



THE OLD LINE Farmer

July/Aug 2026

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Brad Thompson from Foxborough Nursery in Harford County shows off frost-damaged plants.

USDA Declares Several Maryland Counties as Natural Disaster Areas After Advocacy Campaign

On June 15th, the United States Department of Agriculture announced their decision to declare 12 Maryland counties as primary natural disaster areas following the devastating late-April freeze.

This critical Secretarial designation opens the door for the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend emergency credit to impacted producers. These emergency loans will provide a vital financial lifeline, allowing growers to meet recovery needs such as replacing essential equipment, reorganizing farming operations, or refinancing certain debts as they navigate a challenging year.

"Since the days immediately following the late April frost, Maryland Farm Bureau has constantly stressed the need for assistance for our hardworking farmers who were affected by this extreme weather event," said MDFB President Jamie Raley. "We are grateful to the USDA and our partners in government for giving our farmers this much needed relief and security for them to keep going."

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SAVE THE DATE:
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...and more!



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The Old Line Farmer

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A Maryland native from Frederick County, she returns home after spending the past two years serving as a Communications Specialist for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. She graduated from Oklahoma State University where she was a double major in Agricultural Communications and Animal Science.

"I'm excited to be joining the team at MDFB and especially excited to be back home in Maryland," says Mickinzi. "After building my experience in agricultural communications, I'm looking forward to bringing what I've learned back home and serving the agriculture community that first inspired my passion."

As an Operations Coordinator, she is tasked with supporting county farm bureaus and committees on their local programming, member engagement, support agricultural advocacy, and strengthen our presence at the county and state levels. She joins Katie Walker to complete the operations team.

Ferguson and her family have deep ties in Maryland agriculture and Farm Bureau. McKinzi has been involved in Frederick County 4-H since she was 8 years old. In 2022, she served as a Communications and Livestock Intern for the Maryland State Fair. Her father, Colby, previously served as MDFB's Director of Government Relations.

MDFB New Hire: Mickinzi Ferguson

Maryland Farm Bureau is thrilled to welcome its newest addition to the team, Mickinzi Ferguson as an Operations Coordinator.

Members can contact Mickinzi at her email at mferguson@marylandfb.org.



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Becky Yost Wins 2026 Golden Owl Award, Maryland's Ag Educator of the Year

By Katie Walker

The Golden Owl Award recognizes outstanding agricultural educators across the state of Maryland. The recipient is nominated by colleagues, present or former students, or community members and is selected based on how well they demonstrated a dedication to agriculture, commitment to students, and their impact on students and the local community.

The 2026 recipient is Becky Yost, an ag educator, FFA Advisor, and proud alumna of Northern Garrett High School. Yost's passion, mentorship, and service have left a lasting impact on her students and community. Yost is known for her unwavering commitment to helping students discover their potential, broaden their perspectives, and build confidence far beyond the classroom.

Nationwide, in partnership with the Maryland Farm Bureau and Maryland FFA, recognized Yost as the Golden Owl Award grand prize winner during the Maryland FFA



Yost gives a hug to Maryland FFA Executive Director Terrie Shank after her win.



Yost accepts her award from former student and FFA VP, Connor Clary.

State Convention. In addition to the title of Maryland's Ag Educator of the Year, Yost will receive the coveted Golden Owl Award trophy and a \$3,000 Nationwide-funded donation to further FFA's agricultural education efforts.

Under Yost's leadership, Northern Garrett's agricultural program has grown significantly. She has transformed the program by updating curriculum and the facilities, including the animal science barn and greenhouse. Yost has also expanded hands-on learning opportunities through technical skill development in welding, machinery operation, and tractor driving.

The dedication to her students is evident through her work with the FFA program. She invests countless hours mentoring students, coaching competitive teams, leadership development activities, and career exploration. As a result, Northern Garrett FFA is frequently represented at the state and national levels. Former and current students credit Yost with inspiring them to step out of their comfort zones, take on new challenges, and become confident young leaders.

Other amazing ag educators who were named as finalists for the award included Greg Stull from Walkersville High School in Frederick, Sarah Skinner from the Center of Applied Technology North in Anne Arundel County, Sarah Raulerson from Hereford Middle School in Baltimore County, and Jerry Kelley from Parkside Career & Technical Education in Wicomico County. We want to send a big congratulations to all of our nominees for their hard work and dedication to their students.

Becky Yost is a respected advocate for agriculture and a leader in Garrett County. She has had a positive impact on countless students and is helping to shape the future of agricultural education by welcoming five student teachers into her classroom.

The future of agriculture in Maryland relies on dedicated educators, like Becky, who go above and beyond for their students. Her dedication has undoubtedly shaped future leaders in our state. Thank you to our heritage partner at Nationwide, our friends at Maryland FFA, and everyone who helped recognized Becky and all of our state's outstanding ag teachers.

MDA Launches Grants to Boost Urban Ag & Community Gardens

The Maryland Department of Agriculture is excited to launch a new grant program designed to support the growth and development of urban farms and community gardens. This initiative aims to enhance community access to fresh, healthy produce grown using environmentally sustainable farming practices.

