



Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
Thursday, September 7, 2023
Minutes - Approved

- SMADC Members:** Senator Jack Bailey, Joan Bearden, Steve Connelly, Jennifer David, Dan Donohue, Edward Goodman, Willie Goddard, Bill Hitte, Linda Jones, Elizabeth Robinson, Charles Sasscer III, Russell Shlagel, Delegate Gary Simmons, Tresor Thomas, Caroline Trossbach, Lucille Walker – Vice Chair, Steve Wall, Mary Wood – Chair
- Members Absent:** Delegate Brian Crosby, Senator Michael Jackson, Dan Rider, Brian Russell, Deana Tice
- Staff:** Cristina Berthelot, Kelley Koeppen, John Hartline, Heather Hulsey, Susan McQuilkin, Rachel Norris, Craig Sewell, Kelly Swann, Shelby Watson-Hampton
- Guests:** Sierra Criste – Financial Programs Associate, MARBIDCO, Dave Zyga – Paladin Automation LLC, Danny Mast – Suttler Post Farm, Summer Owens – Calvert County Planning & Zoning, Andrew Bowles MDA Ag. Inspector for Southern Maryland, Jamie Tiralla – MD Farm Bureau.

Minutes

SMADC Chair Mary Wood called for a motion to approve the minutes from July 7, 2023. Dan Donohue requested a correction of the date of the minutes of June 1, 2023, and made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Delegate Gary Simmons seconded the motion. All approved.

Guest Speaker – Dave Zyga – Paladin Automation LLC, a Veteran-owned small business in Leonardtown, MD, presented on drone technology focused on agriculture including thermal imaging for soil moisture, multispectral mapping for vegetation and soil health, precision spraying and crop volume. The company is seeking farmers to test the program for the anticipated launch in So.MD in 2024.

Staff Program Reports

Maryland Market Money (MMM) and Food Access Updates – Heather Hulsey reported July and August's high season for Maryland produce coincides with high demand for the program at MMM participating access points. The MMM Team is very busy helping participating access points with technical assistance and funding needed to make the program successful at participant locations.

In So.MD, TCC signed an agreement in July for enhanced food access funding as a sub awardee from Charles County's federal ARPA funding; funding will expand MMM and SMADC's community

refrigerator project in Charles County amongst other food access projects and partnerships to infuse \$200,000 in funds for food through the end of calendar year 2024.

Another focus of the MMM Team has been to enhance program accessibility for everyone who needs it. The most recent effort to expand accessibility came in the form of MMM information cards ("rack cards") in commonly requested language translations now available in English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, French, Korean, and Vietnamese. Additionally, a new brochure has been published designed to help Maryland farmers markets and direct-marketing farmers operating independent farm stands accept federal nutrition assistance benefits as payments for their products. The guide is available in print and digitally online. To request cards and printed brochures please reach out to Cristina at cberthelot@smadc.com.

BLC Team

2023 Buy Local Challenge Celebration – Susan McQuilkin reported the event was successfully implemented on July 31 featuring host farm Suttler Post Farm Clydesdales, in St. Mary's County, completing the rotation of the event through each of the 5 SOMD counties. Highlights:

- **36 Maryland vendors participated.**
- **Close to 1,300 people attended.**
- **6 organizations sponsored the Celebration for a total of \$4,300:** MARBIDCO, Rural Maryland Council, MDA /Maryland's Best Maryland's Best, SOMD National Heritage Area, Calvert County ECD, St. Mary's County ECD.
- **BLC Celebration Baynet Ad. reached an audience of 450,000, Social Media engaged 32,500.**
- **A post event survey of vendors and attendees affirmed the event increased consumer awareness for Maryland farm products.**

2023 Buy Local Challenge (BLC) Statewide Promotion – SMADC and MDA worked together to promote the entirety of the Buy Local Challenge Week (July 21 – 31) and its two main events - the BLC Celebration and Governor's Buy Local Picnic hosted by MDA and Governor Moore. SMADC statewide BLC promotion highlights:

- **Maryland Money Markets 'Buy Local Bucks' – \$3565.00 redeemed by over 700 beneficiaries.**
- **2,500 BLC totes distributed to 31 SOMD markets and at BLC Celebration.**
- **12,000 BLC promo cards distributed statewide.**
- **2,500 Buy Local Guide promo cards distributed in So.MD.**
- **Social media/digital ads engaged over 2,400 consumers; social media outreach engaged 82,000.**

