

Starting a Farm Enterprise in Maryland

Starting a farm or adding a new farm enterprise can be an enjoyable and attractive business decision. However, there are several questions and considerations when starting a farm relating to topics such as agricultural production, regulatory compliance, business permitting and licensing, and product marketing.

Several local, state, and federal agencies support agriculture in Maryland. Each plays a different role in agriculture production and farm operations. The chart below is an abbreviated summary of those roles.

This factsheet lists contacts and resources to explore as you consider a new or expanding farm enterprise. Resources from government agencies and organizations provide production information vital for starting 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 include research, production, and regulations for starting a farm enterprise. If you have



difficulty finding specific information on these sites or have follow-up questions, contact your local University of Maryland Extension office, and a staffed educator can 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)** – This Maryland state department oversees several agricultural regulations, licensing, and conservation, as well as marketing and promoting the agriculture industry. <http://www.mda.maryland.gov>
- ▶ **County Government** – Checking in with county, town, or city government will connect you with local resources such as zoning, permits, health department, and economic development.
- ▶ **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)** – Multiple departments within the USDA can provide support for your farm business. For example, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have offices in your county that can help identify loans and conservation programs. <https://www.farmers.gov>

Production Checklist

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

- ▶ **Agriculture and Food Systems (AgFS)** at UME focuses on crop production, livestock management, and farm planning. <https://go.umd.edu/agfs>
- ▶ **Soil Health and Fertility**
 - **Soil Type** – Knowing your land and its soil is extremely important to the productivity of a cropping enterprise. Visit the NRCS' WebSoil Survey website, enter your farm address, and map out your field. This website will summarize soil type and productivity. <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>
 - **Soil Testing** – A soil test provides soil fertility and pH information. Getting a soil test and recommendations before planting your crop is a good production practice. <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/soil-testing-and-soil-testing-labs>

- If you need assistance understanding or interpreting the results of your soil information, or have additional questions, contact your county UME office. <http://extension.umd.edu/locations>

- ▶ **Pesticide Certification** – In Maryland, a Certified Private Applicator can purchase and apply restricted use pesticides to agricultural commodities on their own or on a leased property. http://mda.maryland.gov/plantspests/Pages/pesticide_regulation.aspx
- ▶ **Pesticide Training** – Pesticide training is available through UME, including certification and recertification training. <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/pesticide-safety-and-training>

▶ **Nutrient Management**

- **A Plan** – Maryland farmers grossing \$2,500 or more annually or raising 8,000 pounds or more of live animal weight are required to implement a Nutrient Management Plan. The 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 UME Office or online. <https://go.umd.edu/anmp>

- ▶ **Crop/Livestock Production Information** – Crops and livestock systems are very specific. Always research weather, equipment, labor, markets, etc. before starting your enterprise. Specialized information on production can be found at: <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/agriculture-food-systems/program-areas>

Business & Marketing Checklist

Business planning and marketing is an essential 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 at <https://go.umd.edu/mredc>, and at the Maryland Beginning Farmer Website, <https://go.umd.edu/newfarmer>.
- ▶ **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 exist to enable business networking and furthering the interests of local businesses, and will often have promotional and educational programs.
- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **State Permits and Regulations** – Be sure to research laws and regulations related to business operations for environmental and consumer protection. Investigate any required licenses and/or permits before selling your product. <https://onestop.md.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 quasipublic 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. Use the program's website to list your farm and link with consumers through its 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. Visit their website to get more information or find a local office. <http://www.sba.gov>

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This publication, *Starting a Farm Enterprise in Maryland* (EBR-2022-0648) is a part of a collection produced by the University of Maryland Extension within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The information presented has met UME peer-review standards, including internal and external technical review. For help accessing this or any UME publication contact: itaccessibility@umd.edu

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