"Urban farms and community gardens are transforming neighborhoods by bringing fresh, locally grown food directly to the communities they serve," said Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks. "This program invests in the innovation and dedication of urban growers, providing resources that meet their unique needs while expanding access to healthy, nutritious food for Marylanders — no matter where they live."

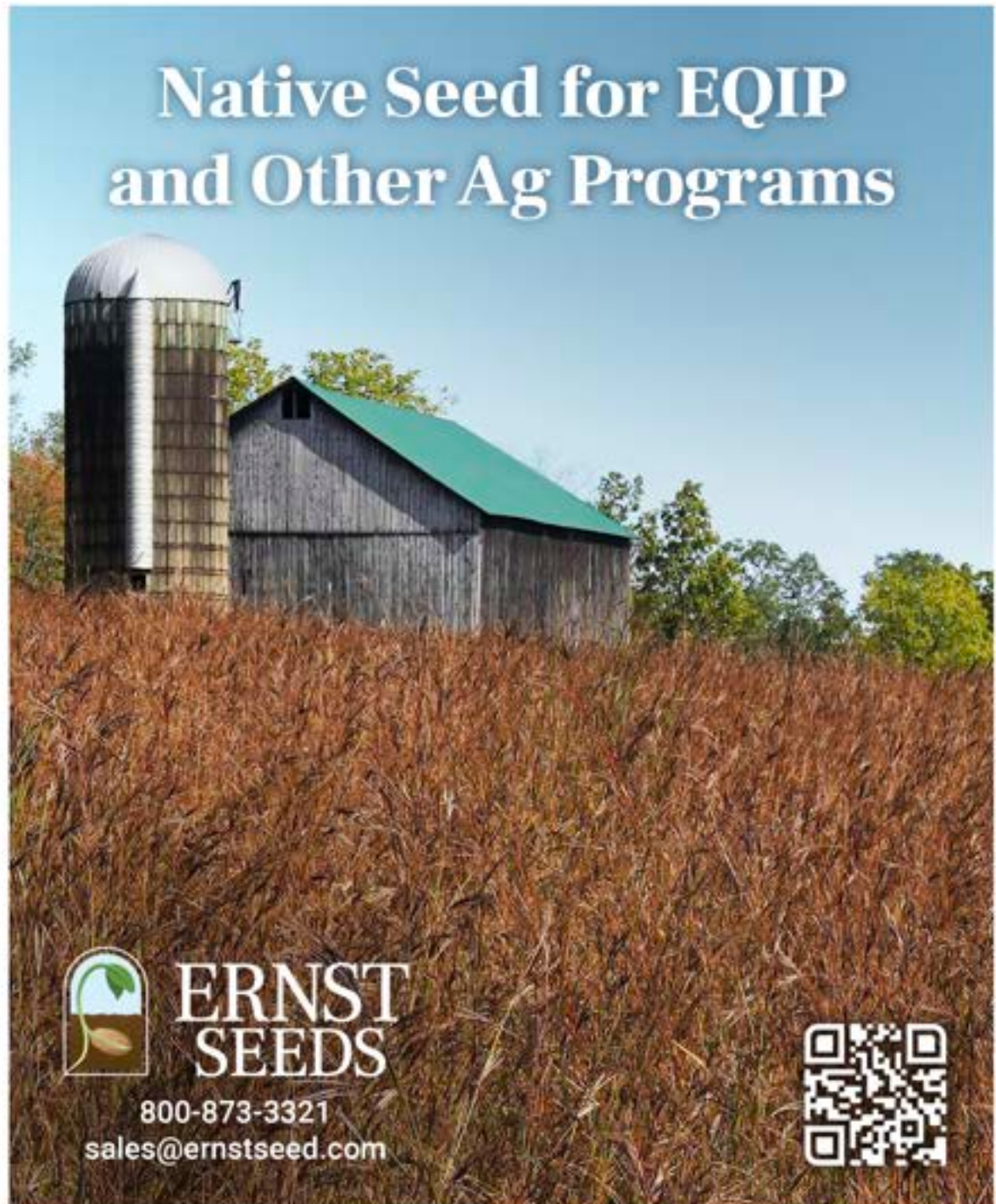
The Urban Agriculture Grant Program supports both urban farms and community gardens, whether they are startups or existing operations looking to expand. Our grants cover a variety of areas and needs, including:

- **Capital Improvements:** Funding for infrastructure such as refrigerated or dry storage, wash-and-pack stations, fencing, low tunnels and more.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Adoption of safe, environmentally sustainable practices, including the creation of pollinator habitat, obtaining certification in the use of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), installing composting units and nutrient management planning.
- **Innovative Farming Solutions:** Investing in rooftop gardens and controlled environment agriculture.
- **Education:** Programs that focus on composting, soil health, and sustainable farming practices.
- **Real Property:** The purchase of real property in an urban area. (This option is capped at 20% of the grant award.)
- **Operating Expenses:** Covers certain operating expenses. (Capped at 15% of the grant award)

The program invites grant applications from individual growers, organized for-profit agricultural businesses and non-profit organizations during the annual open enrollment period, which runs from June 15 through July 24, 2026. Please note that the maximum funding per application is \$10,000. To ensure immediate cash flow for growers, grants will be paid using a tiered payment schedule without the need for reimbursement.

