



Maryland Department of Agriculture

DED OB
Attn: J. Slade
Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry

Office of the Secretary

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Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
Earl F. Hance, Secretary
Mary Ellen Setting, Deputy Secretary

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25-14

July 5, 2013

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street
2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Leggett,

I am writing to tell you about a new program to help support agriculture tourism in your county that I hope you will support. As farmers diversify their operations and connect more directly with consumers, ag-tourism has become a growing segment of Maryland agriculture. The 2007 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ag Census identified 231 ag-tourism farms in Maryland with receipts of \$7.3 million.

The Maryland Ag-Tourism Signing Program will allow the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) to post directional signs to an approved ag-tourism site on the nearest state route, but only after the county has agreed to participate in the program. The program is currently in a pilot phase in Charles County, with expansion into Frederick and Harford counties anticipated this summer. We expect the program to be available statewide by the end of this year.

The SHA will manage the program with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA); however, for it to succeed, counties must first agree to participate. Signs installed along state roads must be followed by the installation of "trailblazer" signs along the county roads. The SHA is not permitted to install signs along state highways until the county trailblazers are in place.

The qualifying farms will pay for these signs. Each qualifying farm must first work with the county to obtain signs along county roads before requesting signs along state routes. The farm will supply the state with written approval from the county government before the SHA and MDA will consider applications for signs along state roads.

While the guidelines are still being modified to address lessons learned from the pilot program, the minimum eligibility criteria for a working farm includes: open to customers and tourists for at least six months of the year, at least four days a week and at least six hours a day for the on-site sale of local agricultural products; have an established educational tour that can be provided by a knowledgeable guide upon request; host public events, such as festivals, fairs or workshops; or provide both educational tours and events.

We hope that you support this opportunity for farmers in your county. Please feel free to contact Stone Slade, (410) 841-5779, email: stone.slade@maryland.gov directly with questions about this program.

Sincerely,

Earl F. Hance
Secretary

RECEIVED

cc: Michael Sanderson, Maryland Association of Counties
Melinda Peters, State Highway Administration

JUL 05 2013

Attachment: Guidelines
Attachment

OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY EXECUTIVE