



UPPER SHORE
Regional Council

2021-2023

IMPACT REPORT

Uniting Strategic Resources for Communities

www.usrcmd.org



Cecil County •

Kent County •

Queen Anne's County •

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About

Mission and Vision

The mission of the Upper Shore Regional Council is to foster regional planning and development for Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties; to afford federal, state, county, and local governments a regional forum to identify issues and opportunities; and to provide leadership in planning and implementing programs to improve the quality of life in the Upper Shore Region of Maryland.

Through collaboration with county, regional, and state partners, the Upper Shore Regional Council broadens opportunities for all by developing funds and programs to serve the region's interests. These initiatives offer a competitive advantage, bolstering community and economic development strategy.

Message from **Susan O'Neill**, USRC Executive Director, and **Ron Fithian**, Chair of the 2023 Executive Board

Reflecting on the past three years, the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) has been pivotal in bridging opportunities and cultivating success within Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties. We've taken significant steps to strengthen programs that promise lasting impact on the region's economic, social, and environmental well-being. Our emphasis has been on building effective strategies to propel the Upper Shore region toward its next phase of growth. In collaboration with our dedicated partners, the USRC has advanced numerous projects and programs that have amplified our workforce, modernized infrastructure, enriched communities, and enhanced tourism. The following examples illustrate our commitment to pursuing these ends.

In an effort to bridge the middle-skills gap in the workforce, the USRC champions Career and Technology Education (CTE) opportunities throughout the tri-county area. Seeing the immense potential in our local students and the evolving labor market, we have supported initiatives like **Project Bright Future**. This initiative serves as a bridge connecting students to regional CTE programs and facilitates impactful internships and apprenticeships. Additionally, we understand that tangible resources play a pivotal role in education; hence, we established the **USRC CTE Equipment Scholarship Fund**, ensuring students across the three counties have access to the tools they need for success.

In a similar vein, our dedication to agriculture, the backbone of our communities, has remained steadfast. To this end, USRC has helped launch and support a pair of forward-looking programs: the **USRC Farm Incentive Fund** and the award-winning **Agricultural Microgrant Program**. Each initiative equips farmers with the resources they need to thrive in an ever-changing market. These initiatives not only sustain individual families but also the legacy of our region's agricultural richness; additionally, they serve as testaments to the importance USRC places on investing locally.

It is important to us that we foster the key elements of our community that share our sense of vision, values, and goals. In that respect, we are thrilled to announce that the USRC has been recently awarded the **Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund**. This will support 25 pivotal projects, promising lasting and significant benefits for our communities in the forthcoming years.

These points are just a sampling of the work we have done around the Upper Shore region over the course of three years. While our mission to promote regional prosperity is still ongoing, we have made tremendous inroads toward that effect. In addition to expounding on these efforts in greater detail, this report also commemorates the USRC's 20th anniversary: two decades of bridging opportunities and cultivating success and demonstrates our dedication, hard work, and community spirit.

With this milestone in mind, the USRC remains grateful to our stakeholders, partners, and communities, for your trust, support, and shared vision. Here's to many more years of progress, partnership, and prosperity.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Susan O'Neill".

Susan O'Neill
Executive Director, Upper Shore
Regional Council



A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Ronnie Fithian".

Ron Fithian
Chair, Upper Shore Regional Council
Kent County Commissioner



\$10M Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund Grant

The State of Maryland awarded the USRC a \$10,000,000.00 "Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund Grant" to stimulate economic activity, foster private sector investment, and grow regional job opportunities.

As one of the five rural Maryland regional councils selected for this grant, the USRC will use the funds to advance critical economic initiatives in Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties and throughout the Upper Shore Region.

Funding distributed to Cecil County will support road improvements, workforce development, and the American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility enhancements. Projects include:

- Belvidere Road Improvement Project
- Cecil County Farm Museum Regional Agricultural Center
- Paris Foundation Culinary Workforce Development Project

Funding distributed to Kent County will be allocated to infrastructure and business development projects. Projects include:

- Worton Service District Water & Sewer Extension
- Town of Millington Project: Millington Wastewater Treatment Facility
- Chestertown Business Campus

Funding distributed to Queen Anne's County will enhance broadband access, infrastructure, workforce development, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and aquaculture projects.