To qualify for these grants, applicants must produce a farm product that generates at least \$1,000 in sales or donations annually. All grant recipients are required to comply with local, state and federal regulations, and obtain any necessary permits for their projects. Eligibility for this grant is limited to operations located in urban areas as defined by the United States Census Bureau.

Contact bill.tharpe@maryland.gov for more info.



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American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall Visits Linden Hall Farm in Hagerstown

By Jeb Burchick

As part of the America 250 celebrations, American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall visited Linden Hall Farm & Orchard in Hagerstown as part of a media event to promote AFBF's Farm 250 initiative. The Farm 250 campaign was started to reflect on the amazing strides America's farmers have made since the nation's founding.

President Duvall joined Maryland Farm Bureau President Jamie Raley and farmowners Brian and Nicole Forsythe to discuss the changes that this farm has undergone. At this century farm, the Forsythe's milk over a hundred cattle and grow seasonal produce.

Brian's immediate family came into this property in 1876, but the large farmhouse on the property dates back to the 1700s. The history is even inscribed into the walls of the house, where Confederate soldiers signed their names onto the wall while using the attic as a lookout post after the battle of Gettysburg in 1863. Years later, when Brian's family owned the farmhouse, they allowed it to be used as a speakeasy during the prohibition era.



AFBF President Zippy Duvall takes a selfie with Nicole Forsythe and her show cow.

Despite these changes, the one constant to the property through all these years is their commitment to agriculture. President Duvall was on-hand to tour the farm, remarking on the beautiful rural landscape and agricultural innovation happening on this farm.

"You could ride just a few miles outside the Nation's Capital, the most powerful city in the world," President Duvall told DC News Now reporter Steven Cohen during the media event. "You'll find some of the most beautiful farmland

and some of the most innovative farmers in America."

"It was such an incredible opportunity to host AFBF here on our farm," said Nicole. "Even though it's a huge organization, it was nice to be seen by both our state and national level of representation and be able to show them a glimpse in

our day to day life to better understand what pressures and struggles we feel on our farm."

A fun anecdote to AFBF's visit was Brian's service to the farming community as the President of the Washington County Farm Bureau. On this hot June day in Hagerstown, this farm played host to three Farm Bureau presidents at the local, state, and national levels.

"Thankfully Farm Bureau is there to advocate on our behalf, because I cannot begin to keep track of all the bills that go through the Maryland legislation, let alone the Federal level," said Brian. "They are there constantly looking out for us, helping to amend or defeat anti-agriculture bills."

In a testament to the truly grassroots nature of Farm Bureau's leadership, all three presidents are working farmers. In addition to Brian's dairy farm, AFBF President Duvall is a third-generation farmer from Georgia where he raises beef cattle and broiler chickens. MDFB President Jamie Raley has a greenhouse nursery operation with a small beef herd in St. Mary's County.

Check out President Duvall's column about his visit and the Farm 250 initiative on page 16



(L to R): American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall, Maryland Farm Bureau President Jamie Raley, and Washington County Farm Bureau President Brian Forsythe.



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Frost Damage (Cont'd from Page 1)

The declaration follows a data-driven advocacy campaign spearheaded by MDFB. In the immediate aftermath of the freeze, MDFB launched an internal statewide damage survey. The findings showed that nearly 90 impacted growers reported an average estimated production loss of 67.5 percent across frost-damaged crops, with many operations in heavily hit counties reporting near-total losses of 90 percent or higher.

Supported by this data, MDFB sent a formal petition on May 14th to USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins, requesting an expedited declaration. This letter was followed by similar requests from Governor Wes Moore and Maryland's Congressional Delegation. MDFB subsequently supported the State of Maryland's May 24 directives to assist growers, which included critical relief like waiving the production minimum requirements for Class 4 Limited Wineries.

"We are grateful to Secretary Rollins and our federal partners at the USDA for their swift, collaborative response," said Governor Wes Moore in response to the disaster declaration. "We thank the Maryland Farm Bureau and Maryland's Congressional Delegation for their partnership in supporting the needs of Maryland farmers and the statewide effort that helped secure this critical USDA designation."

"This federal designation provides an important safety net to support what will be a multi-year recovery process," said Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks. "Moving forward, the state will continue to work side-by-side with federal agencies and our congressional delegation to deploy every tool at our disposal to navigate this environmental volatility and preserve marketplace stability."

Throughout the crisis, MDFB served as the primary megaphone for affected producers, keeping the agricultural community's struggles in the public eye. On April 30th, President Raley released a video message urging all affected producers to officially report their losses to their local FSA offices. MDFB leadership and staff took those stories directly to the airwaves with interviews to WUSA, WMAL, WTOP, and more.

