

AG NOTES

University of Maryland Extension | Harford County

Hello Harford County!

After a brutally cold winter, it seems that signs of spring are approaching. Each spring, cherry blossoms signal a turning point in the season—bringing color to the landscape and providing one of the first meaningful floral resources for pollinators.

Cherry trees belong to the genus *Prunus*, which includes both fruit-producing and ornamental species. In our region, native cherries such as black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) play important ecological roles. These species produce small fruits that support birds and wildlife, and their flowers are accessible to a wide range of native pollinators.

In contrast, many of the showy spring-blooming trees planted in landscapes are ornamental varieties, such as Japanese flowering cherry. These trees are bred for aesthetic traits—abundant blossoms, color, and form—rather than fruit production. While ornamental cherries may produce limited or no fruit, their early-season blooms can still provide nectar and pollen.

Cherry trees typically bloom early in the spring, often before many other plants have begun flowering. This timing is critical. Emerging pollinators—especially native bees—require immediate access to food after winter

dormancy. Cherry blossoms offer nectar (energy) and pollen (protein), helping sustain these insects during a period when floral resources are otherwise scarce. Even managed pollinators like honey bees benefit from this early forage.

The iconic cherry blossoms of Washington, D.C. trace back to a 1912 gift of over 3,000 trees from Japan, symbolizing friendship between the two nations. Planted around the Tidal Basin, these trees—primarily *Prunus serrulata* cultivars—now anchor the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival. The 2026 Festival is March 20-April 12.

Aside from the ornamental and ecological value of cherry trees, many are also important crops. You can find sweet cherries and tart cherries grown locally in Maryland orchards.

For those that might be interested in raising cherries for commercial production, I highly recommend the tree fruit production guides published by [Penn State](#) and [Rutgers](#). As always, if you need assistance accessing any of the materials please contact me.

Until next time,
-Andy



Happy Spring and Happy Easter!

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3525 Conowingo Rd., Suite 600
Street, MD 21154
M - F 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM
extension.umd.edu

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HPAI Bird Flu Case in Cecil County

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

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) announced a presumptive positive case of H5 Avian Influenza on a commercial pullet farm in Cecil County. This is the first case of Highly Pathogenic H5 Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Cecil County this year, and the fifth case on a commercial poultry farm in Maryland in 2026. State officials have quarantined all affected premises, and birds on the properties are being or have been depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from affected flocks will not enter the food system.

Confirmation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) is pending, with final results anticipated in the coming days.

Avian influenza is a highly contagious airborne respiratory virus that spreads easily among birds through nasal and eye secretions, as well as manure. The virus can be spread in various ways from flock to flock, including by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers. This virus affects poultry, like chickens, ducks, and turkeys, along with some wild bird species such as ducks, geese, shorebirds, and raptors.

According to the Maryland Department of Health, the risk of transmission between birds and the general public is low. Those who work directly with poultry or dairy farms may be more at risk and should follow key biosecurity practices.

The MDA continues to urge growers and backyard flock owners to enhance biosecurity practices and become familiar with what to do if HPAI is suspected in a flock. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shares more [guidance here](#). Look for signs of illness. Know the [warning signs](#) of infectious bird diseases.

Report suspected sick birds: To report a possible case of HPAI in a commercial or backyard flock, call MDA at (410) 841-5810. Commercial chicken growers and backyard flock owners can email questions about the outbreak to MD.Birdflu@maryland.gov. To report a sick wild bird in Maryland, call the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) at (877) 463-6497.

Key biosecurity practices:

- Clean and disinfect transportation. Don't walk through

or drive trucks, tractors, or equipment in areas where waterfowl or other wildlife feces may be. If you can't avoid this, clean your shoes, vehicle, and equipment thoroughly to prevent bringing disease agents back to your flock. This is especially important when visiting with farmers or those who hunt wildfowl, such as when gathering at a local coffee shop, restaurant, or gas station.