Projects include:

- 4H Park Infrastructure
- Queen Anne's County Strategic Asset & Industry Competitive Analysis Study
- Town of Centreville Project: Centreville Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades
- Town of Church Hill Project: Cell Phone Tower Construction
- Minority Entrepreneurship Training Accelerator
- Chesapeake College Project: The Future Works Workforce Training
- Queen Anne's Public School System Project: QAPS Career Awareness & Development Initiative
- Town of Sudlersville Project: Project Consultant



- Chesapeake Bay Business Park Broadband Access
- Queen Anne's County Watermen Association Project: Oyster Shell Recovery & Spat Planting Program
- Growing Agribusiness in QAC Feasibility Study

USRC will dedicate the remaining funds to regional workforce development, career technical education, classroom technology improvements, and business attraction projects. Projects include:

- USRC Business Mentoring Program
- Upper Shore WIB Project: Incumbent Worker Training
- SWN Project: Business Workforce Innovation Program
- Chesapeake College Project: The Future Works Workforce Training
- Cecil College Project: Equipping a Marine Service Technology Classroom
- USRC Project: Marketing for Business Attraction
- USRC Project: USRC Career Technical Education Program

Business & Workforce Development



In close partnership with Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties, the USRC fosters holistic physical, economic, and social growth across the region. Equipping organizations with the necessary resources for success, USRC supports businesses in securing capital, expanding business efforts, aligning job opportunities with job seekers, providing educational tools for workforce development, and more. USRC's collaborative efforts actively cultivate a thriving business environment within the region.

USRC Farm Incentive Fund

Sustaining Futures in Farming

HARVESTING HOMETOWN PROFITS

Over 1,400 farms advance the agricultural economy in Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties, and the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) is investing in those investing in our rural working lands. Together with the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), USRC has developed an incentive fund to bolster agricultural businesses within our regional economy.

Upper Shore farms generate revenues of over \$428 million, but costs and seasonal variables impact bottom lines. Expanded access to capital plants possibilities for new and established agribusinesses and energizes our local economy.

FORTIFYING OUR FARMS

Designed to incentivize loan requests from food and fiber-producing farms in the Upper Shore region, this program will connect farmers with vital resources by making a 5% equity contribution towards financing a project funded by a MARBIDCO loan. Funds provided will help farmers to meet lender down-payment requirements and improve the credit quality of their applications.

To learn more, please call USRC at (410) 810-2126.

UPPER SHORE Regional Council
Uniting Strategic Resources for Communities

MARBIDCO
growing your community

ELIGIBILITY

USRC funding assistance can be used with the following MARBIDCO programs:

- Maryland Resource-Based Industry Financing Fund
- Rural Business Equipment and Working Capital Loan Fund
- Maryland Vineyard/Tops/Tree Fruit Planting Loan Fund
- Forestry Equipment and Working Capital Loan Fund
- Maryland Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Fund
- Maryland Remote Setting Shellfish Aquaculture Loan Fund
- Rural Business Energy Efficiency Improvement Loan Fund

APPLY

Upper Shore applicants should follow the regular MARBIDCO application process. Applicants will be approved by meeting MARBIDCO's underwriting criteria for each loan program. Visit MARBIDCO.org for more information, or call 410-267-6807.

USRC Farm Incentive Fund

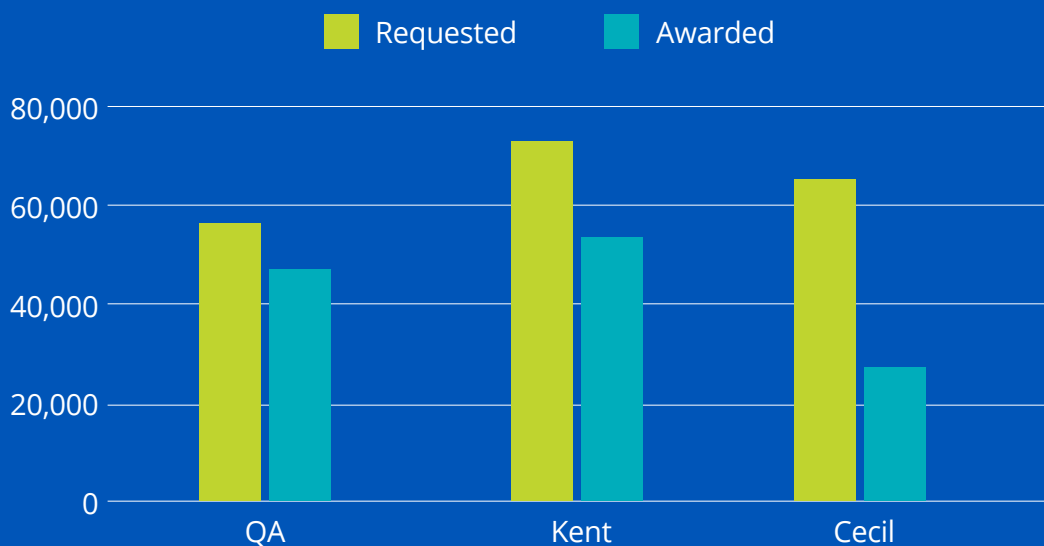
The USRC Farm Incentive Fund seeks to stimulate growth in the Upper Shore Region's established, and developing resource-based agricultural enterprises by providing a **5% equity contribution** towards financing a project funded through the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) loan program. Through close collaboration with local and regional economic development offices, the program is designed to incentivize loan requests from food and fiber-producing farms, helping farmers meet down payment requirements and improve the credit quality of their applications.

