

Conference Proceedings

Maryland Agricultural Educators Conference July 6-8, 2026

Conference held at Calvert Career and Technology Academy Prince Frederick, MD

Lodging at Holiday Inn Express Prince Frederick, MD

MONDAY, JULY 6th

Professional Learning: (2 hrs.) Agricultural Education Vendor Showcase

Presenters: CASE, Calvert CTA, FFA Alumni, Horizon Farm Credit, ICEV, and Safety First Program.

Recorder: Diane Herndon, Frederick Career & Tech Center

The agricultural education showcase provided vital resources for teachers, allowing one on one interaction with representatives. Many of the organizations brought with them the latest updates to their resources to share with teachers. These resources allow teachers to keep up with changes and additions for both personal and professional growth.

Professional Learning: (1 hr.) Biosecurity Principles in Animal Management

Presenters: Dr. Annika McKillop and Cheyenne Van Echo, Intern with the Maryland Department of Agriculture

Recorder: Sara Seiser, Middletown High School

The objective of their visit was to view major biosecurity core principles and how to work with students to better educate them about biological controls and management. They discussed the proper way of identifying animal diseases, and the distinction of cleaning vs. disinfecting animal facilities. Teachers were given resources they could use with their students to prepare them for safe and effective biosecurity measures when handling animals.

Professional Learning: (1) Hydroponics and it's Effectiveness in the Classroom

Presenter: Michael Wijesinghe, Bell Nursery

Recorder: Bethany Meyers, Hancock Middle/High School

Hydroponics is the process of growing plants without soil. Each participant created their own small version of a hydroponic kit using a simple plastic bucket, a pipette and rock wool. A product called Coco Coir is a very inexpensive growing media and widely available. Warehouses can be utilized as a growing space. The major cost of hydroponics is electricity and the start up cost. The major advantages include growing plants during winter months; however, one must be careful of the choice of plants. Tomatoes and peppers require more heat and light, while winter lettuce requires cooler temperatures and less light. Be sure to test water regularly to regulate the amount and type of fertilizer and scout out insects and diseases. The Disease triangle include: the host, the pest, and environmental conditions all play a factor in their occurrence.

Professional Learning: (1) Agronomy & AI Usage

Presenters: Dr. Melissa Welsh, Anne Brown, Bekah Hanksom with University of Maryland Plant Sciences

Recorder: Erika Edwards, Hereford High School

How can we use Artificial intelligence in diagnosing crop conditions within Agronomy plants? Dr. Welsh and her team discussed the importance of connecting students with "virtual experts" in the field. Using a RASR model framework demonstrated how the program works. RASR stands for Role, Audience, Scenario, Requirements. By using the right program, students can ask very specific questions to gain an appropriate response using the most advanced information available from sometimes around the world.

Professional Learning: (1) Vertical Agriculture

Presenter: Jordan Jones-Cordero, Chair of Vertical Ag Program College of Southern Maryland

Recorder: Lynne Rexroad, Boonsboro Middle School

Vertical agriculture is a viable alternative to traditional agricultural practices. The College of Southern Maryland offers a Vertical Ag. Certificate, that encompasses three classes. Water bottle hydroponics is a great way to start getting students interested in vertical agriculture. Tower gardens are also a good way to introduce students in the classroom. There was a meaningful discussion on feeding, growing populations and sustainability.

Professional Learning: (1) ICEV and Maryland Agriculture Council Presentations

Presenters: Rob Limpert, ICEV & Gail Yeiser, MD Ag. Council

Recorder: Mary Zielinski, Washington County Job Development

ICEV now offers an exclusive Ag. Certification (IRC) recognized by Maryland Department of Education. The content of their interactive curriculum can be customized to meet the needs of each agricultural program. It can incorporate both CASE and ICEV resources for MSDE certification standards. Their curriculum is online so very versatile.

The Maryland Agriculture Council was started in 1970 with the Taste of Maryland event annually that allows 24 jurisdictions within the state of Maryland to network with Agriculture organizations, educators and FFA representatives. The program offers grants and scholarships for youth.