- Remove loose feed. Don't give wild birds, rodents, and insects a free lunch. Remove spilled or uneaten feed right away, and make sure feed storage units are secure and free of holes. Wild birds can carry HPAI.
- Keep visitors to a minimum. Only allow those people who take care of your poultry to come in contact with your birds, including family and friends. Make sure everyone who has contact with your flock follows biosecurity principles.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after coming in contact with live poultry. If using a hand sanitizer, remove dirt, manure, feathers, and other materials from your hands first.
- Provide disposable boot covers (preferred) and/or disinfectant footbaths for anyone having contact with your flock. If using a footbath, be sure to remove all droppings, mud, or debris from boots and shoes using a long-handled scrub brush BEFORE stepping into the disinfectant footbath, and always keep it clean.
- Change clothes before entering poultry areas and before exiting the property. Visitors should wear protective outer garments or disposable coveralls, boots, and headgear when handling birds, and shower and/or change clothes when leaving the facility.
- Clean and disinfect tools or equipment before moving them to a new poultry facility. Before allowing vehicles or tools and equipment—including egg flats and cases that have come in contact with birds or their droppings—to exit the property, make sure they are cleaned and disinfected to prevent contaminated equipment from transporting disease. Do not move or reuse items that cannot be cleaned, such as cardboard egg flats.

For more information on avian influenza, visit: <https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/AvianFlu.aspx>.



Small Acreage Cover Crop Program

Maryland Department of Agriculture [press release](#) (abridged)
Grants available for small farms who plant less than 10 acres

The Maryland Department of Agriculture announced that the sign-up period for its [Small Acreage Cover Crop Program](#) runs **March 16 through April 24, 2026**. This program provides grants to help small farms and urban growers plant cover crops on their production areas to build healthy soils, improve crop yields, protect local water quality, improve climate resilience, and provide other environmental benefits. This program is for urban and small-scale producers who do not qualify for the traditional cover crop program. Financial assistance for this program is capped at \$1,500 per grower, per year.

Urban and small-scale producers may download grant applications from [MDA's website](#). Applications must be postmarked by **April 24, 2026**. Program highlights:

- The maximum payment per grower is \$1,500 per year.
- Reimbursement covers the cost of seed (including shipping), labor (capped at \$15 per hour), custom services, and equipment rental fees.
- Growers will be reimbursed based on paid receipts.
- Eligible species include single cereal grains or cover crop seed mixes.
- Cover crops may be planted in open plots/fields, raised beds, or a high tunnel.
- Growers should follow cover crop planting recommendations made by the seed company or the [University of Maryland Extension](#) for eligible species.

The program is funded by the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund and managed by the department's Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program. Growers who want to apply should contact Bill Tharpe, Program Administrator, at (410) 841-5869 or bill.tharpe@maryland.gov. For additional information, please visit: https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/Small-Acreage-Cover-Crop-Program.aspx.

Dicamba: Here, Gone, and Now Back

Mark VanGessel, Weed Management Specialist | mjv@umd.edu
University of Delaware

The EPA has approved special formulations of dicamba for use with dicamba-resistant soybeans (Xtend). These are not new formulations, Engenia, Tavium and Stryax. Stryax is a new name for Xtendimax. All of these are formulated for lower volatility, but none of them eliminated the volatility inherent with the dicamba molecule.

The rates differ between the three products because they have different concentrations of dicamba. They all require a drift reduction agent and a volatility reduction agent with each application. All applicators need to complete dicamba-specific training, refer to the companies' websites for the training.

Read the specific labels for application instructions and precautions. A few things to note:

- 240 ft downwind buffer between application site and sensitive areas,
- apply when wind is between 3 and 10 mph,
- only two applications per season are allowed
- do not apply with AMS
- do not apply if forecasted temperatures are 95 degrees or above either on the day of the application or the following day. The last two years this occurred June 23, soybeans planted after mid-May will need a postemerge spray after the third week of June.
- if temperatures are between 85 and 95 degrees, do not treat more than 50% of the growers' dicamba resistant soybeans (see label)
- fields treated with dicamba must have three (3) mitigations points for ESA (Endangered Species Act) requirements.



