SPRING 2026

Supporting Family and Small Farms in Prince George's County: Tools for Sustainability and Growth

COURSE

ENSP400: Capstone in Environmental Science and Policy

PALS

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Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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ABOUT PALS
The Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) is administered by the National Center for Smart Growth at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD). It is a campus-wide initiative that harnesses the expertise of UMD faculty and the energy and ingenuity of UMD students to help Maryland communities become more environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. PALS is designed to provide innovative, low-cost assistance to local governments while creating real-world problem-solving experiences for University of Maryland graduate and undergraduate students.

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Executive Summary

In recent years, Prince George's County, Maryland has experienced a significant loss of farmland resulting in widespread, negative impacts across the environmental, economic, and social sectors. Our project, *Supporting Family and Small Farms in Prince George's County: Tools for Sustainability and Growth*, set out to identify the challenges that family-owned and small farmers face in Prince George's County and to create a resource toolkit to support these farmers. Reducing the barriers that family-owned and small farms face in Prince George's County is crucial to improving food access, environmental health, and agricultural economic opportunities.

Our team completed a thorough literature review, attended farm visits, and conducted expert interviews with both farmers and stakeholders to research the topic. We identified the major barriers to family-owned and small farming to be rising input and production costs, decreasing revenue, urbanization, and changes to federal policies. Despite these barriers, there are many local, state, and federal programs that provide financial, educational, and technical support that are outlined in our resource toolkit.

Going forward, we propose eight recommendations: centralize financial opportunities online, provide regulatory support staff, connect farmers with local students interested in social media, advocate for improvements in agricultural zoning and permitting regulations, create additional farm incubator spaces, serve marginalized farmers, create an infrastructure grant program, and develop an online volunteer portal. We believe that through these actions, Prince George's County can strengthen its investment in family-owned and small farms, thus having a long-lasting impact on the environmental, societal, and economic development of the county.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Small farms in Prince George’s County, Maryland are an invaluable resource to the community. Family-owned and small farms (FOSFs) support food security, enhance the local economy, and strengthen the environment around the county by preserving green spaces (Martinez et al., 2010; Power, 2010). Farms that are located near large urban areas are especially important, as they reduce the overall “heat island” effect that cities experience due to increased infrastructure that absorb large amounts of heat (Klink, 2025). Protecting FOSFs is an important duty of both county and state governments (Klink, 2025). In Prince George's County, where food access is a growing concern, these farms provide fresh produce to underserved neighborhoods (Prince George’s County Planning Department, 2020). This University of Maryland Environmental Science and Policy senior capstone project serves to connect with farmers across the county to better understand their opportunities and struggles. The aim is to create an accessible resource toolkit for farmers that provides an aggregation of policy, financial, and educational resources in one place. Using information gathered from regulations, articles, and stakeholder interviews, we provided recommendations to our client at the Prince George’s County Planning Department to help them in supporting FOSFs with recommended tools and regulations.

BACKGROUND

Scope of the Issue

Prince George's County is located in central Maryland with a population of 966,629 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Due to its large population size, the county is facing significant issues regarding the loss of natural resources. Between 2017-2022, the state of Maryland lost over 12,000 acres of farmland, while only gaining 121 new farms (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022). In Prince George's County, there was a 4% loss of farm land and an 8% decrease in the average size of farms between 2017-2022 (National Agricultural Statistical Service, 2022). The decrease in average size of farms in the county is unique considering that nationwide, between 2018 and 2025, the average size of farms increased (USDA, 2026). Farmland loss greatly impacts Maryland's smaller scale farms, as around 54% of the 12,550 farms in the state operate on less than 50 acres of land (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022).

Reducing the barriers that FOSFs face in Prince George's County is critical to improving food access, environmental health, and agricultural economic opportunities. Local farms support food security in Prince George's County by strengthening the connection between producers and consumers, thus helping ensure that the produce consumers receive is fresh. Farms in the county also provide a plethora of environmental benefits including flood control, air filtration, protection of wetlands, and habitat for wildlife (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024b). FOSFs also support the economy by providing local jobs, selling products, and producing tax revenues. The farmland in the county also holds historical, cultural, educational, and recreational value that deserves to be preserved (Prince George’s County Planning Department, 2024b).

Barriers to Family-Owned and Small Farming

Prince George's County’s Approved General Plan, Plan 2035, states the county’s commitment to “preserving our existing rural and agricultural communities, including our rural viewsheds, farmland and the agricultural economy” (Plan 2035, 2014, p. 13). Despite this commitment, FOSFs in the county face substantial obstacles when it comes to starting and maintaining their farms. One of the main obstacles is rising input and production costs. Data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that in Maryland there was an 18.13% increase in seed costs, 25.29% increase in oil and fuel costs, 85.27% increase in fertilizer, lime, and soil conditioner costs, and 45.10% increase in interest rates (including operator dwellings) from 2017 to 2024 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2026). Inflation and rising interest rates create economic strain for farmers in starting and maintaining their farms.

Along with rising input and production costs, farmers nationwide receive a very low share of the profit made from their agricultural products. In 2024, crop producers received only 2.5 cents for every consumer food dollar, with the remaining profit going towards processing, transportation, packaging, selling, and food services (Parum, 2026). This was a 14% decrease in crop producers’ share of the revenue from 2023 due to increased input costs and shifts in food pricing (Parum, 2026). While large-scale farmers may be able to recover from particularly hard years, many FOSFs farmers do not have a financial safety net to rely on (Tremblay, 2025).

In addition to financial barriers, FOSFs in Prince George's County face challenges of farming near growing urban areas. Urbanization continues to erase potential farmland, despite the county's efforts to protect farmland (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024a). The county's efforts to protect farmland include enforcing Maryland's Smart Growth initiative to designate Priority Funding Areas (PFAs), which are existing communities and areas where local governments encourage state investment to support future growth. Rural Legacy Areas are also included, as well as county-level policy protections for development on rural tiered land, which is intended to preserve agricultural land, limit suburban sprawl, and support long-term rural and environmental conservation goals (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024b). Priority Funding Areas exist outside of typical rural areas and are eligible for the Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit, whereas Rural Legacy Areas work to protect large rural areas "encompassing agricultural, natural, cultural, and forestry resources"; both programs complement each other's work (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024b; Prince George's Soil Conservation District, 2026). Due to urbanization, the costs to buy or lease land is high, along with the cost of property taxes (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024a). Land development in Prince George's County also continues to increase with 16 new residential development projects, accounting for 3,042 dwelling units, approved in 2024 alone (Prince George's County

Planning Department, 2025). Urbanization and land development also leads to increased rates of trespassing, theft, and air pollution—all leading to a decrease in productivity of farms near urban areas (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024a).

Additionally, changes in federal policy challenge FOSFs. In 2025, the USDA ended two major programs, the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement (LFS) and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA), which helped schools and food pantries buy locally grown produce from farmers (M. Brown, 2025). This decision cancelled over $1 billion of federal funding that was aimed at supporting local agriculture (M. Brown, 2025). Prior to the cancellation, the Capitol Area Food Bank, one of the major pantries that received funding from LFPA, had agreements with 33 local Maryland growers and farmers in both Prince George's County and Montgomery County (D. Brown, 2025).

