

New Extension Program Helps Government Ag Service Providers Understand Maryland Farming

¹Andrew Kness, akness@umd.edu and ²Erika Crowl, ecrowl@umd.edu

¹Extension Agent, University of Maryland Extension, Harford County | 3525 Conowingo Rd., Street, MD 21154

²Extension Agent Associate, University of Maryland Extension, Baltimore County | 1114 Shawan Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030

NEED & JUSTIFICATION

Government ag service providers administer programs and provide technical assistance to farmers. Ag service providers in Maryland include agencies such as:

- United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS)
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)
- Maryland Department of Environment (MDE)
- Local Soil Conservation Districts (SCD)

Employees within these agencies often have specialized technical backgrounds and degrees in areas such as biology, environmental science, engineering, policy, etc., but often have very little working knowledge of farming; yet are often working closely with farmers. This disconnect from basic on-farm knowledge creates a significant barrier to the job and prevents ag service providers from maximizing their efforts.

University of Maryland Extension (UME) developed a training program to help these professionals understand Maryland agriculture.


AG 101 PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE NEED

The two-day program started with a webinar to provide an overview of Maryland agriculture

Intro to Maryland Agriculture

- 12,400 farms on 2 million acres
 - 500,000 acres corn
 - 500,000 acres soybeans
 - 350,000 acres wheat/barley
 - 185,000 acres forages
 - 500,000 acres of cover crops

33% of the state is farmland



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION FEARLESS IDEAS

Followed by a full day of hands-on education by touring different types of farming operations and learning about production practices



Photo by Erika Crowl



Photo by Edwin Remsberg

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND IMPACT

Participants were issued pre and post-course evaluations to measure change in knowledge:

- 126 service providers attended the 4 sessions.
- 31% were employees of local Soil Conservation Districts.
- 45% had no farming or agricultural background.

- 90% report a gain in knowledge related to the size, scope, and impact of Maryland's various agricultural sectors.
- 94% report an increase in knowledge of farming practices.
- 91% of respondents say the program will allow them to offer improved services to their agricultural clientele.