Professional Learning: (1) Project Based Learning

Presenters: Gabrielle Graham, Calvert Career & Tech Academy & Ashley Curtin, Magnify Learning

Recorder: Dr. Stacy Eckels, Southern High School

The presentation included a brief overview of the best practices for project based learning with community partners. The group worked through a CTE Partner Experience Tool with industry partners. The steps involve: prepare experience with a partner, guide the experience and apply the learning. It is good practice to plan ahead of time to allow students to be proactive in their visit and to have the partners prepared for expectations and outcomes. Project based learning is the great first step in discovering active community partners within an agriculture program.

Professional Learning: (1) Grant Writing

Presenters: Sarah Dickinson & Logan Everett, National FFA Organization

Recorder: Jodi Neal, Caroline County High School

The National FFA Organization offers several opportunities for individual students and chapters. There are SAE Grants, Living to Serve Grants, Grants for Growing, and Alumni Grants. They went over how brainstorming what you need/want if money was not an issue. This allows creativity and opportunities to surface, then apply for grants. They explained the application process and components. Most grants open March 1st and close on May 15th. SAE grants open Oct. 1st- Nov. 15th. It was suggested to make it a classroom project/assignment. An agribusiness class can work on budgeting and community involvement. The grants are a great way to expand purpose into action with community service projects.

Professional Learning: (1) Leadership Development Events

Presenter: Nikki Phillips, Career Advising Coordinator at Calvert Career and Technology Academy

Recorder: Bridget Nicholson, Middletown High School

It is essential for students to learn proper formatting when writing a speech or manuscript. FFA requires APA formatting in most events. There was discussion about the challenges of writing, formatting, citations, writing quality and common errors. APA formatting can have many changes so it is imperative to stay up with the latest formatting rules. There were many key take-aways given out to participants to use in their classrooms. This topic can easily be used in capstone and agriscience fair projects.

Professional Learning: (1.5) PEARL Tour

Presenter: Scott Knoche, Director & Dr. Amanda Knobloch, Research Assistant Professor

Recorder: Pat Beachy, Linganore High School

PEARL- Patuxent Environmental and Aquatics Research Lab is part of Morgan State University. It has four key focuses: Aquaculture, Coastal Ecology, Environmental Economics and Bio-Geo Chemistry with a focus on improving shellfish aquaculture around the Patuxent River. A vast knowledge base for any ag program offering environmental science curriculums and Intro. To Agriscience & Technology.

Professional Learning: (1.5) Patuxent Seafood Company Tour

Presenter: Todd Ireland, Calvert County Waterman

Recorder: Kathy Wojcik, Howard ARL

The group learned about the life of a waterman in Calvert County, including skills needed to be successful in fishing, navigation, boat maintenance, and understanding the changes of the water. They took a boat ride with the presenter as he described the changes in the water and species over the years. Rockfish are moving more north now with the changes in water temperature and salinity. A valuable tour giving ag teachers first hand knowledge on the changes in waterways and how it influences the livelihood of watermen.

TUESDAY, JULY 7th

Professional Learning: (1.5) Bowensville Farm & Nursery Tour

Presenter: Suzi & Jamie Gibson, Owners and Operators

Recorder: Amanda Farmer, Boonsboro High School

A 4th generation farm family specializing in herb and heirloom vegetable grower. They moved away from farmer markets due to intensive labor challenges to online sales and offering a one time in person event/year. The majority of plants are started from seed or stock cuttings. This enables them to offer high quality products that are disease-resistant and grown for their local region. The tour demonstrated the differences between growing in greenhouses and outdoor containers. It also showed the process of plant trials and improvements and shortcuts to containerized irrigation. Valuable information for any horticulture program.