Maryland agriculture has also been affected by the increase in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and deportations, exacerbating the agricultural labor shortage and deterring new workers from being hired. While many large-scale farms can afford the costs of mechanization and expensive work visas for employees, FOSFs may not be able to (Tremblay, 2025). This results in many FOSFs not having adequate employees to support their farm's operations.

Existing Resources

Despite the various challenges FOSFs face, there are many existing financial, educational, and programmatic resources that support farmers in Prince George's County. At the county level, there is the Prince George's County Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit, which grants urban agricultural property a tax credit for the county property tax (Prince George's County Council, 2016). At the state level, the Maryland Department of Agriculture provides many financial incentives to aid Maryland farmers, while promoting environmentally conscious practices. These ecosystem incentive programs include the Conservation Buffer Initiative, Maryland’s Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Tree Planting Incentives, Healthy Soils Competitive Fund, Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program, Conservation Equipment Tax Break, Cover Crop Program, Cover Crop Plus Program, and more (Maryland Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

Additionally, there are many educational resources and programmatic support for FOSFs in Prince George's County. The Prince George's Soil Conservation District’s (PGSCD) Urban Agricultural Conservation Program provides tools and services to urban farmers to support the implementation of best management practices to conserve soil and water resources. Some of these tools and services include zoning and permitting navigation, soil identification and testing consultations, soil conservation and water quality plans, best management practice recommendations, urban agriculture property tax credit certification, and training and networking (Prince George’s Soil Conservation District, 2024).

The nonprofit organization, Dreaming Out Loud, works to build equitable food access for marginalized communities, particularly those in Washington, D.C. They collect and distribute products from Prince George's County rural and urban farms which are then sold at farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and wholesale orders. Dreaming Out Loud also provides a technical assistance program (Farm Brigade), which gives hands-on support with farming (crop planning, soil health, pest management, sustainable agriculture practices, infrastructure building, and small machine repair), as well as workshops and training sessions to increase farmers’ knowledge and skills (Dreaming Out Loud Inc., n.d.).

Another resource for farmers in Prince George's County is the Urban Farm Incubator (UFI), which gives beginner small-scale farmers a chance to test their business on designated county land before launching. The UFI provides support through infrastructure, equipment, mentoring, and technical assistance and requires that the farmers use regenerative, certified naturally-grown, and organic practices. This program is a collaboration between many groups including ECO City Farms, PGSCD, Prince George’s Food Equity Council, The Capital Market of 20743 at Mary and Main, and the M-NCPPC Parks and Recreation Department (ECO City Farms, n.d.).

To support emerging urban farmers, ECO City Farm’s Beginner Farmer Training Program provides hands-on experiences, mentoring, and a culturally-appropriate curriculum over the course of a 10-month program. Their 2026 program is aimed at advanced beginners who have 3-5 years of growing experience. This program covers a vast number of topics including nursery management, compost making, farm management systems, infrastructure, marketing and finances, and soil and crop health (ECO City Farms, 2026).

At the state level, the Maryland Farm Bureau supports farmers through a community network, protecting farmers from nuisance lawsuits, and providing discounts on farming equipment, insurance, and services. However, the Maryland Farm Bureau requires a membership fee of $100 annually, which may pose a barrier to some FOSFs (Maryland Farm Bureau, 2026). Taking advantage of the resources available at the local, county, and state level will help FOSFs in Prince George's County access economic, social, and environmental opportunities.

OBJECTIVES

Project Scope

The main goal of this project is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the economic, regulatory, and environmental opportunities and challenges facing FOSFs in Prince George's County. The deliverables will be a comprehensive report, a final presentation to the client, and a toolkit with practical, financial, and educational tools that can be shared directly with local farmers. Focusing on Prince George's County allows for an assessment of this issue on a local level to delve into specific research, receive insight from farmers who have firsthand experience, and concentrate efforts on local regulations and incentives. The intent is to work in tandem with the Prince George's Planning Department to provide the necessary research and information to develop beneficial tools for farmers.

Research Questions

The research questions that will be addressed during the duration of this project are as follows:

1. What tools and policies can the Planning Department consider implementing to support family-owned and small farms?
2. What are the existing financial, educational, and programmatic resources supporting family-owned and small farms?
3. What county and state organizations, agencies, and groups provide technical assistance?
4. What are the economic, social, and environmental opportunities for family-owned and small farms?
5. What are the financial barriers affecting the economic prosperity of family-owned and small farms?
6. What, if any, are the barriers in county and state requirements and regulations that hinder the prosperity of family-owned and small farms?
7. What unmet needs in financing and technical assistance do family and small farms face?

Objectives and Rationale

There are three main objectives of this project. The first is to complete background research on FOSFs in Prince George's County. The research conducted on this issue will allow for the development of actionable recommendations that can be used to support FOSFs in Prince George's County. This research may be applicable not only to surrounding local counties but also on a larger scale.

The second objective is to identify challenges and collect data by conducting farmer and other expert interviews in the county. FOSFs face challenges such as rising land costs, limited financing access, regulatory barriers, and competition from larger commercial farmers. Hearing directly from farmers and other relevant stakeholders about their various issues will inform our research and recommendations.

The third objective is to create a resource toolkit with sections on Technical Assistance, Existing Financial Incentives and Programs, Regulatory and Compliance Information, Marketing and Sales, Education and Training, and Partners that support the sustainability and growth of FOSFs. After identifying the main issues that local farmers in the county face, the next step is to provide them with the necessary resources to tackle them, including practical, financial, and educational tools.

METHODS

Background Research

To answer our research questions, we used two principal methods: background research and expert interviews. Background research was essential to the project and allowed team members to gather a baseline level of knowledge on the current state of tools available to FOSFs in Prince George's County and the challenges they face, while interviews were essential to receive first-hand information on issues and tools that were not found in literature. Prior to any interviews being performed, members of our team conducted background research by utilizing online sources such as the University of Maryland's research databases as well as governmental websites. Once all the data from the background research was collected, it was synthesized into a collective research summary to effectively pinpoint the primary issues, tools, and recommendations related to FOSFs in Prince George's County.

Interviews

Interviews with farmers and other relevant experts were conducted to supplement the information collected in our team's research and literature review. In order to contact individuals to research, emails were sent out to several stakeholders with an explanation of the project. These individuals were identified in three ways: by the client, through snowball sampling from initial interviewees, and through online research. In total, we conducted six interviews, three virtual and three in-person (Table 1).

Interviews were a key component in our research. We interviewed three FOSFs in Prince George's County to better understand their farming practices, crop production, and operational challenges. The owner of Asawana Farms grows culturally significant crops such as ugu, scotch bonnet peppers, okra, and bitter melon. He operates on 0.5 acres at the UFI and has been active in the incubator for around four years, but is a lifelong farmer (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). The interview for the Asawana Farms' owner was conducted in-person during a farm tour, which gave the interviewers an opportunity to see his operations up close. We also virtually interviewed the owner of Mel 'n Nem Farms, a sustainable learning farm that grows fruits and vegetables. She farms on approximately one acre of land, located in Bowie, Maryland, and has been operating for about five years. Lastly, we conducted an in-person interview with the owners of Fat Cardinal Farm, also located in Bowie, who farm on a quarter-acre farm and produce seasonal crops.