To date, the USRC has approved **12 grants** totaling over **\$107,000**, which has leveraged **\$2 million** in borrowers' equity and **\$7 million** in loans for agriculture/rural businesses. In addition, six grants leveraging **\$90,000** were used to assist in purchasing **741 acres**, four farms were provided working capital and/or purchased equipment, and **15 jobs** were created.

Agricultural Microgrant Program

Aimed at supporting agricultural businesses in the Upper Shore Region, the Agricultural Microgrant Program assists businesses in expanding operations, broadening product portfolios, enhancing marketing endeavors, executing transformative capital improvement undertakings, and conducting agricultural research ventures. Each year, numerous organizations receive this grant.

To date, USRC has invested **\$210,000** into the Agricultural Microgrant Program, leveraging **\$189,000** from additional funding sources and **\$19,500 from MARBIDCO** for a total **economic impact of \$418,500**. These funds have been distributed directly to **102** farmers on the Upper Shore.



Scan to Learn More



The Upper Shore Regional Council is happy to spotlight some of our past grant recipients and highlight their successes!

Jason Crook, Owner of Bohemia Bees, shares, "Accessing a local grant program like the Upper Shore Ag Grant proved invaluable in our endeavor with honeybees on the eastern shore of MD. The immediate utilization of the funds empowered us to amplify our local pollination program and further enrich our sustainable beekeeping practices."



Photo Credits: Elizabeth Crook of Bohemia Apiary



Rachel Ross, Owner of Sun Kissed Flower Farm, shares, "As a small-scale grower with a big vision, the Upper Shore Regional Council has been integral in opening doors and providing opportunities that hadn't otherwise been available. Through their Agriculture Microgrant Program, my small flower farm has been awarded funding that has facilitated substantial growth and expansion. I am now able to provide increased volumes of healthy, fresh, eco-consciously grown flowers to the hyper-local community. I've also been able to dedicate more time to producing educational materials and hosting on-farm workshops due to the funding enhancing on-farm efficiency. It is

incredibly important that we share not only our locally and sustainably grown products with our community, but also teach them why it is the better choice over conventionally grown, imported goods. The Upper Shore Regional Council makes all of this possible."

Joe Branham, Owner of Tomahawk Farms, shares, "Tomahawk Farms is a family-owned farm and operated business in Centreville, MD. We offer homegrown produce and flowers from our farm as well as land management services from large to small scale. Tomahawk Farms received an Agricultural Microgrant from Queen Anne's County to apply GPS to spraying equipment, allowing precise application of our products."

Justinian Dispenza, Director-ESPI of The Eastern Shore Permaculture Institute, shares, "The Upper Shore Regional Council's Agricultural Microgrant Program has greatly helped The Eastern Shore Permaculture Institute create a lasting environmental education and nature connection experience for the residents of Maryland and beyond.

The grant has helped me diversify my business ideas as well as create a variety of eco-friendly demonstration projects that have become the center points of our monthly potlucks, school trips, volunteer garden days, and property tours. The Agricultural Microgrant Program has allowed me to shift my focus to education, outreach, and creating customer-facing goods without having to worry about the expenses of infrastructure improvements and raw materials for growing the many different aspects of my business."

Small Business Marketing

The USRC developed an impactful initiative to educate business owners on effective marketing strategies in collaboration with a marketing and public relations agency. This multifaceted endeavor involved tailoring individualized marketing plans to suit the unique needs of each business participant and providing essential seed funding to support the implementation of these plans. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, this program acted as a catalyst for growth, assisting small businesses in establishing and maintaining their customer bases and driving increased foot traffic to local establishments.