FSA emergency loans are now available to eligible farmers in the designated counties, including Baltimore, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Dorchester, Frederick, Howard, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Washington, and Wicomico Counties. Contiguous counties included in the disaster declaration also include Allegany, Anne Arundel, Harford, Kent, Prince George's, Talbot, Worcester, and Baltimore City.

In late June, the USDA issued a similar disaster declaration in many Virginia counties. This declaration makes a handful of Maryland counties eligible for disaster assistance as contiguous counties, including the previously undeclared Charles County. Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to begin the application process.



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South Mountain Creamery in Middletown | #MemberSpotlight



Come and meet the cows who make the ice cream!
South Mountain Creamery started with a classic tradition: old-school, glass-bottle milk deliveries. Located west of Frederick and north of Washington DC, the farm saw an opportunity to open their farm to the public and sell local dairy products. Today, visitors can stop by to purchase delicious ice cream and even meet the calves who will one day

become the ladies producing milk at the farm.
The farm is also a proud stop on Maryland's Best Ice Cream Trail. Now in its 14th year, this initiative by the Maryland Department of Agriculture encourages Marylanders to visit and support our state's on-farm creameries all summer long. Want to burn a few calories before indulging? You can easily pair a beautiful Maryland nature hike with a trip to the creamery.
Over the years, these trail stops have built a vibrant community. For Sophia, part of the third-generation running South Mountain Creamery, that connection is exactly what farming is all about.

"I like to say that we're built on community," says Sophia. "Our entire goal is to connect good food to good people."



Md. Farm Bureau Launches New Legal Services Benefit for Members

By Parker Welch

Running a farm means making decisions that carry real legal weight – signing a lease, forming a business entity, writing a will, or figuring out what happens to the land when you're ready to pass it down. For many Maryland farmers, the cost of even a single attorney conversation has been enough to put those questions on the back burner indefinitely. That changes now.

Maryland Farm Bureau (MDFB) has launched a new Legal Services Plan that gives every member in good standing access to a complimentary 30-minute initial consultation with MPL Law Firm, LLP, a firm with more than 30 years of experience serving agricultural clients across the region. The benefit took effect May 12, 2026, and is available immediately.

"Protecting your farm's future is exactly what this organization is here for," said Jamie Raley, MDFB President. "We wanted to give our members something that delivers real, practical value – the kind of access to legal expertise that makes a difference when you're making big decisions about your land, your business, and your legacy."

MPL Law Firm isn't a general-practice firm that occasionally handles farm cases. Agricultural law is their specialty. They currently service Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and have been providing the same service to them for several years. Their attorneys are well-versed in legal issues that come up in farm operations – from the kind of entity structure that best protects a family operation, to the fine print in a cash rent lease, to the estate planning questions that too many farmers leave unaddressed until it's too late.



Under the new plan, MDFB members can consult with MPL attorneys on matters including:

- Farm business formation and entity structuring, including LLCs and partnerships
- Real estate, zoning, and land use
- Right-to-Farm law and nuisance claim protections
- Farm lease agreements – cash rent, crop share, hunting leases, and renewable energy leases
- Farm succession and transition planning
- Estate planning, including wills, trusts, and powers of attorney
- Agricultural tax programs and land preservation
- Employment law and civil litigation

The initial consultation is free, with no obligation to continue beyond that first conversation. After the 30-minute session, the farmer and the attorney decide together whether it makes sense to move forward with formal legal representation.

For many farm families, the benefit may be most valuable simply as a starting point, a chance to ask a question without running up a meter.

"A lot of farmers have questions they've been putting off," Raley noted. "Maybe it's about their lease, their will, or what happens to the farm when they're ready to hand it down. This is a chance to finally just ask someone who knows – without it costing them anything."

That low-stakes entry point is by design. Legal issues on farms often go unaddressed not because farmers don't recognize them, but because they don't know where to start or whether the cost will justify the outcome. A free consultation lowers that barrier significantly.

To use the benefit, the process is straightforward. Members contact MPL Law Firm directly, mention their Maryland Farm Bureau membership, and MPL's team will verify eligibility and connect them with an appropriate attorney. Members who aren't sure where to start can also reach out to the MDFB office for help getting connected. MPL Law Firm can be reached at 717-845-1524 or at mpl-law.com/farm.

Only members in good standing are eligible to use the benefit. Members with questions about their membership status should contact MDFB directly or visit maryland-fb.org.

The Legal Services Plan is the product of a formal agreement between MDFB and MPL Law Firm. MDFB is looking to expand this offer with additional firms across the state that suit the geography and regional-specific concerns of Maryland farmers.

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The “Wi-Fi Guy” Gets Farmers Connected



By Parker Welch

If you've attended the Maryland Farm Bureau Annual Convention in the last several years, you've almost certainly passed the booth of the Wi-Fi Guy – a father-and-son team, Dustin and Tyler Higgins, who deliver custom-fit Wi-Fi solutions to farms, businesses, and homes across Maryland and beyond.

