

Maryland

**(Historical Essay on Agriculture and
Rural Life)**

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MARYLAND

One of the thirteen original states, Maryland has a rich and complex agricultural history well documented in the holdings of several major state institutions, including the University of Maryland. Bordered by Pennsylvania to the north and Virginia to the south, Maryland encompasses a diverse geography within her relatively small 12,193 square miles: from the tidewaters of the Chesapeake Bay through the industrialized Baltimore City to the mountains of western Maryland. As a neighbor to the nation's capital and a pivot, or border, state between the North and the South, Maryland occupies an important political space, too. The Mason Dixon Line divides Maryland from Pennsylvania, and more famously, North from South. Nicknamed "The Old Line State," Maryland's agricultural history, rural life, and culture reflect and combine trends found in both the North and the South. Maryland's close proximity to the nation's capital has meant that the state's agricultural history is closely tied to national institutions and events. The headquarters, for example, of the National Agricultural Research Center and the National Agricultural Library are located in Beltsville, Maryland.

Maryland is divided into five distinct provinces with progressively higher altitudes from east to west. The Atlantic Coastal Plain extends from the Atlantic Ocean south and west to the northern border of Washington, D. C. This province includes the Chesapeake Bay, a 195 mile long estuary (the largest in the United States), which divides the state into "two shores," the Eastern Shore and the Western Shore. Native Americans were living around the Bay when Captain John Smith, founder of the Jamestown, Virginia settlement, explored it from 1607-09. The Bay yields oysters, clams, blue crabs, the American eel, and striped bass. Agriculture has had a significant impact on the Bay over time and agriculture's effects on the Bay are an important focus of research today. The variety of research conducted is represented in the Contribution series of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, which includes titles such as *The Fishes of Maryland*. The Piedmont Province is about fifty miles wide as it cuts across the state from the northeast through central Maryland. To the west of the Piedmont is the Blue Ridge Province, situated in north Maryland near the Pennsylvania border.

The Maryland section of the Appalachian Ridge and Valley is the northern strip of land that separates West Virginia from Pennsylvania. The Allegheny Mountains cover most of the fifth province, Appalachian Plateau Province; Backbone Mountain, the highest point in Maryland, is located in this region.

In 1634, approximately 130 men and women settled in St. Mary's City in southern Maryland and almost immediately began to build housing and to plant crops. With Virginia, Maryland quickly became known for its tobacco production, a crop that would have a significant impact on the state's agricultural, social, and political history. Despite tobacco's dominance in the historical record, other produce and wheat and dairy products, in particular, were significant agricultural products in Maryland as early as the first decade of the eighteenth century. The Continental Congress relied heavily on Marylanders to provide food for troops fighting in the American Revolution, gaining Maryland her reputation as the "breadbasket of the revolution."

Marylanders were leaders in advocating a scientific approach to analyzing agricultural issues in the new nation. The published works of John Beale Bordley (1727 – 1804) are noteworthy in this regard. Marylanders, including George Calvert of Riversdale, were prominent members of the Columbia Agricultural Society, the nation's first agricultural society founded in 1810 in Georgetown. His son, Charles Benedict Calvert, led agricultural reform movements in the state and the nation. C.B. Calvert was notable both for his central role in the founding of the Maryland Agricultural College and his introduction, as a member of Congress, of legislation resulting in the formation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Two of the first American agricultural periodicals were published in the Washington D.C.-Maryland area. The Reverend David Wiley of the Columbian Agricultural Society, based in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., began the *Agricultural Museum* in 1810. This publication, which ran for two years, is widely known as the first periodical in the United States devoted primarily to agriculture. A few years later in 1819, John Stuart Skinner published the *American Farmer* (1819-1897) in Baltimore. This was the first American agricultural journal with a large circulation. When Skinner became aware that the quality of soil was declining in Maryland, he established this pioneering farm journal to promulgate best methods for farming practice.

After the war of 1812, other crops became more important, as did the raising of livestock. Demand grew for dairy products, fruits, and vegetables. Infestations of insects, especially the Hessian fly, affected wheat crops. Baltimore was an important manufacturing, transportation, and trade center. Entrepreneurs there milled and exported grain and later imported and manufactured fertilizer. Baltimore was a major port for the importation of guano from South America. Manufactured fertilizer, or “manipulated guano,” was first produced in Baltimore in 1849, which became increasingly important as the soil became depleted of nutrients due to intensive cultivation.

Maryland played a leading role in applying innovations in transportation to the distribution of agricultural products. The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the nation's first rail carrier, were both founded to bring western products eastward. Baltimore was a major trans-shipping port with ties to South America that led its dominant position as the entry point for guano from the islands off the west coast of Chile. Steamboats on the Chesapeake were a key means of fostering truck farming and moving farm and fisheries products to the large canning industries located in Baltimore. By the time of the post-Civil War era, the advent of railroad lines on Maryland's Eastern Shore opened new markets in Philadelphia leading to the intensive agriculture still practiced in this part of the state.