The interview protocol was developed in collaboration with our client, and the questions varied depending on the interviewee's role. Farmer interviews focused on the following topics related to FOSFs: recommendations for potential policies and tools, financial barriers, existing resources, and ways the Prince George's County Planning Department can help them. Stakeholder interviews focused on how stakeholders can aid FOSFs in Prince George's County. The interviews were recorded and the transcripts were coded using content coding methods to yield thematic findings to answer the research questions.

Key Informant Interviews for “Supporting Family and Small Farms in Prince George’s County: Tools for Sustainability and Growth”

No.	Date	Interviewer	Organization & location of the respondent	Name(s) of respondents	Role/Title(s) of respondent(s)
Urban Farm Incubator					
1.	3/12/26	Capstone Group	Urban Farm Incubator, Upper Marlboro, MD	Jon Berger	Site Manager
2.	4/5/26	Max & Ardo	Urban Farm Incubator, Upper Marlboro, MD	Isaac Zama	Owner of Asawana Farms
Prince George’s Soil Conservation District					
3.	3/24/26	Capstone Group	Prince George’s Soil Conservation District, Virtual	Kim Rush Lynch	Urban Agricultural Conservation Program Staffer at the Prince George’s Soil Conservation District
Prince George’s Planning Department					
4.	3/24/26	Capstone Group	Prince George’s Planning Department, Virtual	Michele Burton	Food Systems Planner
Mel ‘n Nem Farms					
5.	4/17/26	Capstone Group	Mel ‘n Nem Farms, Virtual	Jamelle “Mel” Thomas	Founder and Operator of Mel ‘n Nem Farms
Fat Cardinal Farm					
6.	4/19/26	Max, Ardo, & Abrar	Fat Cardinal Farm, Bowie, MD	Tim and Danielle Young	Owners of Fat Cardinal Farm

Table 1 – Key Informant Interviews for Prince George’s County Farm Capstone

Resource Toolkit

The third objective of the project was to create a resource toolkit for farmers. To properly divide up the work, each team member was assigned one section of the resource toolkit to focus on. Once the resources were located via online research, they were inputted into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. The resources were organized into the six sections identified by the client: Technical Assistance, Existing Financial Incentives and Programs, Regulatory and Compliance Information, Marketing and Sales, Education and Training, and Partners. As for formatting the resource toolkit, our team asked farmers and other stakeholders about the preferred medium and developed the toolkit based on their suggestions. After the completion of the background research, interviews, and resource toolkit, team members developed this final report related to the challenges and opportunities that FOSFs encounter in Prince George's County.

RESULTS

Economic, Social, and Environmental Opportunities for FOSFs

Economic Opportunities

FOSFs in Prince George’s County play an important role in supporting local food systems, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience. Due to the county’s proximity to Washington, D.C., many farms are uniquely positioned to benefit from nearby suburban and urban markets. Local and regional food systems can increase farm profitability, strengthen local economies, and create opportunities for direct-to-consumer sales through farmers markets, CSAs, and institutional purchasing programs (Martinez et al., 2010). Additionally, urban-edge farming creates opportunities for value-added production, agritourism, and niche markets such as organic and regenerative agriculture (Barbieri, 2012). Diversifying income sources reduces reliance on volatile commodity markets and strengthens long-term farm resilience. Conservation incentive programs and grant opportunities also provide supplemental income while supporting sustainable land stewardship practices. There are several grant opportunities that aid beginner farmers in getting established. In Prince George’s County, there are multiple unique resources to help farmers grow their farms, such as the UFI, a shared farming space in Prince George’s County that provides beginner farmers with access to land, infrastructure, and resources to help them start and grow small agricultural businesses (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). The incubator supports local food production, farmer training, and community-based agriculture, with a strong focus on supporting underserved and first-generation farmers (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). Each farmer at the UFI is typically allocated approximately half an acre to manage independently; with 10 farmers and 5.5 acres total, there is limited space to grow (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026).

The UFI received grants from the Prince George’s Planning Department, the United States Department of Agriculture, Chesapeake Bay Trust grants, and two soil grants, along with two other private grants (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). Other farmers in the county, such as the owner of Mel ‘n Nem Farms, utilized several grants to help establish their operations, including a Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE) grant and a Bright Futures Farm grant. However, much of the farm’s growth depended on significant personal financial investment. The owner of Mel ‘n Nem Farms is currently in the process of applying for a Maryland Education Grant that would offset the costs of a gardening after-school program for elementary school students (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026). Another interviewee, Fat Cardinal Farm, received grants from sources including the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Maryland Department of Agriculture (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Fat Cardinal Farm also received a grant for a pollinator habitat through the Conservation Stewardship Program within the NRCS (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026).

Figure 1 – Urban Farm Incubator

Social Opportunities

Prince George's County offers many different social opportunities for FOSFs to connect to see how other urban farms in the area grow their businesses. The PGSCD hosts a monthly event called "Bloomin' Prince George's Open Mic Nights" to highlight the different farms across the county, bring the community together, and introduce farmers to industry experts (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; PGSCD, 2025). For example, one open mic night, farmers connected with a financial expert who taught farmers how to budget (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). The farmer from Asawana Farms hosted an open mic night in April, and a few other UFI farmers are hosting open mic nights in the coming months. Furthermore, farmers at UFI partnered with local churches, Owl's Nest, a cooperative agricultural company, and other incubators across the country (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). Additionally, one farmer from UFI partners with the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center to distribute his medicinal crops to patients and hopes to expand to other hospitals.

The partnership between ECO City Farms and the UFI supports several beginner farmers by providing mentorship, technical assistance, and opportunities for business development (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). In addition to this program, a local food market called the Capital Market establishes a food market in a space within Capitol Heights that previously lacked a farmers market (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). This market expands community access to locally grown foods while also promoting agricultural education and food security initiatives within the area (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). Other organizations in the county that promote food accessibility include charitable food recovery programs such as the Capital Area Food Bank, the Prince George's County Food Rescue, and the College Park Community Food Bank, which redistribute surplus food to underserved communities and food assistance organizations to improve equitable food access (M. Burton, personal communication, March 24, 2026).

Environmental Opportunities

FOSFs create significant environmental opportunities within Prince George's County. Research demonstrates that diversified farms often improve soil health, support biodiversity, and contribute to ecosystem services through sustainable land management practices (Power, 2010). In areas connected to the Chesapeake Bay watershed, conservation practices such as cover crops, riparian buffers, nutrient management, and regenerative agriculture are especially important for reducing erosion, improving water quality, and increasing carbon sequestration (Lal, 2020). Additionally, urban-edge farms preserve open space and help maintain ecological balance in rapidly developing counties. Farmers can apply for grants to implement best management practices (BMPs), including cover crops, no-till farming, nutrient management plans, streamside buffers, and high tunnels (PGSCD, 2024). BMPs not only support environmental conservation but also improve long-term farm productivity and resilience (PGSCD, 2024). The PGSCD additionally provides climate-smart solutions such as raised beds, mulching, crop rotations, forestry practices, and high tunnels to improve the health and productivity of urban soils (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026).