The agriculture community in Maryland is fortunate to have them. These two Washington County natives have a genuine passion for supporting Maryland farms and rural communities – a commitment reflected in their vision statement: “Establishing the digital backbone of rural America, one business, one farm, one home at a time.”

Farm Bureau has long championed rural broadband access, and in 2026, reliable internet is no longer a luxury – it's a necessity. That's where the Wi-Fi Guy comes in. Through their Educated Internet approach, Dustin and Tyler evaluate a farm's unique ecosystem and recommend real solutions based on an on-site assessment of the property, considering what actually works for the operation's land, layout, and livelihood.

One Maryland Farm Bureau member who recently put that approach to work is Mary Lou Brown of Maple Breeze Farm in Hurlock.

“I first met the Wi-Fi Guy at the Convention in Cambridge a few years ago and kept seeing them each year at the bottom of the steps headed into the Delegate Session. This past year I was ready to give them a try, and what a blessing it has been.”

Mary Lou decided to reach out to the Wi-Fi Guy in hopes of finding a more affordable and reliable connectivity solution.

“I was paying for two internet service providers – AT&T and Verizon – just to make sure I always had some sort of service available,” she explained.

Even with two bills to pay, service wasn't always reliable. And whenever she had a question, her only options were a trip to a brick-and-mortar store or an online support agent who had never walked her farm or understood her operation. That changed when Dustin and Tyler visited.

Dustin and Tyler completed an in-depth analysis of Maple Breeze Farm's current state versus its ideal state. After assessing the property and the providers available in the area, they determined that Starlink was the best solution for Mary Lou's operation.

Mary Lou's poultry houses sit roughly a mile from her house. The Wi-Fi Guy was able to extend her internet signal from the house out to the farm, giving her one strong, reliable connection instead of two unreliable ones. The result: she eliminated the cost of a second service and cut her monthly internet bill in half, all while gaining better reliability.

Because she lives about a mile from the poultry houses, Mary Lou also relies on a camera system to monitor the farm. Now, when her poultry company arrives with a feed delivery, she can watch for the truck on camera and head over exactly when needed – saving her time and unnecessary trips.

In addition, she also uses an app that monitors the environment in her houses – the temperature, humidity, moisture, etc. Having a reliable connection matters when you're not always able to be on the premises. And when something goes wrong, or she's considering adding new technology, she has two people to call who already know her farm, her goals, and her operation, and who can offer real business solutions through technology.

Dustin and Tyler Higgins can be reached through wifiguyusa.com. And if you're attending the 111th Annual Maryland Farm Bureau Convention this year, you'll see them again at the bottom of the stairs so be sure to stop by and ask how they can help you and your farm.



Mary Lou speaks to the press outside her poultry houses.

Horizon Farm Credit: Applications Now Open for Inaugural Young, Beginning, and Small Farmer Grant Program

Farm Credit is proud to announce the launch of its Young, Beginning, and Small Farmer Grant Program, a new initiative designed to invest in the future of agriculture by empowering emerging farmers and strengthening rural communities. The program will award ten \$20,000 grants to eligible farmers, providing critical funding for on-farm improvements, innovation, and business growth.

"We work with farmers every day, and we see what it takes to get started and keep going," said Johanna Rohrer, Horizon Farm Credit Member Education & YBS Program Officer. "We're proud to support young,

beginning, and small farmers with opportunities like this, especially when we know those investments can make a real difference in helping their operations move forward."

The Young, Beginning, and Small Farmer Grant Program reflects Farm Credit's deep commitment as a cooperative to support agriculture at every stage. Whether farmers are launching a new operation, growing their business, or adapting to new challenges, young, beginning, and small farmers play a critical role in ensuring the long-term strength of the industry.

To apply, applicants must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Young Farmers: Between 18-35 years of age
- Beginning Farmers: 10 years or less of reported Schedule F income
- Small Farmers: Less than \$350,000 in annual gross cash farm income

Applicants must live within Horizon Farm Credit's territory, may apply individually or with a co-applicant, and may farm full-time or part-time. Applicants do not need to be a Farm Credit customer to apply.

The deadline to submit an application is August 21, 2026. For more information, visit horizonfc.com/ybs.



MDFB's Women's Leadership Program Pack "Fuel A Farmer" Bags

On June 10th, members of the Maryland Farm Bureau's Women's Leadership Committee (WLC) convened at the MDFB office in Davidsonville to pack hundreds of "Fuel a Farmer" bags. These bags are designed to encourage farmers during stressful working days over the summer and fall.

Filled with snacks, stress balls, and important mental health resources, these bags

will be distributed to farmers at grain receiving locations throughout Maryland.

This initiative goes hand-in-hand with American Farm Bureau Federation's recent "Farm State of Mind" program, designed to build awareness to reduce stigma and provides access to information and resources that promote farmer and rancher mental health wellness.

The Maryland Farm Bureau WLC program provides women with opportunities for growth and development to sharpen their skills and strengthen their ability to inspire change. The committee is chaired by Valarie Brinsfield and their annual meeting takes place at Maryland Farm Bureau's Convention on December 6th in Cambridge.