University of Delaware and University of Maryland Launch Free Virtual H-2A Farm Labor Seminar Series

Paul Goeringer, Agriculture Law Specialist | lgoeringer@umd.edu
University of Maryland, Agriculture Law Education Initiative

The University of Maryland Extension (UME), the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics (AREC), and the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension will host a free virtual seminar series titled "Exploring H-2A Farm Labor in the Mid-Atlantic Region."

The three-part series will take place from March 31 through April 21, 2026, and is designed to help agricultural employers better understand the complexities of the H-2A temporary agricultural worker program.

As labor challenges continue to impact agricultural operations across the region, the H-2A program has become an increasingly important option for securing seasonal workforce needs. This seminar series will provide participants with practical insights into the financial, legal, and regulatory considerations associated with the program.

"Producers are facing increasing pressure to secure reliable labor, and the H-2A program can be a valuable tool when used correctly," said Paul Goeringer, Principal Faculty Specialist and Extension Legal Specialist with the University of Maryland. "This seminar series helps farmers understand not just the costs, but also the legal and compliance responsibilities that come with participating in the program."

The virtual seminars will be held via Zoom from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. on the following dates:

- **March 31, 2026** – *The Real Cost of H-2A Workers*.
Speaker: Nate Bruce, University of Delaware
- **April 7, 2026** – *Legal Aspects of the H-2A Process*.
Speakers: Brandon Davis, Phelps Dunbar LLP; Paul Goeringer, University of Maryland

- **April 21, 2026** – *State Department of Labor Considerations*. Speakers: Ross Weiner, Maryland Department of Labor; Ellen Romero, Delaware Department of Labor

The seminar series is offered at no cost; however, advance registration is required. Participants can register online at <https://go.umd.edu/H2AWebinars>.

This program is supported by the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center through USDA-NIFA award no. 2024-70027-42540.

This program is offered by land-grant institutions committed to equal opportunity and access. Individuals requiring accommodations should contact program organizers at least two weeks prior to the event.



THE
HOWARD & SONDRABENDER
EDUCATIONAL SERIES

The Art & Science of Saddle Functionality & Fitting
How Tack Design Influences Performance & Welfare in your Horse

Thursday, April 16th 6pm-8pm
Hosted at the Maryland Horse Library & Education Center
321 Main St. Reisterstown, MD 21136



Annette Gavin
BHSism, Society of Master Saddler Master
Saddle Fitter & Qualified Bridle Fitter





Amber Markley
Society of Master Saddler Master Saddle Fitter &
Qualified Bridle Fitter, Lantra Trained Bit Fitter

This talk explores how saddle and tack design directly affect a horse's movement, comfort, and overall performance. Blending traditional craftsmanship with modern fitting principles, participants will gain practical insight into how proper saddle functionality supports equine welfare and long-term soundness.









Register for the Event at MarylandHorse.com/Events



Soybean Populations, Row Spacings, and Planting Dates

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Nicole Fiorellino, Extension Agronomist, University of Maryland | nfiorell@umd.edu

Soybean Row Spacing and Population Studies

Modern soybean varieties can tolerate lower seeding rates and still produce good yields, providing there are no other issues with stand loss or stress. In southern Delaware, two studies (2022 and 2023) observed no yield difference when planting full season beans (MG 4.2, late May planting date) when planted between 60,000 to 180,000 seeds per acre. You may consider dropping your seeding rates, considering your regional weather, planting date, and soil conditions.

Over both years, 15" row spacing provided an 8-to-10 bushel advantage compared to 30" rows. A narrower row spacing helps soybeans canopy faster, providing more leaf area per acre to increase yields.

Maryland and Delaware Planting Date Studies

Planting soybeans earlier can provide more vegetative growth before flowering commences, closing the canopy earlier and providing more nodes for pods. In years prior, soybeans would be planted after corn, so that early planting usually referred to May. Now we may consider late April to be early, and many mid-western studies have observed yields steadily decline as soybeans are planted later into May. Even when you choose to plant earlier, colder soils (<50°F) and saturated conditions can limit germination and growth. What is considered early for the Mid-Atlantic though, where our climates range from Coastal to Appalachian?