2023 Southern Maryland Holiday Farm Guide – is now soliciting listings. The guide connects consumers with Southern Maryland farms and producers and other businesses that offer So.MD farm products during the holidays and winter months. **Listings are due by October 2, 2023.**

Infrastructure Team

RAC Update – John Hartline and Craig Sewell reported there have been a series of technical decisions that affect the construction schedule. The Dept. of the Environment has determined the RAC requires a complex and expensive BAT system. St. Mary's Attorney General and Administrator require the project is bid out per county procurement protocols for design and construction; this 2-step process may take up to 6/7 months and likely delay the project until the spring. John Hartline and Craig Sewell met with the County Administrator, County Attorney, and heads of DPW and DED looking for solutions to move the

project ahead while BAT discussions continue. A proposal was made by TCC to accelerate the payment of Rural Maryland Economic Development funds of \$ 924,000.00 (without equipment) for site preparation and groundbreaking by the fall of 2023. The Dept. of Commerce gave approval to use the funds, TCC Exec. Board concurred. As of today, it is confirmed the site plans require further changes and reviews and may not be finalized until late November 2023. St. Mary's County has been very supportive, every effort has been made to move the project forward.

Lothian Grain Elevator - Subject of breaking news – Craig Sewell and Shelby Watson Hampton reported the initial vendor interested in operating the facility did not reach a reasonable agreement with the County, and negotiations began with a different vendor. At the time of reporting the new vendor has reached an operational agreement, due to be signed next week, to operate the facility this fall. Anne Arundel County Executive, Steuart Pittman held a meeting last week with MD Farm Bureau, SMADC and elected officials which was very collaborative. SMADC floated the idea of an emergency grant to small grain producers that have used Lothian in the past to help defray additional transportation costs. SMADC has budget funding available for the grant if needed. This idea is on hold pending the results of the new operator negotiations.

Grandma's Hands Project – Craig Sewell reported the project is in the final stages of editing with an anticipated launch during the holidays.

2023 Southern Maryland Meats Jr. Program – Craig Sewell reported 20 youth have signed up to participate and have received t-shirts and stall cards to promote their livestock projects at the forthcoming county fair season.

Director's Report

BLC & Mini Grant Working Groups Formation – voting and non-voting members were solicited for 2 working groups, those interested are asked to contact Director Watson-Hampton:

- Buy Local Challenge Celebration Event – review/evaluate options to continue the in-person promotion.
- SMADC Mini Grants – review of current criteria including equitable consideration for urban farms and increase amount of grant funds offered.

Sponsorship Requests – Sotterley Plantation So.MD Heritage Festival, October 7 & 8, 2023

SMADC was invited to participate in the 2-day festival featuring heritage themed activities; staff supports the event, but has heavy work demands. Director Watson-Hampton asked for consideration to provide 200 BLC insulated tote bags as giveaways and fund the MAEF interactive agriculture education trailer for 2 days at a cost of approximately \$850.00. **Chair Mary Wood called for a motion. Dan Donohue made a motion, Lucille Walker seconded. With no further discussion, Willie Goddard moved to make a vote to authorize SMADC to provide up to \$900 to support the So.MD Heritage Festival on October 7 & 8, 2023. All approved.**

MARBIDCO Grant Request – Commission approval was sought to add \$30,000 to the SMADC Equity Incentive Matching Fund, managed by MARBIDCO. The fund is designed to incentivize loan requests from Southern Maryland farmers and help them improve the credit quality of their applications. SMADC initially granted \$150K for this program. An additional \$40,000 was added in 2020. MARBIDCO has granted \$171,985 to farmers so far. **Following a discussion, Dan Donohue made a motion to allocate \$30,000 to the SMADC Equity Incentive Matching Fund. Wille Goddard seconded the motion. All approved.**

FY'24 Budget Review – Director Watson-Hampton reviewed the budget as approved by TCCSMD Executive Board. The budget includes \$900,000 in Cigarette Restitution Funds (CRF) and additional grant revenue (Federal, Capital, Bonds) and donations awarded to SMADC for a total of 4.73 million dollars. Using the CRF (base) funding staff has leveraged 3.4 million dollars for the region. **ACTION: SMADC Chair Mary Wood requested the budget spreadsheet to be emailed to members following the meeting for further review and discussion at the October Commission meeting.**

Member Updates – Members shared news and updates.

Adjournment

Mary Wood called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dan Donohue made a motion to adjourn. Joan Bearden Seconded the motion. All approved.

Next SMADC Meeting (first Thursday of the month):
Thursday, October 5, 2023 (virtual only)