

Maryland Farmers Travel to Washington D.C. during National Ag Day

More than 60 Maryland Farm Bureau members traveled to our Nation's Capital to meet with Congressional leaders on March 18. Before heading to Capitol Hill, members received a public policy and legislative briefing from American Farm Bureau Federation officials. A number of time-sensitive issues facing agriculture are currently being debated on the National level. These issue areas consist of federal "GMO" labeling uniformity, opposition to the proposed EPA rule that would expand the definition of "Waters of the United States" under the Clean Water Act, preserving antibiotic access for livestock, and securing a reliable and competent workforce.

While advocating for these issues, members also presented the Friend of Farm Bureau award to Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger, Senator Ben Cardin and Senator Barbara Mikulski for their supportive voting record on priority bills and amendments that benefit the farming community, such as the Small Business Tax Relief bill, Water Resources bill, and the very important 5-year Farm Bill, which Congress passed last year. Congressmen Delaney and Harris also received the Friend of Farm Bureau award from the Maryland Congressional Delegation.

As a grassroots organization, it is extremely important that our elected officials in Washington D.C. hear our voices on a number of issues that could impact the agriculture community. Maryland Farm Bureau would like to thank all the members who attended this year's Washington D.C. Drive-in and congressional staff who made these Capitol Hill visits a reality.

Below is the rationale and call to actions for the agriculture issues that members advocated to the Maryland congressional delegation.

Supporting Federal "GMO" Labeling Uniformity Legislation

GMO foods have a long, safe track record and have been determined that they are safe and nutritious as food derived from other production methods, such as conventional or organic.

Maryland Farm Bureau supports the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015 (HR 4432), which would create national GMO labeling uniformity and supports the consistency of information to consumers about "non-GMO," "GMO," and "Natural" food labels.

Opposing the proposed WOTUS Rule by the EPA

Under the proposed WOTUS rule by the EPA, Maryland farmers are left with no clarity and it creates a risk by providing the EPA or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) with almost unlimited authority to regulate, at their discretion, any low spot where rainwater collects, including common farm ditches, ephemeral drainages, and agricultural ponds.

Maryland Farm Bureau supports Congressional efforts to have EPA and the Corps withdraw the proposed rule.

Preserving Antibiotic Access in Livestock and Poultry

In order to raise healthy animals, farmers and ranchers need tools to keep animals healthy including medicines that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Restricting access to these important tools will jeopardize animal health and compromise their ability to raise and produce a healthy and safe product. Maryland farmers have serious concerns about the effects of removing important antibiotics and classes of antibiotics from the market, which would handicap veterinarians, livestock and poultry producers.

Maryland Farm Bureau supports regulation of antibiotics/antimicrobials at the nation level to avoid state-by-state patchwork of regulation.

Agricultural Labor and the need for Immigration Reform

Maryland currently has 621 temporary workers through the H-2A program. This program allows an increase of a labor workforce during seasonal harvest times during the year. However, the current program is becoming increasingly costly and legally burdensome for producers. The ongoing shortage of workers every year is causing farmers to be less competitive with foreign farmers and less reliable for the American consumer. Agriculture needs a program that functions as efficiently as the current free market movement of migrant farm workers.

Maryland Farm Bureau supports responsible legislative immigration reform that addresses border security, fixes the legal immigration system, and provides farmers access to a legal and stable workforce.