



MARBIDCO
growing rural ventures™

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
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Maryland Agricultural Marketing Professionals Meet with Their Counterparts from Virginia

(Annapolis, April 5, 2011)On March 29, 2011, a group of agricultural marketing professionals from around the State of Maryland traveled to nearby Purcellville (Loudoun County) Virginia to meet and interact with their counterparts in Virginia. The sharing of ideas, strategies, and plans was the goal of the gathering among two dozen marketing professionals all with a focus on developing profitable local food and fiber production. The meeting, which was the first of its kind and organized by the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, was designed as a forum to share the best local practices of both states and create partnerships that bridge state lines.

Economic development officials are increasingly looking to agriculture to foster economic sustainability in challenging times, as well as to further develop business opportunities for local and regional food and fiber production. Farmers face many challenges and obstacles today in order to stay profitable, and many farms have increasingly diversified their production activities and marketing practices. Value added processing, niche marketing and alternative sources of energy supply have become important strategies in allowing farming operations to survive and prosper. In addition, many consumers are looking to local farms to meet their food needs as people are becoming increasingly concerned about their carbon footprint and supporting

local agricultural producers. The eating of more local foods creates opportunities for farmers and provides an economic multiplier effect within a community and region.

During the meeting, the participants heard a number of presentations concerning a variety of strategies to help develop and market local agriculture. From the Maryland contingent, Colby Ferguson, an agriculture business development strategist from Frederick County, provided detailed information on how his county economic development office supports direct-to-consumer farm sales. Ginger Myers, director of University of Maryland's Rural Enterprise Development Center, explained how the Center's website provided useful farm business planning tools. Christine Bergmark, director of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Commission, provided information on agri-tourism marketing efforts and other programs being offered in the Southern Maryland region.

The participants from Maryland included:

- Christine Bergmark, Executive Director, Agricultural Commission of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
- Jeremy Criss, Agricultural Service Manager, Montgomery County Office of Economic Development
- Cheryl DeBerry, Natural Resources Business Specialist, Garrett County Office of Economic Development
- Colby Ferguson, Business Development Specialist, Frederick County Office of Economic Development
- Leslie Hendrickson, Agricultural Marketing Specialist for Washington County, University of Maryland Cooperative Extension
- Ginger Myers, Director, Maryland Rural Enterprise Development Center, University of Maryland Cooperative Extension
- Donna Sasscer, Agricultural Manager, St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development
- Gabe Zepp, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Carroll County Office of Economic Development
- Kathy Zimmerman, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Howard County Economic Development Authority
- Kate Mason, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Maryland Department of Agriculture
- Stephen McHenry, Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation

MARBIDCO is a quasi-public economic development organization chartered by the State of Maryland. Its mission is to help Maryland's farm, forestry, and seafood businesses to prosper through the provision of targeted financial and other services that helps to retain existing resource-based industry production and commerce, promotes rural entrepreneurship, and nurtures emerging food/feed/fiber businesses. Helping young and beginning farmers are of special interest to MARBIDCO., MARBIDCO offers a number of low-cost business loan programs and helps land conservation agencies with preserving productive rural land by serving as a financial intermediary. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has made more than 125 rural business investments in projects located in 22 counties across the State. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit us on the web at www.marbidco.org.