

Ag Notes

Harford County Newsletter

UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND
EXTENSION

University of
Maryland Extension

Harford County
Agricultural Center

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M—F 8:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

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Hello, Harford County!

I hope everyone is enjoying the fall weather and getting the opportunity to spend the Holiday season with family and friends.

It is the time of year when various winter Extension programs are rapidly approaching; you can find more information on these programs in this newsletter and I hope to see you at one or many this winter.

If you are a private pesticide applicator and your license expires this December, you should be receiving a renewal notice in the mail or in your email from the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). You will have to log in to the MDA website to renew your private applicator license. If you still need credits to renew, be sure to sign up for one of our winter programs offering pesticide credits. If you have any questions about Extension programs, contact me at akness@umd.edu or (410) 638-3255. If you have questions regarding your pesticide license, contact MDA at (410) 841-5710.

As the year comes to a close, now is time to reflect on what worked and what didn't. In terms of corn and soybean production, we fared much better than many predicted and the 2025 corn crop will go down as one of the biggest in recent memory. As you plan for 2026, be sure to get updated soil analysis for fields that need them—with fertilizer prices the way they are the last thing you want to do is guess what your soil needs. Also be sure



December 2025

*The Extension office will be closed
December 25 and January 1*



to maintain optimal pH (6.0-7.0 for most crops) as this is the single greatest parameter affecting nutrient availability.

If you need an updated nutrient management plan from us, please contact Sam Covington at scoving2@umd.edu or (301) 226-7461 (Mon. & Tues.) or (410) 996-8138 (Wed. & Thurs.). Sam is our Nutrient Management Advisor in Cecil and Kent County and is covering for Harford until we have the position filled. We have conducted interviews for the Harford position and my hope is that we can have someone here in the next month or two. In the meantime, please reach out to Sam and don't wait.

I am also pleased to announce a new hire in the Extension office; Daniel Gustitis will start on December 15 as the 4-H and FCS Administrative Assistant (formerly Lynne DiBastiani's position). Dan joins us from the Baltimore City Extension office where he has been an administrative assistant for the Agriculture program and prior to that he interned with UMD Extension. We are excited to have Dan join our team and we look forward to everyone meeting him.

And finally, I would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

Until next time,
-Andy





2025-2026

Helping communities grow and thrive

CROP PRODUCTION MEETINGS

The University of Maryland Extension is excited to announce that we will be hosting informative workshops in person at different venues across the state. These workshops will offer valuable insights and support for commercial production throughout the 2025-2026 season!

AGRONOMY

- 12-02-25 Southern MD Crops Dinner
- 12-03-25 Northern MD Field Crops Day
- 12-03-25 Washington Co. Agronomy Day
- 12-10-25 Kent Co. Agronomy Breakfast
- 01-15-26 Carroll Co. Mid-Winter Mtg.
- 01-21-26 Lower Shore Agronomy Day
- 02-3-26 Cecil Co. Winter Agronomy Mtg.
- 02-17-26 Harford Co. Mid-Winter Agronomy Mtg.
- 02-18-26 Central MD Agronomy Mtg.
- 02-19-26 Caroline Co./Mid-Shore Agronomy Mtg.
- 02-27-26 Queen Anne's Agronomy Day

PRECISION & DIGITAL AGRICULTURE

- 02-26-26 Precision Ag. Technology Conf.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

FORAGE

- 01-20-26 Southern MD Forage Conf.
- 01-21-26 Western MD Forage Conf.
- 01-22-26 Central MD Forage Conf.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE

- 12-12-25 Loveville Produce Auction Annual Mtg.
- 12-18-25 Urban Farming Veg & Fruit Prod. IPM Workshop
- 01-21-26 Central MD Vegetable Growers Mtg.
- 02-12-26 Western MD Regional Fruit Mtg.
- 02-18-26 Eastern Shore Vegetable Growers Mtg.
- 03-10-26 Urban Farming Veg & Fruit Prod. IPM Workshop
- Mar. 2026 Urban Farmer Winter Mtg.

ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURE

- 2-5-26 Nursery Greenhouse & Controlled Environment FTC

Check out our website at
go.umd.edu/CPM
for more information



Pesticide Certification,
Nutrient Management
Voucher, and Certified
Crop Advisor credits will be
available at these meetings.

2025 Corn Hybrid Trials

*Nicole Fiorellino, Assistant Professor & Extension Agronomist
University of Maryland, College Park*

The 2025 corn hybrid trials results are available for download online at <https://psla.umd.edu/extension/md-crops/> or click the button below or contact the Extension office for a hard copy. The fee-based performance trials are critical to provide Maryland farmers with unbiased yield performance data across the broad geographic diversity of Maryland. The relative yield tables in both of these reports are extremely valuable for farmers to select varieties that perform well across the state. The varieties with relative yield greater than 100, meaning above the average yield at that location, across all the test locations are highlighted in these tables and would be considered resilient varieties that are likely to yield well in different conditions. For more information on interpreting variety trials results, see the UMD Factsheet authored by Andy Kness and Nicole Fiorellino at this link <https://go.umd.edu/interpretingtrials>. We are grateful for the continued funding provided by Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board for these variety trials.

Corn Trials



Workers' Compensation Webinar

Nicole Cook, Agriculture Law Education Initiative Legal Specialist
University of Maryland Eastern Shore

December 3

3:00—4:00 PM
Online

Are you an agricultural employer or employee in Maryland looking to understand workers' compensation? Join ALEI's Samantha Capaldo and Nicole Cook on December 3rd for a free webinar. They'll provide a comprehensive overview based on their recently [published guide](#).

In Maryland, most employers with one or more "covered employees" are required to purchase workers' compensation insurance. There are some exceptions for agricultural employers, however. Agricultural employers are only required to purchase workers' compensation insurance if the employer's annual payroll is more than \$15,000 for full-time employees or the employer has more than three full-time employees. Although some agricultural employers are exempt, due to the inherently dangerous nature of farming, Maryland agricultural employers should, nevertheless, consider adding workers' compensation coverage to their risk

This article is not a substitute for legal advice. Reposted from the [Ag Risk Management Blog](#).

management portfolios to protect themselves and their employees.

The webinar is December 3, 2025, from 3 pm – 4 pm ET.

The webinar will cover:

- Who is required to purchase workers' compensation insurance;
- Who and which injuries are covered by workers' compensation;
- What benefits are provided by workers' compensation;
- How to obtain coverage;
- Employer and employee obligations in the event of a claim;
- Penalties for violations; and
- The role of the Workers' Compensation Commission.

To register for the webinar, click [here](#).

Biosecurity Reminders for Poultry Growers

Maryland Department of Agriculture [press release](#) (abridged)

The Maryland Department of Agriculture continues to remind all poultry farmers, whether commercial or backyard, to review and implement enhanced biosecurity plans. This comes after the confirmation of several cases of HPAI in backyard flocks in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Migratory waterfowl moving through Maryland presents a heightened risk for HPAI, a devastating disease for poultry operations. HPAI is caused by an influenza type A virus, which can infect poultry (chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quails, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl such as ducks, geese and shorebirds.

Commercial and backyard flock owners are urged to follow these guidelines to maintain a sanitary, biosecure premise:

- Restrict access to poultry by posting "Restricted Access" signs, securing the area with a gate, or both
- Take steps to ensure that contaminated materials on the ground are not transported into the poultry growing house or area.

- Provide the following items to anyone entering or leaving any area where poultry are kept: Footbaths or foot mats with disinfectant; Boot washing and disinfectant station; Footwear change or foot covers; PPE – coveralls, hair nets, and masks.
- Cover and secure feed to prevent wild birds, rodents or other animals from accessing it.
- Cover and properly contain carcasses, used litter, or other disease-containing organic materials to prevent wild birds, rodents or other animals from accessing them and to keep them from being blown around by wind.

