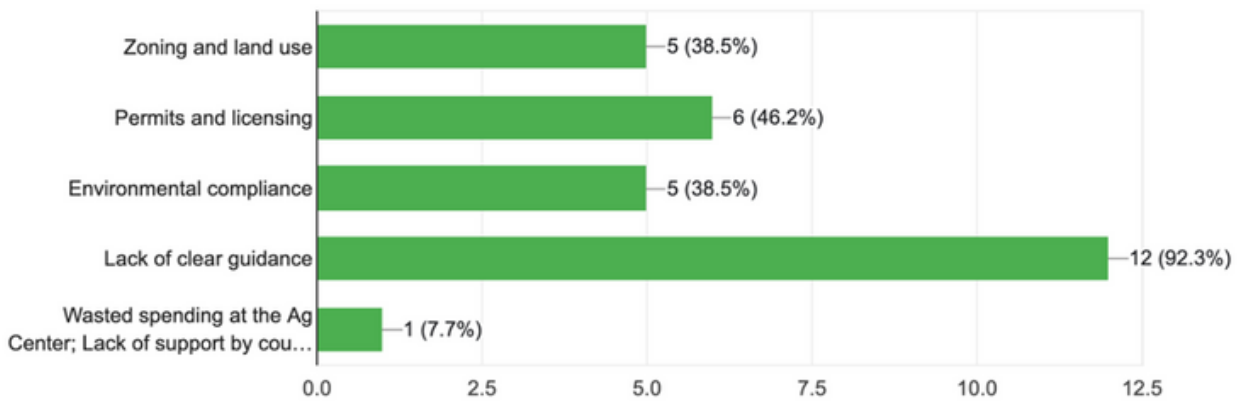
4. Have you encountered any challenges related to the regulatory environment in Baltimore County that have impacted your agricultural activities?

16 responses



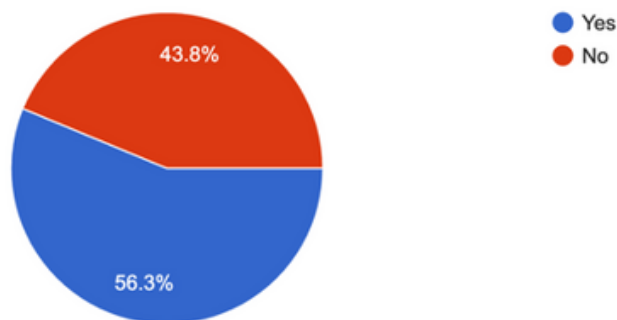
5. If you answered "Yes" to question 4, please specify the nature of the challenges or obstacles you've faced in the regulatory environment (select all that apply):

13 responses



6. Do you believe there are discrepancies between Baltimore County and state regulations that affect agricultural activities in the county?

16 responses



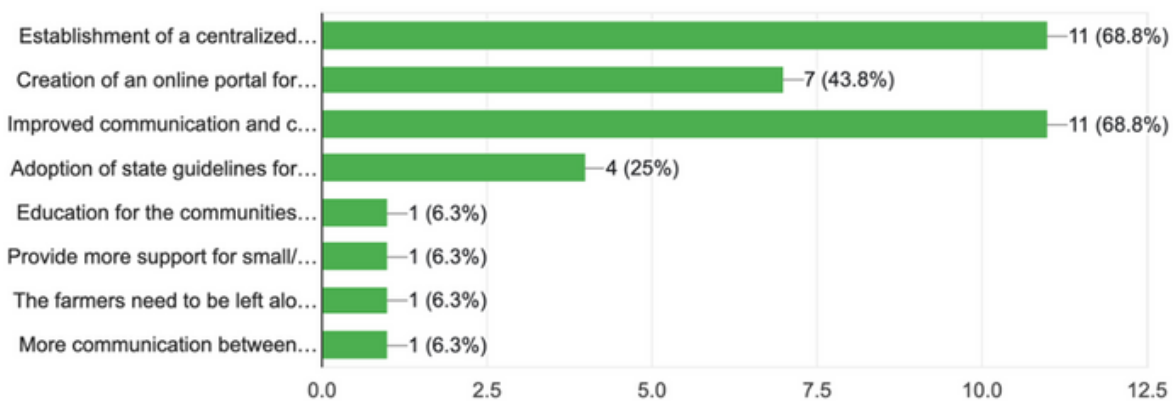
7. If you answered "Yes" to question 6, please specify the discrepancies between county and state regulations:

7 responses

- What can be done within buffers.
- County and state regulations not agreeing or personnel not understanding agriculture
- Everything is very difficult for people that follow the rules
- State allows activities not recognized by Baltimore County
- I have experienced more discrepancies at the county level.
- Too many costly regulations
- State Code §4-212 defines agritourism, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation does not support all of the activities listed in §4-212 and Baltimore County Code appears silent on agritourism.