Professional Learning: (1.5) Lucky Cricket Equine Farm Tour

Presenter: Mary Russell, Owner and Operator

Recorder: Sarah Welty, Oakdale High School

The tour showcased the 38-acre farm that houses 13 horses with emphasis on the design/layout of the facilities and pasture areas. Biosecurity and soil conservation is imperative to their management practices. They use turbo fans with thermostatic controls in their barns and use rotational grazing to maximize quality grazing. This tour allowed teachers to see firsthand how to plan out a facility and the factors that have to be considered in setting up a safe and effective equine facility.

Professional Learning Tour: (2) Floriculture Event and Wedding Design

Presenter: Gracie Stephens, Frederick Flower Farm

Recorder: Lori Mayhew, Damascus High School

Gracie runs an event and wedding company, not a retail florist shop. Participants were given live flowers to create their own floral designs using chicken wire and tape over a clear glass container. This practice is much more environmentally friendly by not using floral foam. She demonstrated how to break down each stem to maximize availability of flowers to cut down on waste and cost. She brought a wide selection of plant materials to work within their design. This workshop is extremely important in any ag program that runs a floral design shop.

Professional Learning: (2) Agriculture Mechanics Shop Safety

Presenter: Jonathan Grimes, Safety First

Recorder: Aaron Geiman, Manchester Valley High School

Being an agricultural mechanics instructor, Jonathan designed a Safety First training program for teachers and students. He designed lesson plans, assessments and various resources to make teaching agricultural mechanics much safer and effective. He discussed various components to the program and safety tips. Having a well planned out safety protocol provides teachers with tools to provide a safer learning environment in the shop.

Professional Learning: (1) Building your Advocacy Profile

Presenter: Aaron Geiman, Manchester Valley High School

Recorder: Bethany Reese, Tuscarora High School

Building an advocacy profile is a great step in making sure to inform policy makers and elected officials to the importance of your agriculture education program. Knowledge is power. Aaron provided a timeline for advocating for your program that gives teachers a template to follow. NAAE and ACTE websites also provide examples for building an advocacy profile. Be sure to use local data to include community support. Every ag program in the state should have an up-to-date advocacy profile so when needed, it will be done.

Professional Learning: (1) Agritourism in Fermentation

Presenter: Cindy Mullikin, Mully's Brewery

Recorder: Krista Hartley, Linganore High School

Fermentation is one of those areas in agriculture that is not talked about but uses necessary agricultural products in hops and different grains to create a fermentation process. Changing the amounts of yeast changes the taste and adding hops too early or too late in the brewing process can change the aromas and taste. The process takes a lot of patience, experimentation and wisdom to create the best product. This is a niche, value added ag related operation. Local farmers and microbreweries can form partnerships in supplying products and resources.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8th

Professional Learning: (1) FFA Updates/National Chapter Award/Ideas Unlimited

Presenters: Terrie Shank, MD FFA; Cindy Vance, Nat. FFA; Lori Mayhew, Bethany Reese, Tom Hawthorne

Recorder: Sarah Shriner, Urbana High School

Terrie reviewed state ffa updates and Cindy any national ffa updates, SAE opportunities and the National Chapter Award application process. Lori and Bethany presented Ideas Unlimited samples. Tom shared example IU for wedding display and ag mechanic projects.

Professional Development Recognition Luncheon- Calvert Career & Technology Academy

Host: Pat Beachy, Linganore High School and President of MATA

Recorder: Sarah Shriner, Urbana High School

This program recognized accomplishments of Maryland agriculture teachers and programs across the state by the Maryland Agriculture Teachers Association (MATA). Special guests and supporters of agriculture education were recognized, along with introductions of the newly elected MD FFA State Officers. Greetings were brought by Susanne Richards, Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation and Kevin Atticks, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Agriculture

Major Awards and Recognition:

Years of Service Recognition:

1 year- Mary Dempsey, Maurice J. McDonough; Jolene Custer, Oakland High;
Meredith Elvey, Boonsboro High; Sarah Ruggiero, Worcester Tech High.