The inaugural phase of the program, launched in FY2021, offered robust support to a cohort of **14 enterprises**, collectively representing **39 employees**. The following fiscal year, FY2022, the program evolved to focus on digital marketing specifically. A series of three workshops were conducted, each drawing an average attendance of approximately **30 participants**.

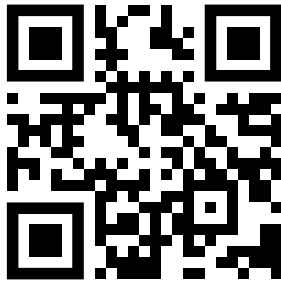


Antonio Guerrero presented a full-day workshop on Small Business and Digital Marketing at the Cecil County North East Library.

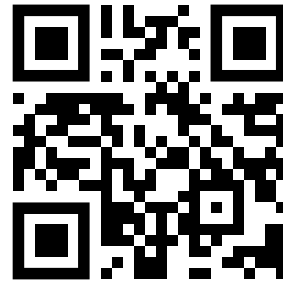
4-H Videos

The Maryland 4-H Youth Development organization aims to empower young people through hands-on learning experiences and activities focusing on animal sciences, engineering and technology, environmental sciences, healthy living, and youth civic engagement and leadership. Committed to balancing the region's rural character with goals for economic prosperity, USRC is proud to support initiatives that tell the regional narrative. In partnership with The University of Maryland Extension - Upper Shore Cluster, the USRC helped fund a series of videos that showcased the broad impact of the 4-H program across the Eastern Shore. The videos feature students, program alumni, leaders, and other Maryland 4-H Youth Development staff who underscore the importance of 4-H, CTE, and agriculture preservation.

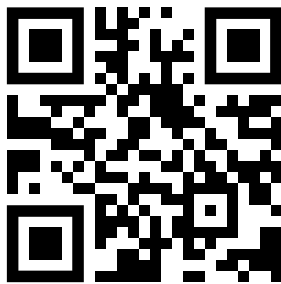
Dr. Timothy Mears



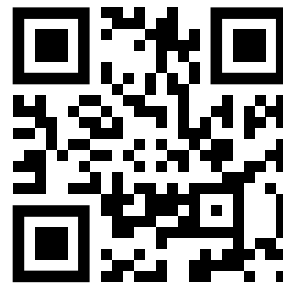
Sam Zambuto



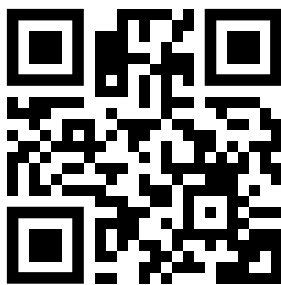
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Jenell Eck McHenry



Erika Edwards





CTE Equipment Scholarship Pilot Program

Career and Technology Education (CTE) empowers students with fundamental academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training, laying a foundation for their future career success while instilling a commitment to ongoing learning. In response to the Upper Shore region's determined efforts to bridge the middle-skills gap within the workforce, the USRC Board of Directors has identified the significance of CTE and its potential influence on high school students. Thus, a CTE Equipment Scholarship Pilot Program was implemented in the Fall of 2022.

"The Academy of Health Professions is a Medical Academy that allows students to obtain Certified Nursing Assistant and their Geriatric Nursing Assistant certifications. To even be able to sit for these classes is an expensive endeavor, to the tune of about \$350 per student, including all necessary expenses and incidentals for the semester. While the class can be costly and demanding, it is indispensable. On average, 3 out of every 4 students in the class land Nursing positions when they graduate, giving back to our community by working in nursing homes, doctor's offices, and other medical facilities.

We greatly appreciate ALL the monetary assistance through USRC's CTE Equipment Scholarship Pilot Program; the funds make it possible for these students to get a running start into their careers."

— Christa Collison, Academy of Health Professions Instructor at Kent County High School

Scan to Learn More



The CTE Equipment Scholarship Pilot Program is for students attending high school CTE programs and/or participating in internships or apprenticeships within the region. It is a one-time grant for students to purchase the necessary equipment to complete their studies, work towards their certifications, and help ensure success for students of all economic statuses.

In the school calendar year of 2022 - 2023, USRC proudly presented nearly **\$10,000** in scholarships to **40 students** from Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's High Schools. Scholarships were given to welding, culinary, automotive, and nursing students.



Project Bright Future

USRC supports and funds Project Bright Future, a regional initiative to foster student engagement with career readiness programs encompassing Career and Technology Education (CTE), apprenticeships, and internships.