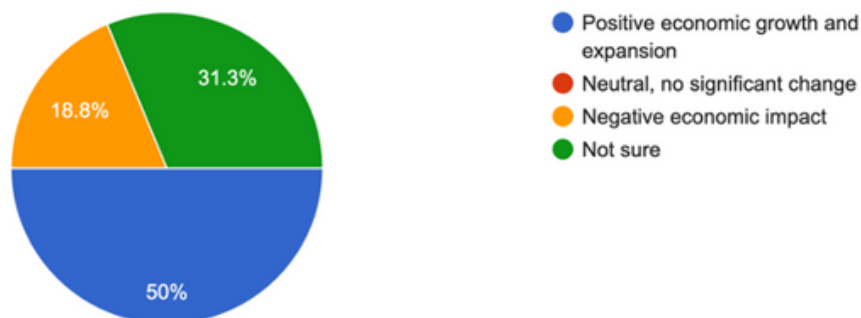
8. What kind of support or improvements do you think would enhance the regulatory environment for agricultural operations in Baltimore County? (select all that apply):

16 responses



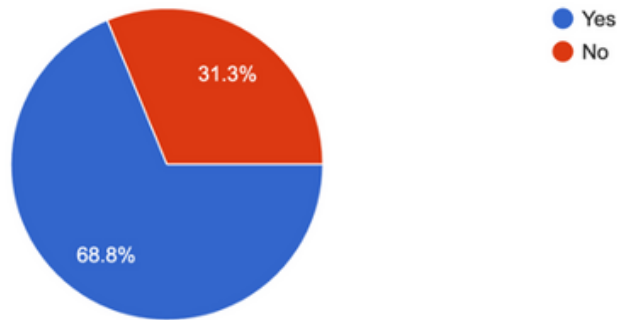
9. What economic impact do you believe effectively addressing regulatory challenges could have on the agricultural industry in Baltimore County?

16 responses



10. Are there other Counties or jurisdictions that have a model framework for supporting agricultural economic development and tourism?

16 responses



11. If you answered "Yes" to question 9, please specify the jurisdiction:

9 responses

Montgomery County

Montgomery, Carroll

Boulder Co., CO

southern md

Carroll and Frederick

Carroll and Harford Counties

I've been impressed with Virginia's agritourism support

You should know

Harford County seems to be able mesh agriculture and tourism effectively, with the first emphasis placed on the farm operation and preserving farm land and the second on tourism.

12. Do you have any other comments, concerns, or suggestions regarding the regulatory environment for agriculture in Baltimore County? Please share your thoughts.

9 responses

I think the Baltimore County Office of Ag is a good start.

Lack of understanding and promotion for equine agricultural activities

I had to get rid of my animals to comply with regulations.

