



Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Environment & Production Subcommittee

May 26, 2022 1:00pm-2:00pm

1. Welcome
2. Group Discussion
 - Invited Speaker
 - a. Dr. Jim McDonald (Ag Econ Expert at the University of Maryland)
 - b. Shannon Dill (Ag Econ Expert at the University of Maryland)
 1. Definition of table crop - crops for human consumption or crops for direct marketing
 2. Delmarva is a significant importer of food for poultry which is a challenge, as economics are favorable for producing feed for poultry
 3. There is a local demand component (i.e. Montgomery County), but land is expensive, so there is a need for crops that are less land extensive
 4. There are challenges identified with the right type of markets and right type of market signals
 5. The types of crops produced in Maryland doesn't need to be either/or – not away from commodity crops; rather adding table food crops to the existing crop production
 6. Virtually impossible to feed a family of 4 using locally grown foods, unless we have more processing (Currently one vegetable processor on Eastern Shore remains in Maryland)
 7. The subcommittee members should begin thinking beyond farmers' markets (other considerations include: built capacity with meat processors; meat processors are too far and expensive to increase capacity, and there are water issues with discharge)



8. Food hubs are centralized – item for examination include:
(1) is there a way to pool crops and get them out
9. There are government procedures, policies, and permitting processes that should be reviewed as these items are responsible for the current food system.
10. Structural challenges include processing crops (cutting, chopping, etc.) in any capacity changes the regulations and/or categorization (even for small scale producers)
11. Contradictory regulations (planning and zoning, county regulations) to increase capacity are not available. Looking at impediments that we can clean out. For example, during COVID allowed fishermen to sell off the boat – to reduce the 2 or 3 other steps in place. Food safety is important but are there ways to make these better. Things have to go to market quickly (example: risks for raspberries, etc.)
12. Other factors to consider when examining “table food crop” production: crop production risk vs. return on farmers’ investment, which includes equipment for preserving fruit
13. MARBIDCO, loan program, no applications for loans for food processing equipment – business plan may not provide cash flow to support such a loan. There are small grants for value-added processing (dairies to start creameries, small investments in cold storage). The economics of small-scale food and vegetable production is very challenging. For instance, the need to sell to retail markets to have a shot at viability, and land is a challenge, as not everyone has access to land – need neutral property. Lastly, who would carry that labor?
14. Labor: challenges of finding it. Table crops are more labor intensive than commodity crops and labor rates are rising faster than inflation. AS a result those focusing on fruit and veggies, need to economize on higher labor prices. As an economist need to be careful on things that will require more labor
15. Maryland producers are competing with farmers (CA, FL, and Mexico) that have lower labor costs. Advantages that MD farmers have is the market and access to water.



Western producers are now facing this labor increase and looking to tech – which may be out in the fields in the future. Economies of scale will bring the price down. Right now grocery expenses are already increasing.

- Healthy Soil & Regenerative Agriculture Practices - Research Development
 - a. Background/Current group focus: Two subjects currently under investigation, which include **(1)** regenerative ag and healthy soils - thinking about what is on top of the soil, **(2)** what type of crops (table food or commodity crops)- look at food resiliency, how can these crops direct farm to table crops, keeping in mind food hubs, resiliency, climate change impact (reducing transportation or our carbon footprint), economic impact
 - b. How can regenerative ag serve as a roadmap for more food system resiliency. From a policy perspective providing incentives for Maryland farmers (at various scales/scope) to begin changing production to “food” products to local markets (once developed).
 - c. How do we decentralize production, and promote more farmers? What are the considerations for promoting transition and continued growth, for farms participating in programs like Future Harvest?
 - d. Possible future speaker: Adam Pennedelton:
<https://www.asdevelop.org/programs-resources/food-hub/>.
 Operated by Appalachian Sustainable Development (a nonprofit) in Duffied VA (works with large and small scale farmers)
 - e. Labor (H2A worker price and transport) has gone up. Can we share workers? How can we pool farm resources? In Australia there are programs where young people are sent to farms to work. FAA has programs but could we have a roving team that works on these farms? Tool sharing programs are not that useful (more funding is needed for these programs).
 - f. Possible consideration- there is a need for more innovation in the agricultural space (example: MD wine – two companies on the Eastern shore started a vineyard management company, but neither are still in business).



- g. Common topics of interest:
 - 1. What would it take for MD to re-establish processing facilities (water processing, processing permits, labor, land)
 - 2. How can we incentivize food hubs
 - 3. Think through labor shortage issues
 - 4. Barriers to small producers expanding, including contradictory regulations (zoning barriers), economies of scale for equipment (shared resources and joint services), and risks associated with non-commodity/non-traditional crops.
 - 5. Climate chaos and intense rainfalls/droughts, fossil fuel inputs, how do we address this (regenerative agriculture)
- 3. Next steps and adjourn
 - Invited Speaker for June 9th Meeting: Ailshia Mulkey (Program Planning and Evaluation Executive Secretary, State Soil Conservation Committee at Maryland Department of Agriculture)