



Starting a Farm Enterprise in Maryland: Checklist

Factsheet FS-946
2012

Consumer interest in locally grown products is increasing.

A local market for vegetable, fruit, livestock, value added and other rural enterprises is created.

Farmers start growing and selling local products directly to consumers through marketing outlets such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), farmers markets and other venues where local products can be purchased.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2007 Census, direct to consumer marketing amounted to \$1.2 billion in current dollar sales, compared with \$551 million in 1997.

Starting a farm or adding a new farm enterprise can be an enjoyable and attractive business decision. When starting a new farm enterprise many questions need to be answered in the areas of production, regulatory, business and marketing topics.

This factsheet contains a listing of resources as you consider a new farm enterprise. It includes government agencies, organizations, and production information that will be vital for getting started and

operating a successful farm business. Review the summaries below, visit the websites and contact these resources for more information.

AGENCY CHECKLIST

The resources below provide information including research, production and regulations for starting a farm enterprise. If you have difficulty finding specific information on these sites or have follow up questions you can contact your local University of Maryland Extension office and a staffed educator will assist you. <http://extension.umd.edu/locations>

- **University of Maryland Extension (UME)** – Visit the UME website and your county Extension Office for agriculture, natural resource information, and educational programs. <http://extension.umd.edu>
- **Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)** – The state department that oversees a number of agricultural regulations, licensing and conservation as well as marketing and promoting the agriculture industry. <http://www.mda.maryland.gov>
- **County Zoning** – There are regulations regarding property zoning and allowable practices. If you construct a building, post signage or have animals, there may be zoning requirements that must be met. <http://www.extension.umd.edu/mredc/get-connected/mredc-resource-map>
- **County and State Health Department** – Baking, canning, food item processing and other water, septic and food issues are regulated by county and state health codes. <http://www.extension.umd.edu/mredc/specialty-modules/food-processing>
- **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)** – If the property is currently farmland and enrolled in a federal program, you will need to contact your county USDA Farm Service Agency before any crops are planted. FSA offers farm

disaster payments, low interest loans and conservation programs.

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

- **USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)** – NRCS works with landowners through conservation planning and assistance to benefit the soil, water, air, plants, and animals for productive lands and healthy ecosystems. There are programs and funding available that your farm may be eligible for. If you have a newly purchased farm it may be enrolled in a current program. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

The websites and information provided in this section will guide you through production aspects of your farm enterprise.

- **Soil Health and Fertility**
 - **Soil Type** – Knowing your land and soil is extremely important to the productivity of a cropping enterprise. Visit the site, enter your farm address and map out your field. This website will summarize soil type and productivity. <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>
 - **Soil Testing** – This test will provide you with fertility and pH information for your soils. It will be important to get a soil test and recommendations before planting your crop. <http://extension.umd.edu/learn/2-soil-sampling-and-testing>
 - **Nematode Testing** – This test is important for certain crops and regions of Maryland. Decide if this is needed for your crop. Testing services are available at the link below. <http://extension.udel.edu/ag/plant-diseases/nematology/>
 - If you need assistance or analysis interpretation of the soil information above or have other additional questions contact your county University of Maryland Extension Office. <http://extension.umd.edu/locations>
- **Pesticide Certification** – Pesticide certification is needed if you plan to purchase

and apply pesticides. A Certified Private Applicator is a person in the State of Maryland that can purchase and apply restricted use pesticides to agricultural commodities on their own or leased property.

http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/pesticide_regulation.aspx

• Nutrient Management

- A Plan – A Nutrient Management Plan requires all Maryland farmers grossing \$2,500 or more annually or raising 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight to implement a nutrient management plan. A plan must be written by a certified nutrient management consultant. For a listing of consultants in your area visit the MDA website or call your local Extension office. http://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/nutrient_management.aspx
- Voucher – If you spread manure or fertilizer on 10 acres or more you are required to attend a two-hour training and receive a Nutrient Applicator Voucher Certificate. Trainings are held in the winter through MDA and local Extension offices.
- More information about the Maryland Nutrient Management law and your farm operation is available at your county University of Maryland Extension Office or online. <http://www.extension.umd.edu/anmp>
- **Crop/Livestock Production Information** – Crops and livestock systems are very specific. Be sure to research weather, equipment, labor, markets, etc. when starting your enterprise.