Financial Barriers Affecting the Economic Prosperity of FOSFs

Despite existing financial resources, there are numerous financial barriers that affect the economic prosperity of FOSFs in Prince George's County. One financial barrier is the increase in land costs. While farm-related income in Prince George's County increased 357% between 2017 and 2022, land prices increased

19.1% (Maryland Department of Planning, 2024; USDA, 2022). Rising cost of land impedes farms from buying land to scale up production (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). One farmer we interviewed explained that buying land is challenging because you must have 20% down payments (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). Rising land prices exacerbate another challenge FOSFs face–competing with big corporations to supply produce to large companies such as hospitals (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). According to a farmer/economist from Fat Cardinal Farm, farming at a small-scale requires higher income costs (costs associated with assembling, showcasing, transporting) and more labor than farming at a large scale (CFA Journal, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). As a result, the prices of small-scale farm products are higher, and small-scale farms are less attractive to customers (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). In contrast, large farms producing corn and soybeans receive subsidies to decrease the prices of their products, leaving FOSFs struggling to compete on price (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Despite making up more than 86% of farms nationwide, small farm production pales in comparison with large scale farm production (Farm Income Team, 2026). According to the USDA, small farms – defined as farms with annual gross cash farm income (GCFI) of less than $350,000 before expenses – account for 17.2% of total farm share of production, whereas, large-scale farms with GCFI $1,000,000 or more, account for 50.2% of the share of production (Farm Income Team, 2026). Overall, FOSFs in Prince

George’s County struggle to buy land because of rising land prices, and struggle to enter business with large-scale food buyers. Compounding these issues, FOSFs face cuts to federal agricultural grants under the current administration.

In 2026, the repeal of the LFPA removed funding to food banks to purchase food from FOSFs in Prince George’s County (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). According to the UFI manager, this grant cut erased a consistent customer for FOSFs (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). Another grant cancellation impacting FOSFs is the USDA’s cancellation of the Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program (ILCMAP) that awarded grants to help farmers access land and markets, and manage farm inheritance (Brown, 2026). This grant specifically targeted Black farmers, immigrant farmers, Indigenous farmers, and veteran farmers (Brown, 2026). Federal grants such as the LFPA and ILCMAP are imperative to the farm business model; According to the Congressional Research Service, in 2020, 39% of farm income came from government subsidies. (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

In addition to grant cuts and federal subsidies, FOSFs face high infrastructure expenses such as wash and pack stations, refrigeration, cold storage, fencing and netting to protect from deer and insects, hand tillers, and tractors (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). For example, the cost of fencing to protect the UFI was around $70,000 (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). In addition to infrastructure, farms face the challenges of paying for water. The farmer from Fat Cardinal Farm stated that they spent over $1,000 in one month on water (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Another expensive input is high gas prices; high gas prices correlate with high fertilizer prices (K. R., Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026).

Requirements and Regulations that Hinder the Prosperity of FOSFs

The team dove into the Maryland legislation for the 2026 session to find out what bills, if passed, could hinder the prosperity of FOSFs in Prince George's County. Although agriculture is one of Maryland's largest commercial industries, contributing approximately $8.25 billion annually to the economy and covering nearly 2 million acres of the state in 2022, it faces many challenges (Proulx, 2025). In Maryland, "Agritourism" and "Value-Added Agriculture" are two rapidly emerging practices which have been overlooked within state and local regulations and policy (Proulx, 2025). Value-added agriculture is defined by the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture as "a change in the physical state or form of an agricultural product or production in a manner that increases value," such as a certified organically grown label. Agritourism is defined as when "the public is welcomed onto a private farm for the purposes of education and recreational activities that supplement or enhance the underlying farm operations" (Proulx, 2025). These emerging practices represent an evolution of agriculture which exists within an outdated framework. This framework was built upon traditional definitions of farming, creating challenges for the state and local authorities to adequately support and expand new agricultural businesses (Proulx, 2025).

The amount of farmland in Maryland is shrinking and rising in price, which means FOSFs are becoming a popular pathway for prospective farmers in the area. It is the duty of local and state governments to implement policies and regulations that reflect the changing agricultural landscape, as challenges for FOSFs often lead to a struggle to get established. A significant challenge on the state and local level is the disjointed definitions of farming across jurisdictions in Maryland; many jurisdictions have different interpretations of state legislation which proves difficult when acquiring necessary licensing and certification. This makes eligibility for proper zoning permits, other permits, and regulatory mandates difficult. For instance, definitions of what constitutes a farm vary significantly across jurisdictions. In Maryland, only 14 jurisdictions currently define ‘farm,’ and each definition differs from the others (Proulx, 2025). Prince George’s County defines agricultural uses such as agriculture, urban agriculture, and agritourism in its zoning ordinance, but does not currently provide a definition for "farm" (Proulx, 2025). During an interview with Fat Cardinal Farm, the farmers mentioned a frustrating and arduous process with understanding regulations and qualifications. They expanded on some of the requirements with sales taxes stating that, “apparently…when we sell vegetables, we do not need to charge state sales tax when we sell either at the stand or at the farmers market, but that exemption does not apply for cut flowers… That’s confusing.” A lot of this confusion stems from inconsistent enforcement of legislation and ordinances from counties across the state due to different definitions of farm-related activity.

The definition of agritourism includes the words “private farm,” which becomes an issue when all existing definitions of a farm in Maryland are different. Urban farms are allowed by right in all zones, and while some accessory structures are permitted, they may require permits, causing high costs for farmers (Prince George’s Soil Conservation District, September 2024). Another issue Fat Cardinal emphasized is the lack of information and transparency on who to talk to about zoning, tax exemption eligibility, or restrictions. They mentioned that many regulations and restrictions only become clear after speaking with a third party connection from the PGSCD. Another farmer in the county corroborated how helpful the PGSCD is since she gets special permission to do things that would normally not fit within ordinances. For instance, she had piles of mulch sitting in her yard without being cited by the county (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026).

Although urban farms are allowed across the state of Maryland, only Prince George’s County defines urban agriculture within their local zoning text (Proulx, 2025). Federal and state governments recognize urban agriculture, sometimes with grants or subsidies attached, but some counties fail to allow urban farms to access these resources due to mismatched, outdated, and complex policy frameworks which makes eligibility especially challenging (Proulx, 2025). A prime example of that is the Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit, which only one farm in Prince George's County currently qualifies for. Another controversial bill is the Maryland House Bill 91–Agriculture - Neonicotinoid Pesticides - Prohibitions, which would have prohibited a person from distributing, selling, or using corn, soybean, or wheat seeds that have been coated or treated with neonicotinoid pesticides. This bill would harm farmers because it would result in increasing costs for an alternative pest control and require more labor intensive monitoring (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). This bill did not end up passing this session, but farmers could see it introduced in future sessions. Another bill of concern is House Bill 1071–Environment - Stormwater Management for Agritourism, which would require the Maryland Department of the Environment to adopt regulations that consider BMPs for stormwater management for agritourism (K. Rush Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026; M. Burton, personal communication, March 24, 2026). Farmers may be concerned that additional stormwater management requirements could increase operational costs and create additional regulatory burdens for small and family-owned farms. These requirements may also make it more difficult for farms to develop or expand agritourism activities that provide supplemental income.