Report any unusual bird deaths or sudden increases in very sick birds to the MDA Animal Health Program at (410) 841-5810 or after-hours to (410) 841-5971. Also contact the USDA at (866) 536-7593.

For more information on avian influenza, please visit the department's [website](#) or the [University of Maryland Extension HPAI resource page](#).

Healthy Soils Grant

Maryland Department of Agriculture [press release](#)



The Maryland Department of Agriculture will accept grant applications for its Fiscal Year 2026 Healthy Soils Competitive Fund from November 3, 2025, through January 9, 2026. The program offers financial support to eligible farmers and organizations to adopt innovative soil health practices, enhance their stewardship of soil and water resources, and promote soil health awareness within the agricultural community.

“Healthy soil is the foundation of a strong, vibrant, and sustainable farming economy,” said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks. “Now in its 4th year, Maryland’s Healthy Soils Competitive Fund is popular with farms of all types and sizes. We look forward to partnering with pioneering Maryland farmers who want to install innovative soil health and agroforestry practices on their farms.”

Grant recipients will receive up to \$50,000 to support three years of enhanced soil health practices. Grants are available to farmers and agricultural organizations for innovative, next-level soil health projects. We support expanded soil health and new management systems that minimize soil disturbance, maximize soil cover and diversity, and increase living roots.

The size of the farm does not affect grant approval. There is no minimum or maximum acreage requirement; however, the agricultural operation and/or its partners must generate a minimum of \$2,500 in sales or donations annually and/or manage 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight.

Grant recipients will receive a portion of the funds (up

to 30%) upfront, with the remainder distributed annually after progress is confirmed. These grants may be used to implement conservation practices, purchase equipment that supports soil health practices, and cover research, labor, and administrative costs needed to meet project goals.

Since its inception in 2023, the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund has funded 53 projects across the state focusing on innovative soil health and agroforestry practices. Winning projects have included:

- Intensive cover cropping for reduced input use in row crops
- Equipment and field trials for reduced tillage in vegetable production systems
- Silvopasture and windbreak establishment for livestock shade and forage
- On-farm composting system improvements
- Planting annual cover crops for improved summer grazing

This program was developed based on recommendations from Maryland’s Soil Health Advisory Committee. Funding for the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund comes from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Moore Administration.

Grant applications and additional soil health resources are available on at https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/pages/soil-health.aspx.

Documentation confirming compliance with Maryland’s nutrient management program is required at time of application. Grant recipients will be notified on or around March 30, 2026. For more information, contact Healthy Soils Program Specialist Nick Miller at nicholas.miller2@maryland.gov or (410) 980-2350.



Bee Lifespan 50% Shorter Than 50 Years Ago

University of Maryland, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources [news release](#)

A new study by University of Maryland entomologists shows that the lifespan for individual honey bees kept in a controlled, laboratory environment is 50% shorter than it was in the 1970s. When scientists modeled the effect of today's shorter lifespans, the results corresponded with the increased colony loss and reduced honey production trends seen by U.S. beekeepers in recent decades.

Colony turnover is an accepted factor in the beekeeping business, as bee colonies naturally age and die off. But over the past decade, U.S. beekeepers have reported high loss rates, which has meant having to replace more colonies to keep operations viable. In an effort to understand why, researchers have focused on environmental stressors, diseases, parasites, pesticide exposure and nutrition.

This is the first study to show an overall decline in honey bee lifespan potentially independent of environmental stressors, hinting that genetics may be influencing the broader trends seen in the beekeeping industry. The study was published November 14, 2022, in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

"We're isolating bees from the colony life just before they emerge as adults, so whatever is reducing their lifespan is happening before that point," said Anthony Nearman, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Entomology and lead author of the study. "This introduces the idea of a genetic component. If this hypothesis is right, it also points to a possible solution. If we can isolate some genetic factors, then maybe we can breed for longer-lived honey bees."