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Fresh produce in the mountains!

About as far-west in Maryland as you can go, in the rolling mountains of Appalachia, sits ALL Produce & Greenhouse. Levi Lantz and his family operate this farm growing specialty crops, many in greenhouses. The high-elevation in

ALL Produce & Greenhouse in Oakland | #MemberSpotlight

Garrett County means that on any given day, the temperature is ten to fifteen degrees cooler than the rest of the state. Despite this, the Lantz's greenhouses stay warm, allowing their produce to ripen a few weeks more quickly than conventionally planted produce.

The result of this is just about the freshest produce you can find, delivered to wholesale and retail markets, as well as their own farm stand. These markets are important, but family tradition is even more important.

Levi is accompanied by his one-year old Riley, who enjoys

snacking on small tomatoes while Dad works. It's in her eyes that Levi sees hope for the future.

"It's a lot of hard work, it's a lot of long hours, but we're all here together," says Levi with a smile. "At the end of the day, we enjoy being together."



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Jessie Flores Johnston
Rusted Star Ranch, Worcester County



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The Zipline: Celebrating 250 Years of American Agriculture



**By Zippy Duvall,
President of the
American Farm
Bureau
Federation**

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to spend time on a

century farm in Hagerstown, Maryland. As I stood with the family and heard stories of the generations who had worked that land before them, I couldn't help but think about how many farms across America have stories just like theirs.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday this Fourth of July, those stories are worth remembering. Independence Day is a time to celebrate the freedoms and opportunities that define our nation. It's also a chance to reflect on the people whose work helps make those opportunities possible.

FARM 250 Celebrates American Agriculture's Legacy

Long before highways, airports and technology connected the country, agriculture helped lay the foundation for communities to grow and thrive. Since then, generations of farmers and ranchers have helped feed our country and strengthen local economies.

The tools, crops and markets may change, but the commitment to caring for our land, our animals and our families remains the same.

Many farms are still family owned today. In fact, 97% of farms in this country are family farms. Some have been in the same family for generations. Others are just beginning to build a legacy of their own. Each farm has a unique story, but what we share is a commitment to hard work, stewardship and service that has helped shape our country.

One of the goals of FARM 250 is to help share those unique stories. Our FARM 250 webpage features farm

stories from across the country, including the Maryland farm I visited. If you have a story to tell, I encourage you to participate in our FARM 250 Photo Contest and help showcase the people, places and traditions that make agriculture such an important part of our country.

FARM 250 Looks to the Future of Agriculture

While FARM 250 celebrates our history, it is also a reminder that agriculture's story is still being written. Every generation of farmers faces new opportunities and new obstacles. The tools, crops and markets may change, but the commitment to caring for our land, our animals and our families remains the same. That commitment has driven remarkable innovation. Today, farmers produce more food while using fewer resources, thanks to advancements in agriculture. In fact, it would have taken 115 million more acres 30 years ago to produce the same amount of food we do today.

Farmers and ranchers will continue adapting, innovating and finding new ways to provide the food, fuel and fiber Americans depend on every day. We will continue caring for the land so it can support future generations. And we will continue strengthening the rural communities we call home. That spirit has carried American agriculture through the past 250 years, and it will carry us forward through the next 250 years as well.

This Fourth of July, and year-round, Farm Bureau is proud to celebrate the farm families who helped build this country and those who continue to move it forward. Our farm stories are woven into the fabric of our nation. And thanks to the resilience, innovation and commitment to serving others that mark farmers and ranchers from sea to shining sea, agriculture will continue to stock dinner tables and support communities across America for generations to come.

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Farm Labor Bill Answers Agriculture’s Call for Reform

By John Walt Boatright, American Farm Bureau Director of Government Affairs

Agriculture’s Labor Challenges

2026 is a year of important milestones for our country. Nearly all Americans will leave Fourth of July weekend with fresh memories of the America 250 celebrations. Many fewer will recognize that it has been 40 years since lawmakers last reformed our agricultural labor and immigration programs via the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

Why does that matter? For one, it was the last time Congress passed farm labor reforms into law, despite multiple attempts. It is also a reminder that farmers have been struggling with labor shortages for decades with little relief from policymakers.

Securing Agriculture’s Workforce Act

Enter Glenn “G.T.” Thompson, a nine-term Pennsylvania congressman and current chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. In 2023, he appointed a bipartisan group of lawmakers to deliberate and deliver solutions for the primary guestworker program for U.S. agriculture – the H-2A program. This group met with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including farmers and ranchers who struggle to secure a reliable workforce regardless of commodity or region. The product of that work serves as the foundation for his newly introduced Securing Agriculture’s Workforce Act (SAWA).

The proposal centers on three key H-2A reform: controlling costs, improving access, and modernizing and streamlining the program.

The costs of using the program are significant. Employers are required by law to pay housing, transportation and mandatory wage costs for H-2A employees, as well as cover the administrative costs of the program. The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), the minimum hourly

the minimum hourly wage rate H-2A employees must be paid, has been the major and unpredictable cost driver for farmers. In the past decade alone, the AEWR has easily outpaced private sector wage growth, with the AEWR rising by 60% compared to a 49% increase in private sector wage growth. However, unlike most in the private sector, farmers cannot pay for increased labor costs by raising their prices; they are price takers not price makers.