Within Maryland, there are designated Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas. Lands that fall within what is deemed to be a critical area must adhere to special regulations to ensure the health and stability of the land and the surrounding area. In Prince George’s County, most of the land on the water is an approved Resource Conservation Area, meaning that land use regulations are the most restrictive and no new construction, industrial, and institutional uses are permitted (Maryland Department of Natural Resources, n.d.). Looking at Figure 2, all of the land that borders water that leads into the Chesapeake Bay is labeled as a Resource Conservation Area, with some areas being Intensely Developed Areas, meaning that any new development must include techniques to reduce pollutant loadings associated with stormwater runoff. This can include site design, infiltration practices, and structural stormwater treatment practices (Maryland Department of Natural Resources, n.d.). FOSFs often navigate these strict environmental regulations on their own which may prove burdensome and complex because they exist within an industry that is regulated by multiple government agencies (Proulx, 2025). The PGSCD does provide technical assistance to farms across the county, but there is an inconsistency across the state regarding stormwater management practices, which limit their abilities as an approval authority (Proulx, 2025). These gray areas of technical assistance and regulatory practices have caused FOSFs great strain in navigating this space and finding support to expand their growing businesses.

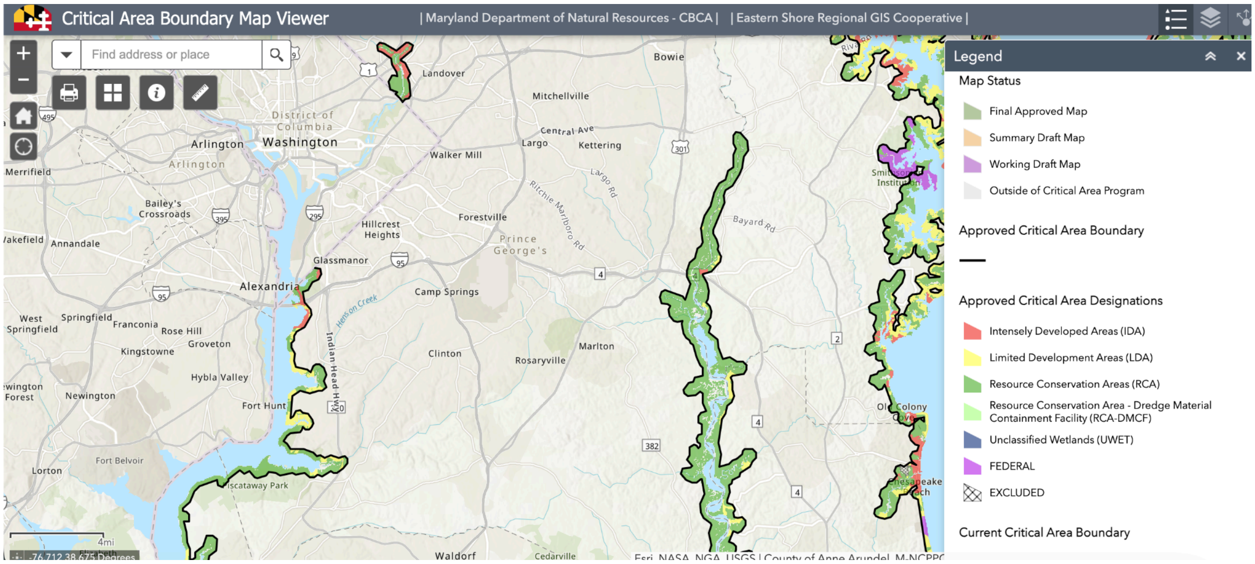


Figure 2 – Critical Area Boundary Map Viewer

Unmet Needs in Financing and Technical Assistance that FOSFs Face

The final topic area that our team researched was unmet needs in financing and technical assistance. Regarding financial assistance, there is a demand for funding for market events, managing social media, and advertising volunteer opportunities (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026). In respect to technical assistance, there's a desire for semi-mechanized tools, such as small tilling machines, that can help reduce the amount of manual labor (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). Furthermore, having access to relatively expensive technical necessities, such as tractors, irrigation systems, and cold storage facilities, would be useful (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Tractors specifically were listed by two farmers as expensive technical needs.

Farmers repeated the same unmet and operational needs. For example, farmers struggled with simultaneously handling administrative tasks like managing production, marketing, volunteer coordination, bookkeeping, and regulatory paperwork, limiting the time available for farm expansion and long-term planning (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Multiple farmers expressed difficulty finding consistent volunteers and requested better advertising or centralized volunteer coordination (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). Furthermore, farmers cannot afford appropriately sized mechanized equipment or infrastructure independently; the farmer from Asawana Farms suggested a shared equipment program, or county-supported equipment access initiatives may help reduce operational costs for small and beginner farmers (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026).

There are some existing technical assistance programs that aid FOSFs. For example, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides grants for FOSFs to implement climate-smart practices such as pollinator gardens (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). An additional program is the Maryland Small Acreage Cover Crop Program which provides grants to small farms that implement climate-smart practices (MDA, 2026).

There are several unmet financial needs for FOSFs. The collapse of the LFPA, which provided states and counties with funds to support the purchase of food from local and regional farmers, impacted FOSFs in Prince George's County. The Capital Area Food Bank had 33 local Maryland growers and farmers and used the LFPA to purchase the food, causing many farmers to lose business this year (D. Brown, 2025). Although not from Maryland, an Illinois farmer mentioned that LFPA was one of the first USDA programs that really worked for small farms and stated, “by having that consistent market for our product, it allowed us to invest in infrastructure, capacity, production, transport, storage, all those things” (M. Brown, 2025). As of February 2026, there is a draft farm bill that would add a new permanent program modeled after LFS and LFPA. The new program would be eligible for up to $200 million in annual funding and be run by state, local, or tribal governments. However, there is no part of the funding that is mandatory, meaning that FOSFs in Prince George’s County may not reap the full benefits from this funding (M. Brown, 2025).

Federal farm subsidies can significantly help farms, yet in many cases, farm subsidy payments go to large agribusinesses, many of which are listed within the top 500 largest corporations in the United States. Farm subsidies are designed to help stabilize the income of farmers, this is in the form of establishing a minimum price for crops. Other programs pay farmers to leave their farm fallow to reduce overproduction. From 2005 to 2014, 90% of federal farm subsidy payments went to growers of only five crops: corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, and rice. In 2010, 74% of farm subsidies went to only 10% of U.S. farms, which had sales of over $250,000 (Ford and Flynn, 2024). These subsidies are designed to help farmers promote specific practices, further research and development, conservation practices, disaster aid, marketing, nutrition assistance, risk mitigation, and more (USAFacts Team, 2025). The owner of Asawana Farms mentioned that one issue is the lack of funding FOSFs receive compared to larger, established agricultural operations (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). As the larger subsidies payments go to larger farms, FOSFs are left with comparatively minimal assistance, and receive little to no help when they are the ones who need it more.

FOSFs face substantial risks including natural disasters, extreme weather events, outbreaks of disease and pests, global market forces like trade wars, unpredictable price fluctuations, and uncertainties regarding labor availability because they utilize marginal lands and lack the technical and financial capacity to invest in resilient practices (Manono, 2025). Although this is not specific to Maryland, if small farms in Prince George's County were provided with further technical and financial assistance, they could invest in resilient practices that could better protect their farms and enhance environmental conservation.