Between 2020-2022, University of Maryland and University of Delaware performed planting date trials for soybeans from lower Delaware (Georgetown) to the mid-shore (Wye Rec, MD), piedmont (Clarksville, MD), and Ridge & Valley (Keedysville). All planting dates were at least two weeks apart, typically starting in mid-April (weather and field conditions permitting) and the final planting date in mid to late May.

Although earlier planting (April) did produce earlier canopy closure and sometimes earlier flowering, yields were only statistically different at two site years, the Wye and Clarksville in 2021 (Figure 1). The latest planting

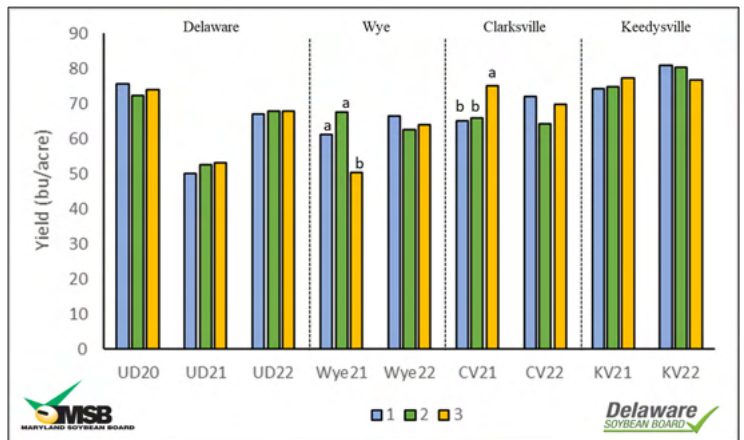


Figure 1. Soybean yields based on early (1), mid (2), and later (3) planting dates for soybeans in Delaware (UD), the Wye Rec, MD, Clarksville Rec (CV), MD, and Keedysville Rec (KV), MD.

date at the Wye (May 28th) did have the lowest yields, compared to either April 23 or May 12, 2021. In Clarksville, yields were higher on the latest planting date of May 19th, compared to April 21st or May 5th. This could be due to the timing of rainfall or temperature conditions during early stages that season, as there was a lot of variability for the first two planting dates in yield.

For the other seven site by year combinations, there was no benefit to planting earlier, but there was also no yield penalty (Figure 1). In fact, we purposely did not apply a seed treatment to provide a more suitable environment for disease pressure. At the UD site in 2021, one row unit planted too deep in April, but yields remained similar to May planting. Freeze damage at UD in 2022 cause the death of some leaf and cotyledon tissue, but the soybeans recovered and matched later planted yields.

As there was no clear benefit to planting in mid to late April for soybeans, planting decisions can be made based on field suitability, disease presence, or tillage and soil temperatures. As noted in the population studies above, these decisions should be matched with local knowledge of yield potential, planting dates, and potential freeze damage.

This article appears in April 2024, Volume 15, Issue 1 of [Agronomy News](#).



Harford County to Host 2026 Agriculture Symposium “Rooted in Change” May 9

Harford County Government press release

Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly is inviting the community to participate in the 2026 Agriculture Symposium, “Rooted in Change,” on **Saturday, May 9, 2026, from 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** at North Harford High School.

The symposium brings together farmers, agricultural professionals, and the community for a day of learning, networking, and discussion about the future of agriculture in Harford County. The event is open to anyone interested in agriculture or invested in farming.

“Agriculture is a key component of our Harford County economy, and the Agriculture Symposium is an opportunity for farmers and community members to share ideas and explore issues shaping agriculture today,” County Executive Bob Cassilly said. “From emerging technologies to farmland preservation, these conversations help ensure agriculture remains a strong and sustainable part of Harford’s future.”