SAWA restructures a flawed methodology by adopting reforms by the U.S. Department of Labor following the welcome discontinuation of the USDA Farm Labor Survey. The new rule also recognizes the extensive nonwage costs associated with the program and factors those costs in into the final AEWR determination. Along with codifying the Trump administration’s October 2025 AEWR reforms, which will save farmers hundreds of millions of dollars in inflated costs, SAWA adds sensible reforms to by capping year-over-year growth and eliminating mid-contract changes, thereby limiting the unpredictability that has long plagued the program.

The involvement of three Cabinet-level departments (Labor, Homeland Security, State) and various state agencies that poorly communicate with each other and the employers and employees they serve has long undermined the program’s efficiency. For example, delays, backlogs and other inefficiencies have become too common in the petitioning process, which results in lost time on the farm and reduced productivity, which hurts a farm’s preparedness and economic sustainability.

SAWA directs the agencies to create an online platform as a single point of access for growers and reinstitutes the in-person interview waiver for returning H-2A workers who have a proven history of vetting and reliability. Importantly, SAWA also designates H-2A workers as essential, which will keep government funding disruptions from halting the program’s functionality.

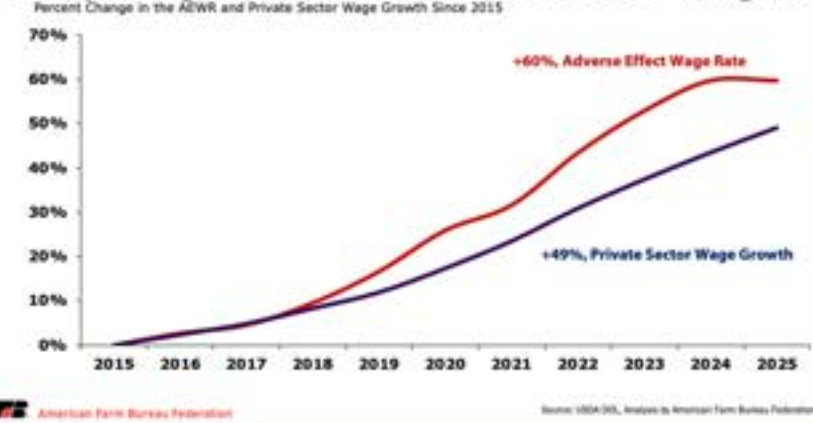
The current H-2A program only provides farmers with a seasonal and temporary workforce. This limited eligibility prevents the many sectors in production agriculture with year-round – and sometimes even hourly – labor needs from using the program. These sectors include, but are not limited to, operations like dairies with consistent milking needs, horticultural operations with plants at various stages, and livestock operations with varying animal husbandry needs.

SAWA strikes the seasonal requirement and clarifies the temporary designation for workers just under a year’s length. And the

H-2A Utilization Has Soared



Comparing AEWR and Private Sector Wages



legislation ensures that many previously precluded sectors will be eligible for H-2A workers, including dairy and livestock occupations. Coupled with additional reforms, SAWA provides a long-desired option for farmers with year-round needs to secure a labor force where domestic interest in this work is absent.

The Time to Address Agricultural Labor Shortages is Now

Our agricultural workforce challenges are complex, multi-factored, and often misunderstood. Federal policymakers should seek to understand the labor needs of family

farms and the direct implications for U.S. competitiveness in the global landscape. Struggling with this persistent and defining problem for decades, so many family farms – nearly 200,000 in the past decade, in fact – have closed down.

With the farm economy currently underwater in so many areas, Congress has an obligation to get the Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act on the president's desk. For the sake of family farm sustainability and national security, Farm Bureau urges lawmakers to pass this critical legislation as soon as possible.

AFBF Policy Supports:

- A visa program that is open to all segments of agriculture and flexible enough to provide for the differing needs of farmers and ranchers, including seasonal and year-round employers;
- A wage methodology that would cap year-over-year increases and is based on sound data.
- A visa program that is simplified and cost-competitive.

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Nationwide: Founded by farmers, for farmers



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Farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers share a deep connection to the land and a commitment to feeding and fueling the world. Nationwide understands that connection well.

Founded by farmers in 1926, Nationwide has grown into a trusted partner for the agricultural community while staying true to its roots. A century later, this agricultural heritage remains at the heart of everything Nationwide does.

"Nationwide's roots run deep in agriculture," according to Devin Fuhrman, Nationwide Chief Agriculture and Sponsor Relations Officer. "The company was founded by farmers, for farmers, and that heritage continues to guide our work today."

A legacy built by farmers

Nationwide's origins trace back to the Farm Bureau Mutual Automobile Insurance Company, established in 1926 to address the lack of fair, affordable auto insurance options for farmers. Over time, the company evolved into Nationwide, but its agricultural foundation has remained steadfast.