UMD Websites of Interest

Aquaculture	www.extension.umd.edu/aquaculture
Beginning Farmers	www.extension.umd.edu/newfarmer
Equine	www.extension.umd.edu/horses
Field Crops	www.mdcrops.umd.edu
Grain, Leases, Custom Rates	www.extension.umd.edu/grainmarketing
Grapes and Fruit	www.extension.umd.edu/smallfruit
Marketing	www.extension.umd.edu/agmarketing
Environment and Natural Resources	www.extension.umd.edu/topics/environment
Nursery, IPM landscape,	www.extension.umd.edu/ipm

greenhouse	
Pastures	www.mdforages.umd.edu
Plant Clinic – plant pest diagnosis	http://extension.umd.edu/plantdiagnosticlab
Poultry – Small Flock	http://extension.umd.edu/poultry
Sheep and Goat	http://extension.umd.edu/sheep-goats
Vegetables	http://www.extension.umd.edu/mdvegetables

BUSINESS & MARKETING CHECKLIST

Business planning and marketing are an important part of enterprise development. The success of your farm is dependent on it.

- **Business Plan** – A complete business plan will help organize your thoughts on a new or expanding agriculture business. Information on writing a business plan and more is found at the Maryland Rural Enterprise Development Center. <http://www.extension.umd.edu/mredc>
- **Chamber of Commerce** – A local Chamber of Commerce is a great way to interact, network and market with other small businesses in your area. Chambers of Commerce function for business networking, furthering interests of local businesses and will often have promotional and educational programs. Google your county Chamber of Commerce for contact information.
- **County Economic Development and Tourism Offices** – located in most counties and incorporated towns the local Economic Development Departments and Offices of Tourism can be a great way to connect, market and promote your business. Call your local and neighboring county departments to introduce yourself and your business.
- **Maryland Department of Agriculture** – is responsible for a number of laws and regulations for environmental and consumer protection. Investigate required licenses and/or permits for your product. <http://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/Licenses-and-Permits.aspx>

The site also includes information on marketing, conservation, statistics, events and other agricultural information.

<http://mda.maryland.gov>

- **Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development** - This Department supports new business, stimulates private investment, encourages the expansion and retention of existing companies and provides Maryland businesses with workforce training and financial assistance. The Department assists with products and services at home and abroad. <http://www.choosemaryland.org>
- **MARBIDCO** – MARBIDCO is a quasi-public financing agency that makes low-interest loans to young and beginning farmers and other enterprises looking to develop or expand food/fiber production or processing operations. MARBIDCO also offers grants for value added processing, and facilitates agricultural land conservation easement purchases using installment purchase agreements. <http://www.marbidco.org>
- **Maryland's Best** – Maryland's Best is a program managed by the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Marketing and Agribusiness Development section. List your farm and link with consumers through the website's promotions and advertising. <http://marylandsbest.net>

- **Small Business Development Centers** – This agency is available at locations around the state to assist small businesses with loan guarantees, contracts, counseling and other forms of assistance. To get more information or to find a local office you can visit their website. <http://www.sba.gov>.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

<http://www.agrisk.umn.edu/>

- National Ag Risk Education Library organizes thousands of risk management materials which help producers quickly locate information, tools, and assistance on specific risk management topics. <http://www.smallfarmsuccess.info/>
- This site is to help farmers: effectively use consumer research and direct marketing techniques, develop sustainable and profitable crop rotation strategies, adopt financial strategies that enable farmers to remain viable. <http://www.attra.org/>
- ATTRA is a National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service. It provides information and other technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, Extension agents, educators, and others involved in sustainable agriculture in the United States. <http://www.nesare.org/>
- The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has helped advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities through a nationwide research and education grants program. <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/familysmallfarms>
- This web site is intended to be a one-stop gateway to resources, benefits and services offered by USDA for small farmers. <http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/>
- The purpose of this web site is to provide easy access to information for small-scale farmers and those who work with them.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Maryland, College Park, and local governments. Cheng-i Wei, Director of University of Maryland Extension.

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