5 years-Amanda Farmer, Boonsboro High; Jennifer Kuhl-Depp, Kent County;
Dane Grossnickle, UMCP-IAA.

10 years-Sarah Skinner, CAT-North.

15 years- Becky Yost, North Garrett High; Brittany Sentelle, Frederick High.

20 years-Dene' Flack, Harford Tech High; Patrick White, Francis Scott Key High.

25 years-Mary Zielenski, Washington County Job Development; Mark Kather, Western Sch. of Tech.

30 years-Pat Beachy, Linganore High.

35 years-Sarah Welty, Oakdale High; Laura O'Leary, North Harford High.

50 years-Roy Walls, Retired Ag Educator, MD FFA Executive Director.

Outstanding Leadership Award: Pat Beachy, Linganore High School as the 2025-2026 MATA President

First Annual State Golden Owl Award: Becky Yost, North Garrett High School

National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Awards:

Ideas Unlimited- Bethany Meyers, Hancock Middle/High School
Teacher Turn the Key – Lynne Rexroad, Boonsboro Middle School
Outstanding Early Career Teacher- Bethany Reese, Tuscarora High School
Outstanding Teacher – Sara Seiser, Middletown High School
Outstanding Program- South Carroll High School, Teacher- Brittany Stiles
Outstanding Mentor – Aaron Geiman, Manchester Valley High School
Lifetime Award- Ed Mayne, Retired Maryland Agriculture Educator
Post Secondary Program- Chesapeake College Wye Mills, MD
Service Impact Award: Sarah Welty, Oakdale High School
Visionary Impact Award- Maryland Department of Agriculture

Maryland Agriculture Teachers Association (MATA) Awards:

Mentorship Incentive Program- Bethany Meyers, Hancock Middle/High School
Spreading the Word- Sarah Shriner, Urbana High School
Outstanding Classroom- Dr. Stacy Eckels, Southern High School
Outstanding FFA Chapter (Single Program)- Shelby Althoff, Francis Scott Key High School
Outstanding SAE Award (Single Program)- Oakdale High School

The 2026-2027 MATA Executive Board of Directors elected:

President- Sara Seiser, Middletown High School
Past President- Patricia Beachy, Linganore High School
President Elect- Kathy Wojcik, Howard County ARL
Secretary- Shelby Althoff, Francis Scott Key High School
Treasurer- Thomas Mazzone, University of MD College Park, IAA
Membership Chair- Amanda Farmer, Boonsboro High School
Website Reporter: Jodi Neal, Caroline County High School
Social Media Reporter: Gabrielle Graham, Calvert Career & Technology Academy
Historian: Bridget Nicholson, Middletown High School

MAEC 2026 Conference Planning Committee**Chairperson:**

Gabrielle Graham, Calvert Career & Technology Academy

Members:

Erika Edwards, Hereford High School
Naomi Knight, Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation
Bethany Meyers, Hancock Middle/High School
Sarah Skinner, Center for Applied Technology-North

Listed below are the teachers who participated in the conference and earned hours toward an MSDE continuing education credit

Prof. Dev. Hours	Total Hours													
	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	1.5	2	2	4.5	18.5
Shelby	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	18.5
Althoff	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	18.5
Pat	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Beachy	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Kimberly	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Campbell	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Stacy	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Eckels	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Erika	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Edwards	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Farmer	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Amanda	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Aaron	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Geiman	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Gabrielle	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Graham	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Hartley	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Krista	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Thomas	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Hawthorne	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Diane	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Herndon	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Natalie	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Marston	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Mayhew	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Lori	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Amie	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
McDaniels	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Bethany	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Meyers	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Neal	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Jodi	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Nicholson	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Bridget	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Reese	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Bethany	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Lynne	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Rexroad	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Warren	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Ruarik	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Sara	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Seiser	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Shank	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Shriner	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Sarah	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Skinner	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Stone	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Victoria	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Sarah	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Welty	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Wojcik	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Mary	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17
Zielinski	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	0	0	2	4.5	17