"Nationwide's dedication to agriculture is central to our identity," Fuhrman says. "As a mutual company, we're able to focus on the needs of farmers and rural communities, ensuring their voices are heard and their futures are safeguarded."

As a modern mutual, Nationwide focuses on protecting futures, building financial security and fostering trust. They're all values that align closely with the American Farm Bureau Federation and its members around the country.

Partnerships that strengthen agriculture

Nationwide is the official insurance and financial services provider for eight state Farm Bureaus. These partnerships reflect Nationwide's commitment to supporting the agricultural community through innovation, risk management and advocacy. They're a cornerstone of the company's efforts to strengthen agriculture across the country.

"Our partnership with state Farm Bureaus around the country reflects our shared commitment to supporting farmers," Fuhrman says. "We understand the unique challenges faced by the nation's agricultural community and are here to provide the tools, resources and support they need to thrive."

Championing agriculture through advocacy

Advocacy is a cornerstone of Nationwide's commitment to agriculture. The company champions policies and initiatives that protect and promote the interests of farmers, rural communities and agricultural sustainability.

"Nationwide's advocacy is built on a deep connection to agriculture," Fuhrman says. "From championing farm safety to advancing sustainability efforts, we're dedicated to helping farmers overcome obstacles and create a stronger future."

Nationwide's advocacy includes programs like Grain Bin Safety Week and collaborations with advocates like Dale Earnhardt Jr. to promote off-road vehicle safety. These initiatives highlight the company's dedication to protecting lives and livelihoods while fostering resilience and growth in rural communities.

A team that understands farmers

Nationwide's agents and associates bring a unique perspective to their work, many of them coming from farming backgrounds themselves. This connection allows the company to better understand the challenges and risks farmers face.

"Nationwide's team is made up of individuals who truly understand the agricultural industry," Fuhrman says. "It's that understanding that reinforces their commitment to helping farmers succeed."

Learn more

This shared mindset enables Nationwide to provide tailored solutions and support that farmers, ranchers and agribusiness owners can rely on.

Explore Nationwide's agricultural heritage and commitment to supporting your livelihood and community at nationwide.com/foundedbyfarmers. To learn more, connect with a Nationwide Farm Certified agent.

Visit AgInsightCenter.com for more

resources and expert tips to help you run a successful business and maintain the safety of your operation.

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Whether you're focused on business success, family security or community prosperity, Nationwide® can help you constantly evolve to ensure a bright future.



Member benefits

Our policies offer broad coverage that can be customized to your operation's needs, including your home and contents, outbuildings, livestock, machinery and equipment, as well as your stored commodities and liabilities. We continually update our policies to meet the changing needs of agriculture, with benefits such as:

- **Equipment breakdown** for the systems built into your farm structures (such as a milking parlor or a cold storage facility) and for systems used to maintain your home (such as central air conditioning or a built-in furnace)
- **Rental reimbursement** on your farm equipment damaged by accident
- **Unwarranted allegations of animal cruelty** coverage, which helps cover costs to defend against baseless claims
- **Drone liability** coverage for agricultural uses of unmanned aerial vehicles

Farm Bureau member benefits

We've made being part of the Farm Bureau even better for farmer members. Nationwide offers exclusive membership benefits—at no additional cost—that include coverages specifically tailored to your farm or ranch:

- Accidental death coverage for pets
- Arson and crime information reward
- Coverage for youth organization livestock projects
- Deductible waiver
- Emergency roadside assistance for farm machinery and equipment
- Farm co-insurance waiver
- Fire department service charge
- Identity fraud expense
- Landlord furnishings
- Refrigerated farm personal property

Land As Your Legacy®

Our Land As Your Legacy® program helps provide security to families in the agricultural community so that land and businesses can be preserved within the family for generations to come. At no cost, Land As Your Legacy can help you build a carefully designed transition plan for your family's farm or ranch with 5 key elements:

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- Estate planning
- Financial independence planning
- Risk management
- Succession planning



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Calendar/Upcoming Events:

July:

Tues, July 21st

**Maryland Ag in the Classroom
Educator Workshop**

Davidsonville
9:00 AM

Fri, July 24th

**Queen Anne's County Farm
Bureau Summer Picnic**

Sudlersville
5:30 PM

August:

Sun, Aug 2nd

**Kent Conty Farm Bureau Summer
Picnic & Crab Feast**

Chestertown
3:00 PM

Mon, Aug 3rd & Weds, Aug 5th

**SBA Small Business
Assistance Webinar**

Virtual
8/3 @ 7:00 PM | 8/5 @ 12:00 PM

Fri, Aug 21st

**Talbot County Farm Bureau
Member BBQ**

Easton
6:00 PM

September:

Thurs, Sept 24th

**Maryland Farm Bureau Public
Policy Drive-In: Labor**

Washington, D.C.
10:00 AM

Sat, Sept 26th

**Cecil County Bull
& Oyster Roast**

Rising Sun
6:00 PM

Visit marylandfb.org for event updates, registration, and new events!