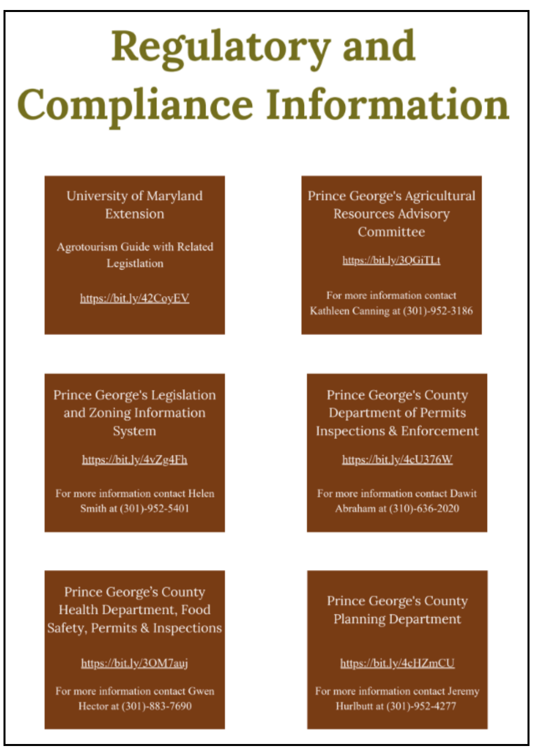
Toolkits

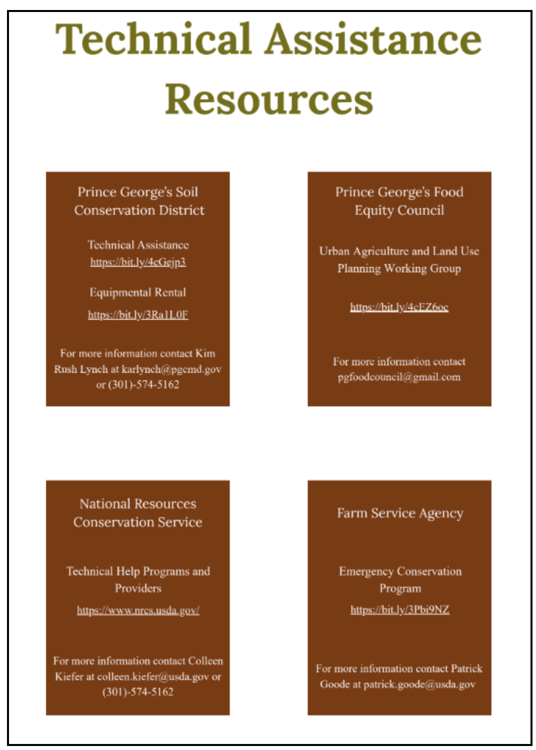
During our interviews, farmers expressed a need for both handheld, paper resources and easily accessible, online resources, which led us to create both a print and online format of the toolkit. Our team compiled resources into a Google Sheets spreadsheet (Figure 3), separating each tab by resource type (Technical Assistance, Existing Financial Incentives and Programs, Regulatory and Compliance Information, Marketing and Sales, Education and Training, and Partners). Each resource provides farmers with a description, a link to learn more about that resource, and a contact person if applicable.

Existing Financial Incentives and Programs			
Identify grant opportunities, low-interest loan programs, and tax incentives for family and small farms.			
Incentive/Program Name	Prince George's County Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit	Agricultural Use Assessment	Conservation Equipment Tax Break
Program type	Tax incentive	Tax incentive	Tax incentive
Description	Establishes a tax credit for property used and zoned for urban agricultural purposes. The property must be one-eighth of an acre and not more than 5 acres and located in the priority funding area of PGC.	Allows qualifying farmland in MD to be assessed for taxes at its current agricultural value rather than its market value, thus allowing for tax savings.	Subtracts 100% of the cost of eligible equipment purchases from taxable income on Maryland individual and corporate tax returns.
Website	https://princegeorgescountymd.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2467346&GUID=A228AA10-18DB-4192-8D2C-0C884D9FB81B&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=CB-74	https://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/pages/the-agricultural-use-assessment.aspx	https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Documents/taxsubtraction.pdf

Figure 3 – Screenshot of the Existing Financial Incentives and Programs from our Online Toolkit.

Furthermore, since many farmers and stakeholders suggested that we also provide a paper handout in addition to the online version of the toolkit, we developed that as well (Figures 4 & 5). While the paper handout does not contain the full extent of information from the spreadsheet, it highlights a significant portion of the resources accessible to farmers, organized by topic.





Figures 4 & 5 – Print Versions of the Toolkit for Regulatory and Compliance Information and Technical Assistance Resources.

DISCUSSION

Explanation of Results

Our results identify obstacles and existing resources available to FOSFs in Prince George's County. This includes existing tools and policies that we would recommend for implementation within the county, such as existing financial, educational, and programmatic resources to support FOSFs. This includes technical assistance resources, growth opportunities (economic, social, and environmental), economic barriers, and the regulations impacting these farms.

One trend in our findings is that FOSFs identify their lack of scale as a hindrance, yet do not have access to the capital to expand (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). The struggle to acquire land is an expected finding because land prices in the county are on the rise (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024a). Additionally, the struggle for Prince George's County FOSFs to acquire land makes sense within a national context given that farmland prices are on the rise nationwide (Brown, 2026).

Another key theme in our findings is that farmers are suffering because of cuts to farm grants under the current federal administration. One trend across interviewees is the struggle to build a customer base after the USDA cut the LFPA and the LFS (M. Brown, 2025, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026). This finding connects with farmers' struggle to access land and agricultural markets nationwide (Brown, 2025 & 2026). More generally, this finding highlights the current federal government's cut to agriculture to maintain fiscal responsibility (Brown, 2026).

Another trend across our results is that FOSFs want to learn how to use social media (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; J. Thomas, April 17, 2026). Social media could connect FOSFs with customers, potential employees, volunteers, and could help farmers learn new farming techniques. Literature review did not include very much consideration of social media; future research could identify which social media platforms would be best for FOSFs to use.

One surprising finding is that the Prince George's County Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit applies to only one farm in the county: Fat Cardinal Farm in Bowie (Young, T. personal communication, April 5, 2026). This finding is surprising because the tax credit was signed into law by the Prince George's County Council in 2015 although the tax credit has existed since 2015. Only one farm has successfully accessed this tax credit, suggesting that the eligibility requirements may be overly restrictive and highlighting the need to pass HB 0359, which is a bill intended to expand and improve access to the agricultural tax credit for eligible farms (Prince George's County Council, 2016). As the average farm size in the county continues to decrease, the eligibility requirements for the Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit should be revised to improve accessibility for small farms (Prince George's County Planning Department, 2024a). Investing in small farms should be a priority of the county because small farms connect local communities through agricultural knowledge sharing and food sharing (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Overall, the county should make it logistically easy for small farms to receive a tax credit because small farms connect communities and could establish Prince George's County as a destination for small scale agricultural businesses.