The symposium is sponsored by Harford County Department of Economic Development as part of the Farmers & Community Partnership of Harford County. It will feature a keynote address by Jennie Schmidt, farmer and agricultural communicator behind The Foodie Farmer and Schmidt Farms. Following the keynote, attendees will participate in two of four available breakout sessions covering key topics impacting modern agriculture:

Innovation in the Field: Technology Transforming Agriculture

Speakers: Andy Kness, Agriculture Extension Educator, University of Maryland Extension; Ben Hushon, Certified Crop Advisor, The Mill

Expanding the Farm Business: Value-Added Strategies for Producers

Speakers: Kimmi Doran Lyons, Agricultural Specialist, Harford County Government; Martin Proulx, Agricultural Specialist, Maryland Department of Agriculture; Megan Keyes, Owner, Keyes Creamery

Women in Agriculture: Leadership, Networks, and Opportunity

Speakers: Kristin Kirkwood, Executive Director, Harford Land Trust; Emmy Dallam, Owner, Homelands Poultry; Dr. Jennifer Trout, State Veterinarian, Maryland Department of Agriculture

Stewardship in Action: Protecting Farmland for the Future

Speakers: Bill Amoss, Harford Land Trust Conservation Award Winner and Vice Chair of the Harford County Agricultural Land Preservation Board; Jen Wilson, Agricultural Land Preservation Program Administrator, Harford County Government; Rob Weaver, District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Registration is \$10 per person, which includes breakfast, lunch, seminars, live demonstrations, and access to the vendor fair. Vendor registration is \$20 and includes all attendee benefits plus space to host a booth during the vendor fair.

Registration is required by **April 30, 2026**. For more information or to register, visit: <https://bit.ly/HarfordAg>.



HARFORD COUNTY

AG-STRAVAGANZA

*Celebrating Harford County Agriculture,
Earth Day, and America 250*

3519 CONOWINGO RD., STREET
SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026 | 10 AM - 3 PM

*Rain or
Shine!*

**KIDS
ACTIVITIES**

**4-H MARKET-
PLACE**

**RAIN BARREL
RAFFLE**

**COMPOST BIN
RAFFLE**

**FREE MULCH
AND
COMPOST**
BRING YOUR
OWN CONTAINER

**MEET MACK,
"THE DOG
WHO SAVED
THE BEES!"**



JOESTING-GORSUCH HOUSE
A Colonial Family Experience



THE GROVE BARN
Earth Day Exhibitors



AGRICULTURAL CENTER
Open House



**COLONIAL
ACTIVITIES
AND
EXHIBITS**

LIVE MUSIC

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TRUCKS**

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**12 PM
PATRIOTIC
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UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND
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AG NOTES

University of Maryland Extension | Harford County

Dates to remember

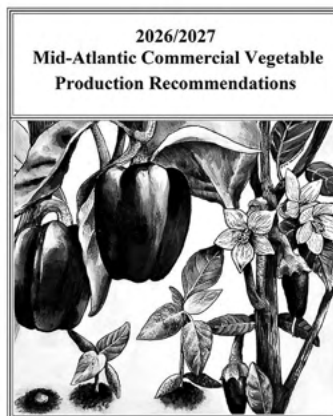
31 Mar, 07 & 21 Apr. Farm Labor Seminar Series. 12-1 PM.
Online via Zoom. Free. Register at go.umd.edu/H2AWebinars.

01 Apr. Annual Implementation Report (AIR) due to Maryland
Department of Agriculture.

02 Apr. Equine Wellness Seminar. 6-8 PM. Central MD
Research & Education Center, Ellicott City. Free. Register at
go.umd.edu/equinehealth.

25 Apr. Ag-Stravaganza. 10-2 PM. Harford County Agricultural
Center.

09 May. Harford County Ag Symposium. 7:30-2 PM. North
Harford High School. \$10. Register at
<https://bit.ly/HarfordAg>.



Get your copy of the
2026-2027 Commercial
Vegetable Production
Guide or contact the
Extension office for a
print copy.



April 2026