Nearman first noticed the decline in lifespan while conducting a study with entomology associate professor Dennis vanEngelsdorp on standardized protocols for rearing adult bees in the laboratory. Replicating earlier studies, the researchers collected bee pupae from honey bee hives when the pupae were within 24 hours of emerging from the wax cells they are reared in. The collected bees finished growing in an incubator and were then kept as adults in special cages.

Nearman was evaluating the effect of supplementing the caged bees' sugar water diet with plain water to better mimic natural conditions when he noticed that, regardless of diet, the median lifespan of his caged bees

was half that of caged bees in similar experiments in the 1970s. (17.7 days today versus 34.3 days in the 1970s). This prompted a deeper review of published laboratory studies over the past 50 years.

"When I plotted the lifespans over time, I realized, wow, there's actually this huge time effect going on," Nearman said. "Standardized protocols for rearing honey bees in the lab weren't really formalized until the 2000s, so you would think that lifespans would be longer or unchanged, because we're getting better at this, right? Instead, we saw a doubling of mortality rate."

Although a laboratory environment is very different from a colony, historical records of lab-kept bees suggest a similar lifespan to colony bees, and scientists generally assume that isolated factors that reduce lifespan in one environment will also reduce it in another. Previous studies had also shown that in the real world, shorter honey bee lifespans corresponded to less foraging time and lower honey production. This is the first study to connect those factors to colony turnover rates.

When the team modeled the effect of a 50% reduction in lifespan on a beekeeping operation, where lost colonies are replaced annually, the resulting loss rates were around 33%. This is very similar to the average overwinter and annual loss rates of 30% and 40% reported by beekeepers over the past 14 years.

Nearman and vanEngelsdorp noted that their lab-kept bees could be experiencing some sort of low-level viral contamination or pesticide exposure during their larval stage, when they're brooding in the hive and worker bees are feeding them. But the bees have not shown overt symptoms of those exposures and a genetic component to longevity has been shown in other insects such as fruit flies.

The next steps for the researchers will be to compare trends in honey bee lifespans across the U.S. and in other countries. If they find differences in longevity, they can isolate and compare potential contributing factors such as genetics, pesticide use and presence of viruses in the local bee stocks.



Congratulations to Patricia Hoopes

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On Friday, November 21, our former Nutrient Management Advisor, Patricia Hoopes, was recognized at the 102nd Harford County Farm Bureau banquet by winning the 2025 Service to Harford County Agriculture Award! Many of you have worked with Tricia over the years and can understand how hard she worked for the farmers in Harford County.

In her 23 years with Extension, Tricia wrote 1,786 nutrient management plans covering 221,799 acres! Her services alone helped keep over \$1.1 million dollars in the pockets of Harford county farmers and tens of thousands of pounds of nitrogen and phosphorus out of our waterways. Please join me in recognizing Tricia for her service to Harford County Agriculture!

Vegetable & Fruit IPM Workshop

Make plans to attend one of the Urban Farming Vegetable and Fruit Production IPM Workshop pesticide and nutrient management recertification, Thursday, December 18, 2025 from 6:00-9:00 p.m. at the Anne Arundel County Extension Office. The workshops will explore advanced fruit and vegetable production practices focusing on sustainability, food security and integrated pest management tactics. This meeting will provide Private Applicator Recertification & Nutrient Applicator Voucher Recertification.

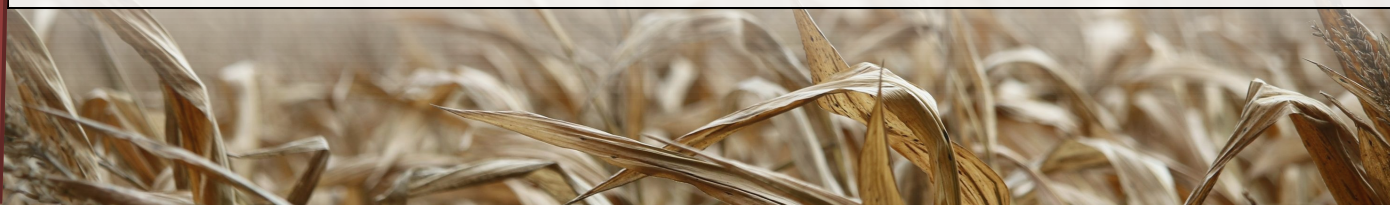
Register [online](#) or call (301) 226-7470.