Another interesting finding is that two of the three farmers we interviewed listed books as the method they use to learn farming (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). This finding is surprising because books are less hands-on compared to in-person learning methods such as the ECO City Farms Beginner Farming Training Program and training from PGSCD (ECO City Farms, 2026; PGSCD, 2024). Overall, our results made sense within the context of the multitude of challenges that farmers are facing across Prince George's County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Centralize Financial Opportunities Online

One policy tool that farmers expressed interest in is centralized online information on financial opportunities such as cost-shares, grants, tax credits, and other financial opportunities. The farmers from Fat Cardinal Farm explained they access grants through word of mouth because information about available grants is not easy to find online (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). They also expressed desire for clear instructions on how to apply online for financial opportunities such as grants and tax exemptions and for Prince George's County staff to support farmers with applications to financial opportunities (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026).

Add Regulatory Support Staff

Our interviews revealed that one action the county should take to help FOSFs is to build transparency in regulations. Our interview with the UFI manager revealed that there is a lack of clarity regarding which forms are necessary for farmers to complete and which are optional. This leads farmers to feel less motivation to complete the required regulatory paperwork (J. Berger, March 12, 2026). The farmers at Fat Cardinal Farm expressed confusion over why they are not required to charge state sales tax on vegetable sales but are required to charge state sales tax on flower sales (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). The farmers also emphasized a desire for the county to add support staff to help farmers access their federal tax ID number, register as a family farm in the state of Maryland, and navigate the PG Atlas in order to apply for grants (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Overall, the UFI manager and the farmers at Fat Cardinal Farm requested added transparency with regulations and requirements (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; J. Berger, March 12, 2026).

Connect Farmers to Local Students Interested in Social Media

Another program recommendation is a partnership between FOSFs with local students who are interested in and knowledgeable about social media marketing. The farmer at Asawana Farms emphasized interest in partnering with University of Maryland students so that they could offer training on how to use social media (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). Another farmer expressed interest in partnering with high school students interested in social media marketing (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026). To facilitate a connection between students and farms, the county could create a social media internship position for high school students or partner with schools directly to build an experiential learning program.

Advocate for House Bill 0359 and Implement Food is Medicine Legislation

Our research team recommends that the county advocates for the passing of House Bill 0359 by Governor Wes Moore (HB 0359). The county offers an Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit, which provides tax credits to farmers growing in urban areas in Prince George's County (PGCSD, 2026). Although the Urban Agriculture Property Tax Credit provides financial relief for qualifying farms, eligibility requirements related to acreage, zoning, and land use limit accessibility for small-scale farmers (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). For example, Fat Cardinal Farm highlighted how the one-eighth acre minimum land requirement is challenging for urban farms to meet (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). HB 0359 helps FOSFs in Prince

George’s County expand their businesses by easing eligibility for the Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit (Delegate Roberson, et. al, 2026). Specifically, HB 0359 alters the definition of ‘urban agricultural property’ by repealing the requirements that urban agricultural property be at least one-eighth of an acre and not more than five acres, and be located in a specified Priority Funding Area (Delegate Roberson, et. al, 2026). Instead, HB 0359 defines urban agricultural property as real property not assessed as specified agricultural land (Delegate Roberson, et. al, 2026). The farmers from Fat Cardinal emphasized the importance of House Bill 0359 passing through the Legislative Assembly, with one farmer even testifying for the bill (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). One farmer from Fat Cardinal suggested the county should change the Urban Agriculture Tax Credit in two ways: make the tax credit permanent and ongoing instead of limited to five years in duration, and give farmers a year to meet the required $2,500 in farm income or donations, instead of making the $2,500 a prerequisite to eligibility (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; Delegate Roberson, et. al, 2026). Although these proposals are not directly addressed in HB 0359, the bill expands eligibility for the Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit. Our interviews reveal that Fat Cardinal Farm is the only farm in the county to meet eligibility for the Urban Agricultural Tax Credit, despite the tax credit existing for over 10 years (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Our interviews suggest multiple reasons why eligibility for the Urban Agricultural Tax Credit is difficult. According to one farmer from Fat Cardinal, many farmers do not meet eligibility because the land size requirement mandates a minimum of one-eighth of an acre of growing area, which is difficult for growers to meet considering the credit also requires growers to exist in ‘urban areas’, where land availability is often limited and property values are high, as defined by the county (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). In addition to the land-size requirement, another reason that farmers struggle to access the tax credit is disagreement over how ‘urban areas’ should be interpreted under the program’s eligibility requirements (K. R. Lynch, personal communication, May 4, 2026). According to Lynch, uncertainty surrounding which properties qualify as being located in "urban areas" has contributed to inconsistent interpretation of eligibility requirements between Prince George’s County and the state of Maryland. Overall, the county should continue to advocate for the Governor to sign HB 0359 as an avenue to help FOSFs. Regardless of the outcome of HB 0359, the county should advocate to ease eligibility for tax credits.

Farmers listed the Food As Medicine Health Program Act of 2025 as another critical piece of legislation (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). This legislation connects the Prince George’s County Department of Health with local farmers, food banks, and healthcare providers to initiate food as a component of healthcare (Prince George’s County Council, 2025). Despite the legislation’s enactment by the County Council, the farmer from Asawana Farms feels as though the legislation has not been implemented and is just “sitting in some office” (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). Asawana Farms sells medicinal crops to the University of Maryland Capital Region Health Medical Center in Largo, MD; They emphasized that more partnerships between hospitals and medicinal produce would encourage healthy eating and reduce health care costs in Prince George's County (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026).

Figures 6 & 7 – Isaac Zama of Asawana Farms at the Urban Farm Incubator.

Create Additional Incubator Space

Our research also leads to a recommendation that the county should designate land for an additional farm incubator. The UFI manager explained that they received 18 applicants for one available plot (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). He also emphasized that generally small-scale farms in Prince George's County do not have enough land to supply large-scale food markets (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). To solve the high demand for limited incubator space at the UFI, and difficulty meeting large-scale market demand, the county should designate more land for small-scale farms by adding an additional incubator. The incubator could exist on existing parkland, or land that is currently not farmed on. Non-farming landlords, entities who rent out agricultural land, own approximately 79% of farmland in the United States (USDA, 2026). Prince George’s County should acquire land owned by non-farmers within the county to build an additional incubator for FOSFs.

Serve Black-owned and Marginalized Farmers Through Event Space Provisions and Procurement Policy

Our interviews reveal that one way for Prince George's County to assist FOSFs is to provide Black-owned FOSFs with free space to sell produce and network. In our interview with Mel ‘N Nem Farms, they explained that to help Black farmers, Prince George's County should make intentional investments in local businesses to encourage local economic growth (J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026). They suggested that the county provide space for Black businesses to connect and share goods in order to circulate money in the county; they referenced Baltimore City’s BLK ASS FLEA MKT, an incubator space for Black businesses and creators, as a model business incubator for Prince George's County (BLK ASS FLEA MKT, 2026; J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026).