The Civil War affected agriculture in Maryland profoundly. Many livestock diseases appeared in Maryland as animals were transported across the state for military uses. After the Civil War, the westward movement of agriculture reduced the agricultural importance of Maryland to the nation. Up until 1900 agriculture was the prevalent

economic activity in Maryland, after which time a manufacturing economy predominated. Wheat declined as the major crop. As wheat production declined, Maryland's Eastern Shore became a center of vegetable production; the dairy industry occupied central Maryland, and tobacco continued to be produced in southern Maryland.

An important development in Maryland agriculture was the formation of agricultural societies, farmer's clubs, and the Grange. These groups provided farmers with support as they faced the problems and stresses of rural life. The early groups were literary planters' organizations, followed by the formation of state and county societies and organizations that sponsored fairs and agricultural education. The Board of Trustees of the Maryland Agricultural Society of the Eastern Shore was formed to coordinate the improvement of the agricultural production system there. Specialized agricultural societies become more prevalent, including societies for horticulture, silk, marketing, and livestock. The first grange in was founded in 1873.

The Maryland State Agricultural Society formed in 1848. The *American Farmer* served as its record. It sponsored fairs and supported an experimental farm and agricultural college. Under the leadership and encouragement of Charles Benedict Calvert, a small group of investors founded the Maryland Agricultural College in 1856. In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant College Act further supported the development of the Maryland Agricultural College, which became the state's first land-grant institution in 1865. Today, the Maryland Agricultural College is the University of Maryland, College Park, the state of Maryland's flagship university. In 1886, the Delaware Conference Academy was established as a state land-grant program for African Americans. It still exists in the present day as the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

The 1856 charter of the Maryland Agricultural College was the first to authorize the "conduct of experimentation" in addition to the teaching of agricultural subjects. The 1887 Hatch Act furthered the conduct of experimentation, creating the State Agricultural Experiment Station (SAES) system, and the General Assembly of Maryland approved the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) in 1888. In 1892, the Station separated from the Maryland Agricultural College when an independent director to the Experiment Station was appointed. The Station's records and publications document over 100 years of agricultural research in Maryland. Some of the highlights include work on control of San Jose scale, an orchard pest, and the isolation of vitamin B-12 as the result of poultry research by Mary Shaw Shorb. In 1951, Wendell Arbuckle, "Mr. Ice Cream," organized the first national ice cream conference at the University of Maryland. The University of Maryland Dairy is still operational today. In 1967, MAES started the first formal research program in aquaculture in the nation. As recently as 1987, the Chesapeake Bay Agreement charges the MAES to investigate the impact of soil management practices and use of agricultural chemicals on surface and ground-water quality.

The Maryland Cooperative Extension Service (MCES) is another institution that has played an important role in agricultural research and education throughout the state. The Smith-Lever Act led to the creation of MCES at the Maryland Agricultural College in 1916. The system expanded to county governments shortly thereafter. The Service has published numerous publications on all types of agricultural topics for the benefit of Marylanders. For example, a book by M.C. Joelle Fignole Lofton, *Bittersweet Perspectives on Maryland's Extension Service* (1990), documents the history of black agricultural extension agents in Maryland.

The breeding and training of thoroughbred horses has been an important industry throughout Maryland's history and continues today. Horse racing has been part of life in Maryland since colonial times. Races took place at crossroads, taverns, and in the vicinity of tobacco-loading points. Soon horses began to be imported and bred in Maryland and Virginia. The first thoroughbred arrived in Virginia in 1730 and horse breeding became an important activity in Maryland soon thereafter. The famous Preakness, well over 100 years old and the second jewel of horse racing's Triple Crown, is held at the Pimlico race track in Baltimore, America's second oldest race track, according to the Maryland Horse Breeders Association. Established in 1929, the Maryland Horse Breeders Association has published the periodical *The Maryland Horse* since 1934.

Today, agriculture is the state's largest commercial industry, and fourteen percent of the state's workforce is engaged in Maryland's food and fiber sector. Over time, poultry, nursery and turf sod production, fresh fruits and vegetables, and the horse breeding industry have joined traditional dairy, grain, and livestock production as important commodities. On a national scale, Maryland's poultry and tobacco industries rank among the country's top volume producers. In terms of cash sales, the vertically integrated poultry industry (producers and processors of broilers) on the Delmarva Peninsula is the largest in Maryland. Dairy is the second largest industry, and swine and livestock are raised as well. Today, Maryland's major crops are corn, soybeans, wheat, tomatoes, green vegetables (cabbage, green peas, lima beans, and spinach), pumpkins, squash, turnips, apples, strawberries, melons, and other fruits. Agriculture has been an integral part of Maryland's history, and it continues to be a main component of Maryland's diversified economy.