Upcoming Programs for Pesticide & Nutrient Management Credits

Date & Time	Program	Location
December 3, 2025 8:00-12:30 pm	Northern Maryland Field Crops Day*	Hereford Fire Hall
January 21, 2026 8:00-12:30 pm	Central Maryland Vegetable Growers Day*	Hereford Fire Hall
February 17, 2026 9:00-2:30 pm	Harford County Mid-Winter Agronomy Meeting*	Deer Creek Overlook
February 25, 2026 10-12:00 pm	Nutrient Management Voucher Training	Harford County Extension Office
March 12, 2026 9:00-11:00 am	Private Applicator Exam (for new applicators)	Harford County Extension Office
March 12, 2026 1:00-3:00 pm	Private Applicator Recertification Training	Harford County Extension Office

*Satisfies credits for BOTH pesticide and nutrient management



HARFORD COUNTY LANDOWNERS AG PRESERVATION SEMINAR

Explore the options for preserving your farmland & protecting your legacy



THURSDAY
JANUARY 29, 2026
6 - 8 P.M.

Harford County Ag Center
3525 Conowingo Road, Street

SATURDAY
JANUARY 31, 2026
9 - 11 A.M.

Churchville Rec Center
3023 Level Road, Churchville

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 3, 2026
6 - 8 P.M.

Fallston Public Library
1461 Fallston Road, Fallston

TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

- Background on land preservation in Harford County
- Receiving value for your land through conservation easements
- Recent updates to Harford's Ag program



BOB CASSILLY
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

QUESTIONS?

klee@harfordcountymd.gov or
jrwilson@harfordcountymd.gov | 410.638.3235



Great resources are just a click away!

Andrew Kness

Andrew Kness
Senior Extension Agent,
Agriculture and
Food Systems



Like us on
Facebook

facebook.com/HarfordAg

akness@umd.edu

Back-issues can be found at: <https://extension.umd.edu/locations/harford-county/agriculture-and-nutrient-management>



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Dates to remember

- 03 Dec.** Northern Maryland Field Crops Day. 8-12:30 PM, Hereford Fire Hall. \$22. Register by calling (410) 887-8090.
- 15 Dec.** Farm & Home Solar Energy Webinar. 12-1:15 PM, online via Zoom. Free. Register [online](#) or call (301) 226-7581.
- 21 Jan.** Central Maryland Vegetable Growers Day. 8-12:30 PM, Hereford Fire Hall. Registration coming soon. Call (410) 887-8090.
- 11 Feb.** Mid-Atlantic Women in Ag Conference. 9-3 PM, Chesapeake Bay Beach Club. Register [online](#) or call (410) 822-1244.
- 17 Feb. SAVE THE DATE:** Harford County Mid-Winter Agronomy Meeting. 9-2:30 PM, Deer Creek Overlook. Registration details forthcoming.



The graphic features a background image of mushrooms growing on a log. Overlaid on this are several green rectangular boxes with white text. In the top left corner is the logo for Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education). The main title 'Farmer Grant Call for Proposals Open' is in a large, bold, white font. Below this, several bullet points are listed in white text on green boxes. At the bottom, the website 'northeast.sare.org/farmergrantcall' is provided in white text on a green box.

NORTHEAST SARE
Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

Farmer Grant Call for Proposals Open

- Projects led by farmers
- Projects must take place in Northeast
- Awards up to \$30,000
- Test an idea on your farm that could impact farming in our region
- Proposals due 5 p.m. EST Dec 9, 2025

northeast.sare.org/farmergrantcall

December 2025