within reason let farmers farm

No

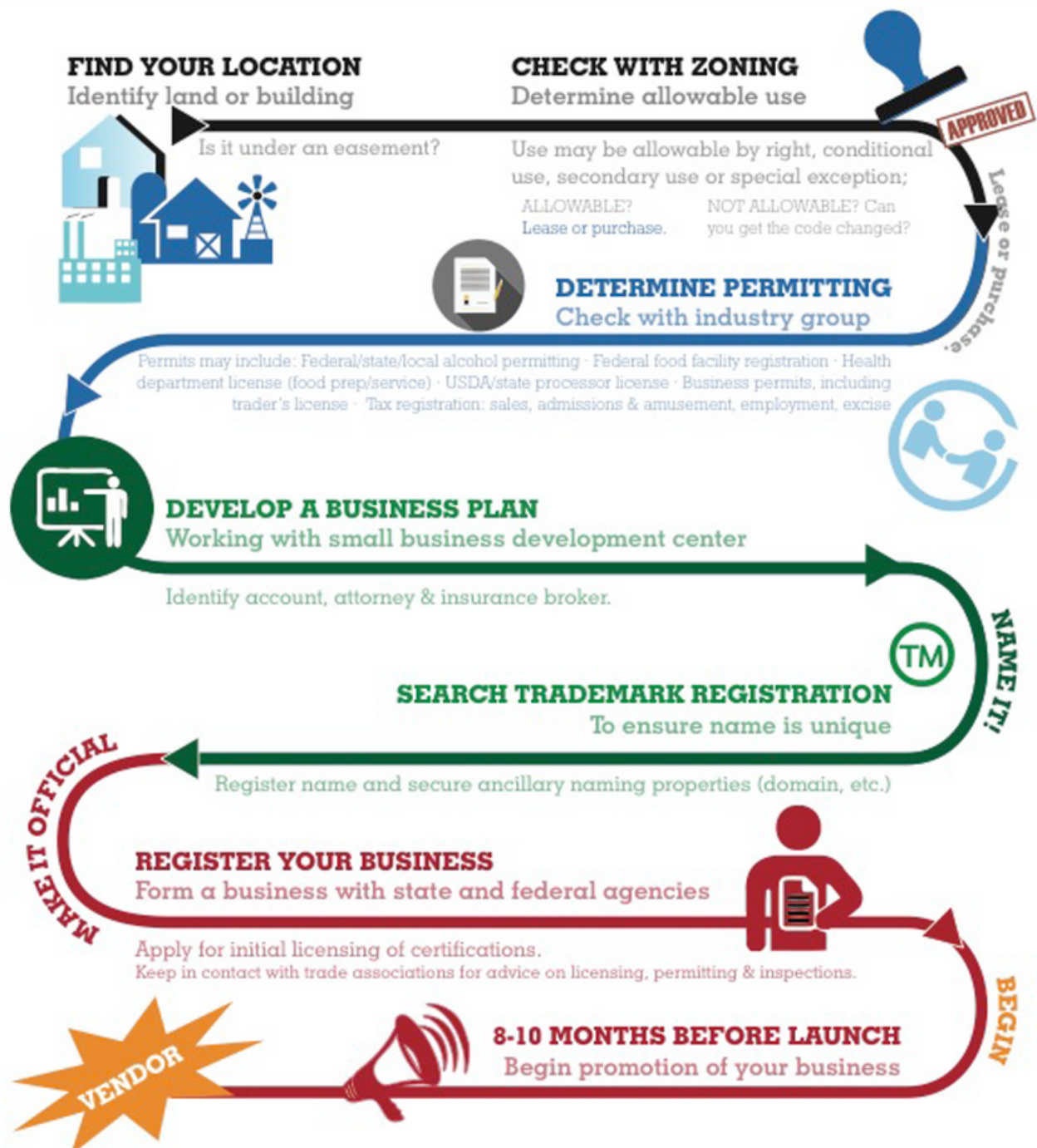
Providing more local healthy sustainably grown food not alcoholic beverages is best for our health!

In order to have a successful agritourism sector, the county and state need to be able to help farmers diversify their farm and not punish them for it. Is agritourism "real farming?" Who determines this? I've been told I need to provide additional information about the production agriculture on my farm in order to receive funding/support because my current operation is not considered "real agriculture". Although regulations are important, I'd like to see available resources be equally addressed.



# APPENDIX 4: HOW TO START A VALUE-ADDED BUSINESS

## How to Start a Value-Added Business



# COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Adopt clear definitions for key activities:** Precisely define key activities focusing on applicability and reducing regulatory ambiguity.
- 2. Launch an agricultural advisory body:** Formalize an agricultural advisory committee to inform economic development policy-making, help to articulate the functions of the planned Office of Agriculture, and identify clear points of contact for the agricultural community based upon specific issues. This body would also make zoning recommendations and weigh in on county legislation.
- 3. Establish a Senior Agricultural Manager role:** Consider the establishment of a Senior Agricultural Manager position dedicated to assisting farmers with permitting and regulatory issues.
- 4. Adopt the state definition of agritourism,** developed by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.
- 5. Encourage the County Office of Tourism to coordinate with the state craft alcohol trade associations** to promote farm-based breweries, wineries and distilleries through the Maryland Craft Beverage App, existing wine trails and events where Baltimore County producers will be in attendance.
- 6. Develop precise and consistent definitions** for essential terminology.
- 7. Develop streamlined approval pathway:** Coordinate County and state guidelines under integrated protocols.
- 8. Expand allowable on-farm enterprises:** Empower small-scale and public-facing operations through flexible allowances.
- 9. Enhance Right-to-Farm protections:** Provide mediation resources to balance neighborhood relations amidst growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