The PGSCD Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner and the Project Manager at the Institute for Public Health Innovation agreed with Mel N’ Nem Farms that Prince George’s County should boost Black-owned businesses (K. R., Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026; M. Burton, personal communication, March 24, 2026). They listed grant cuts to marginalized farmers as an obstacle to the county supporting Black farmers (K. R., Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). For example, a $3.25 million grant issued in

2023 funded beginner Black farmers in Prince George's County, but funding expired in 2026 (Flores, 2023). Despite grant cuts, the stakeholders emphasized the county still offers support to Black farmers by giving "extra points" to Black-owned businesses (K. R., Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). One example they listed is the Office of Procurement, which manages the public funds of the county and aims for equitable economic development (Prince George's County, 2026). For example, the county recently adopted a bill to create a voluntary public-private initiative to encourage institutions to increase contracts with Black-owned businesses (Prince George's County Council, 2025). The stakeholders suggested that the county should include farms as businesses to benefit from procurement contracts (K. R., Lynch, personal communication, March 24, 2026). Overall, the county should continue to invest public funds in Black-owned businesses, specifically, Black-owned FOSFs.

Create an Infrastructure Grant Program

Another way for Prince George's County to help FOSFs is to provide an infrastructure grant to help farmers afford necessary equipment such as fences and water. Our interviews with farmers reveal that fencing, irrigation, refrigeration, wash-pack stations, storage, greenhouses, high tunnels, mechanized equipment (tractors and hand tillers), and water pipes, are high cost infrastructure imperative to farming (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). The UFI manager emphasized the cost of fencing; He explained the fence at UFI cost $70,000, and that UFI paid for the fence through a grant obtained by Prince George's County (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). The UFI manager also explained that they accessed grants to pay for a tractor, a stormwater system, and a compost system through a combination of grants from the USDA and private lenders (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). The UFI's access to infrastructure grants highlights the variety of grants available at the state and federal level for small-scale farm infrastructure. For example, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides funding for high tunnels (NRCS, 2026). Additionally, at the state level Maryland's Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program offers grants for water and power infrastructure to farms located in urban areas (Maryland Department of Agriculture, 2026). Fat Cardinal Farm received a grant through this program (T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). Despite the support of state and federal grants, farmers still struggle on expensive infrastructure like fencing, tractors, and water (J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; T. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026). We recommend the county to provide additional grants or funding sources specifically for farm infrastructure.

Create a Volunteer Portal

Another way to help FOSFs in Prince George's County is to add a section to the Prince George's County website advertising volunteer opportunities at FOSFs. Interest in having volunteers was expressed by all three of our farm interviewees (D. Young, personal communication, April 19, 2026; J. Thomas, personal communication, April 17, 2026; I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026). The farmer at Asawana Farms emphasized consistent volunteers are hard to come by; additionally, the UFI manager expressed that farmers are on their own to find volunteers (I. Zama, personal communication, April 5, 2026; J. Berger, personal communication, March 12, 2026). One solution to this is an online portal that allows prospective volunteers to learn of upcoming volunteer opportunities through a shared calendar for FOSFs in the county where they can market upcoming volunteer days. Another solution to the current volunteering issue that FOSFs face would be to partner with Prince George's County Public Schools. In doing so, volunteer opportunities for students to earn student service hours could be created, which Eco City Farms has successfully implemented with their Summer Youth Program. Finally, an online system also offers farmers the opportunity to coordinate with potential new employees and plan for farm work projects ahead of time, further reducing the arduous labor demands that FOSFs face.

LIMITATIONS

Throughout the project, we encountered a few limitations that impacted our research. One limitation was the lack of online research that existed for Prince George's County FOSFs. In conducting our literature review, there were many sources that provided information on the federal level and the state of Maryland, however it was much more difficult to find sources that had information specific to Prince George's County. Another limitation was the limited time we had to conduct our research. Given that this research was conducted as a capstone project at the University of Maryland, College Park, the time we had to complete it spanned from the beginning of February 2026 to the beginning of May 2026. This time constraint required us to be selective in our scope of work. Lastly, a limitation we encountered was that we did not conduct any interviews with farmers in South Prince George's County. Given the size of the county, the experiences of FOSFs in the north and south parts of the county could differ, thus accounting for this limitation in our research. Having a larger sample size of farmers from different regions of the county could have impacted results and possible recommendations that could be region specific.

FUTURE WORK

Our team has a few ideas for opportunities for future research on this project. The first being expanding our current research on the financial, technical, programmatic, and educational support for FOSFs by speaking with more farmers and stakeholders. Having a larger sample size would help gather a broader understanding of the challenges and experiences of FOSFs in Prince George's County. Next, it would be beneficial to research existing and potential connections between FOSFs and established grocery stores. We believe that this would be a good extension of our current research to understand the impacts of farming challenges on food insecurity in the county. Additionally, researching new funding sources for local food purchasing, similar to the Farm to Food Bank Program in Montgomery County, would also be useful in understanding ways to support farmers and those experiencing food insecurity. Another area of future work includes implementing increased support for historically marginalized farmers in Prince George's County, especially given the high percentage of people of color in the county. There are also opportunities to increase community partnerships between FOSFs and K-12 students to increase awareness of local agriculture, similar to the partnerships we heard about from the farmers at the Urban Farm Incubator and Mel 'N Nem Farms. Lastly, developing programmatic support to help FOSFs with marketing and outreach would address a need that was expressed by many of the farmers we interviewed.

CONCLUSION

FOSFs in Prince George's County are essential contributors to the county's long-term environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and community food security. As demonstrated throughout this report, these farms provide fresh produce to local communities, preserve open space and agricultural heritage, create entrepreneurial opportunities, and support climate-smart land stewardship through practices such as cover cropping, soil conservation, diversified cropping systems, and efficient water management. Their location near a major metropolitan market also creates unique opportunities for value-added agriculture, agritourism, culturally specific food production, and direct-to-consumer sales.

However, our research makes clear that these benefits are increasingly threatened by structural barriers. Rising land prices, costly infrastructure needs, shrinking farmland acreage, labor constraints, limited access to capital, fragmented technical assistance, and outdated or inconsistent regulatory frameworks continue to hinder the ability of small farms to expand and remain financially viable. Interviews with farmers and stakeholders further revealed that many producers are highly innovative and community-oriented, yet they often spend substantial time navigating bureaucracy, searching for grants, solving marketing challenges, or compensating for missing distribution infrastructure rather than focusing on production and growth.

At the same time, Prince George's County already possesses many of the ingredients needed for success: a strong planning framework, active conservation institutions, emerging incubator models, community food partnerships, and a growing public interest in local food and equitable development. The central challenge is not the absence of resources, but the need for stronger coordination, clearer implementation pathways, and policies intentionally designed for the realities of small-scale farming.

If Prince George's County acts strategically, it can position itself as a regional leader in urban-edge agriculture and inclusive food systems development. Supporting FOSFs should therefore be viewed not simply as agricultural policy but as economic development policy, public health policy, environmental policy, and community resilience policy. With targeted investments and responsive governance, these farms can remain viable businesses while continuing to serve residents for generations to come.

Prince George's County has a rare opportunity to preserve farmland, improve food access, support entrepreneurship, and advance environmental stewardship through intentional investment in FOSFs. With coordinated action, these farms can become an even stronger pillar of the county's sustainable future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the following individuals for interviewing with us and supporting this research!

Danielle Young

Isaac Zama

Jamelle “Mel” Thomas

Jon Berger

Kim Rush Lynch

Michele Burton

Tim Young

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