10. **Authorize small value-added enterprises:** Craft policies that encourage entry and innovation.
11. **Waive select public hearing requirements:** Simplify special exception rules for common farming practices.
12. **Spotlight the equine industry:** Incorporate terminology in agricultural definitions.
13. **Stimulate priority agricultural segments:** Develop strategic incentives and initiatives for emerging sectors.
14. **Adopt definition for small-scale farms:** Consider establishing a smaller acreage threshold or range that will allow small-scale growers to start farm businesses and activities on plots smaller than the current definition of 3 acres, as often seen in urban and suburban (residential or industrial) zones.
15. **Empower small-scale value-added production:** Authorize small-scale value-added production, such as jams, sauces, and baked goods crafted from locally sourced ingredients, as allowable farm activities. Establish partnership with the local health department and Office of Agriculture for efficient permitting processes.
16. **Simplify agritourism permitting:** Exempt modest agritourism uses of existing farm structures from extensive permit requirements, with a focus on ensuring structural soundness and safety.
17. **Encourage diverse agritourism activities:** Permit pick-your-own produce operations, farm tours, corn mazes, and similar agritourism pursuits on farms without the need for change of occupancy permits.
18. **Enhance clarity with clear definitions:** Provide precise and comprehensive definitions related to value-added agriculture and agritourism in the zoning code, reducing ambiguity and facilitating compliance.
19. **Streamline zoning for increased permissiveness:** Simplify zoning regulations to create a more permissive environment for value-added and agritourism opportunities on agricultural land.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

- 20. Adopt definition for small-Scale farms:** Consider establishing a smaller acreage threshold or range that will allow small-scale growers to start farm businesses and activities on plots between .5 acres and larger, as often seen in urban and suburban (residential or industrial) zones.
- 21. Provide farmer representation throughout Special Exception process:** Attorney fees can be prohibitive for any business owner that is required to proceed through the Special Exception Process in Baltimore County. Either task the Senior Agricultural Manager to provide insights into effective pro se representation and response to public comments, or establish an agreement with the county Conflict Resolution Center or private agricultural mediators to facilitate neighbor disputes expressed during the Special Exception proceedings could reduce the disadvantage to farmers operating on small margins.
- 22. Implement simplified permitting procedures** for commonly conducted agritourism endeavors ensuring communication and collaboration amongst departments.
- 23. Remove the Class 6 License from the zoning use table for alcohol production.** Only one business in the state uses this license.
- 24. Consider changing the use from Special Exception to Conditional or Permitted** for farm-based alcohol producers. Many counties in the state have Special Exception hearings via their Zoning Board of Appeals process, which does not include an Administrative Law Judge. This process still allows, and encourages, public comment and participation, while reducing the perceived need to secure legal representation.
- 25. Adopt a Farm Alcohol Producer definition,** which encompasses the on-farm production of beer, wine, spirits, cider and mead. This creates the flexibility for a farm to add another component of alcohol production if they so desire (i.e. a winery adding a distillery license, or a brewery adding a winery license). Eliminate the farm winery, farm brewery and farm distillery definitions. This is the direction that several other counties (Anne Arundel, Charles, Montgomery, St. Mary's, Washington) have taken to simplify their zoning, definitions and permitting process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

26. **Create acreage consistency across all types of farm alcohol producers and zones;** the majority of counties have a consistent acreage minimum across all zones.
27. **Update the County’s “Guide to Opening a Craft Beverage Business in Baltimore County”** to reflect updated state license classes, regulatory authority, and key contacts. Include Baltimore County Tourism in any update work and encourage craft alcohol producers to be in coordination with Tourism as part of the startup process.
28. **Prioritize agricultural business sustainability:** Make it a top priority to support value-added activities as a pivotal means of sustaining Baltimore County's agricultural community.
29. **Expand allowable agritourism activities** in suitable agricultural zones and recognize agritourism as agriculture.
30. **Develop a specific checklist,** coordinated with other county agencies, but managed by the County’s Office of Agriculture, **for startup farm-based alcohol producers.** Montgomery and Frederick Counties serve as very good models.

Additionally, we recognize the work of the Baltimore County Department of Planning’s 2020 Report and support the following recommendations [73]:

1. **Consider creating a Use Group such as ‘Value-Added Agriculture Building ’** that incorporates the types of multiple uses that these uses include (storage, office space, mercantile and assembly) so that it reduces the conflicts between trying to address these uses independently.
2. **Investigate what options there are to resolve the conflict between the actual planned occupancy levels and how the buildings are rated.** Special Exception limits on the number of occupants, posting and other mechanisms could be considered for setting the Occupancy limits.
3. **Review the Section of the IBC that deals with historic structures** and investigate if any changes need to be made to make clear that these buildings cannot come up to modern codes.

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