Spanning the entirety of a five-county Eastern Shore region of Maryland, including Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Talbot, and Queen Anne's counties, this program is driven by a visionary goal: to establish a skilled workforce pipeline that can effectively cater to the demands of the region's existing business landscape, thereby facilitating business retention, expansion, and attraction efforts.

A key objective of this initiative is to establish a regional CTE program to provide vocational training tailored to support the region's largest industries and create avenues for growth in emerging sectors. This curriculum would encompass various trades, ranging from hospitality and manufacturing to construction, medical, and marine-specific trades.

The USRC initially allocated **\$7500** in funding to Project Bright Future, which then garnered an additional **\$4,000** through strategic collaborations with various business partners, further enriching its financial resources.

Following exploratory meetings, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews, a comprehensive blueprint was developed for the Project Bright Future website. This platform is envisioned to serve as a centralized hub, offering an array of resources, opportunities, student testimonials, career income projections, local job fair events, business tools, and other features.



PROJECT BRIGHT FUTURE

"Creating Opportunities For Our Youth."

90.5 WKHS

STUDENT PUBLIC RADIO



WKHS

Owned and operated by the Kent County Board of Education, WKHS is a radio station dedicated to educating and training students pursuing a career in broadcasting. The station is exclusively managed by high school students from Kent County, who take on roles as producers and hosts for various programs. WKHS is recognized as a Maryland Department of Education CTE program.

For several years, the USRC has actively contributed programming support to WKHS. This includes the provision of equipment, training opportunities, and resources. The sponsorship from USRC plays a crucial role in ensuring the station's sustained ability to offer students a platform to express their voices and gain hands-on experience in radio broadcasting.



Log Industry

In partnership with Danzer Veneer, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Virginia Tech, the United States Department of Agriculture, and Polo Pallet Manufacturing (a Cecil County-based business), the USRC helped fund an environmentally friendly technology alternative to replace the prohibited use of Methyl Bromide as a broad-spectrum pesticide in the wood industry. Methyl Bromide has been banned in the State of Maryland since 2016, and as of 2021, wood products treated with it are no longer importable to the European Union. The economic implications of this ban amount to millions of dollars. According to the Maryland Department of Commerce, the forest products sector ranks as Maryland's fifth-largest industry, thus rendering the safety and accessibility of the technology particularly beneficial for family farms.



The environmentally friendly technology is a steam-based, non-chemical alternative to control pests in agriculture and shipping. Its revolutionary process employs the application of steam and vacuum. The steam/vacuum technology system is a scalable solution for forest products and agricultural industries, as it's portable, stationary, and chemical-free.

Made possible through Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment funds, the effectiveness of this treatment method underwent rigorous testing in Elkton, Maryland. A trial shipment of logs was meticulously prepared at the Polo Pallet Manufacturing's Mill Creek lumber site, comprising two 20-foot containers brimming with 8-foot white oak veneer logs. These containers—one filled with treated logs and the other with untreated ones—were dispatched from the Port of Baltimore to the Danzer Veneer Bohemia Mill in Melnick, Czech Republic. The field test resulted in a resounding success, underscoring the efficacy of the newly implemented approach.

Currently, the phytosanitary treatment process is undergoing assessment by the regulatory authority of the European Union for its authorization. A full report can be found on our website [usrcmd.org](https://www.usrcmd.org).

County-Specific Initiatives



USRC is dedicated to facilitating county-specific initiatives in Kent, Cecil, and Queen Anne's Counties aimed at fostering growth and prosperity for each county and the entire region.

USRC actively partners with each county to enhance employment opportunities, empower existing businesses, attract new industries, and nurture emerging agricultural ventures. With an approach guided by a comprehensive regional success plan, the USRC places collaboration at the heart of every project.



MOBILE JOB SEARCH + RESUME ASSISTANCE

BRINGING BUSINESS + CAREER RESOURCES TO YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD


WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16 | 2:00-3:30 TURNQUIST | 4:00-5:30 EVERGREEN

ACCESS TO COMPUTERS, WIFI, AND PRINTERS ON-SITE ASSISTANCE FROM BUSINESS LIBRARIANS

- SEARCH AND APPLY FOR JOBS
- CREATE RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS
- DISCOVER NEW CAREER PATHS
- DEVELOP SKILLS NEEDED TO START, BUILD, OR EXPAND A BUSINESS

Cecil County Public Library Mobile Technology Lab

The Cecil County Public Library prides itself on championing reading, building knowledge, and inspiring curiosity. To help drive their mission, the USRC assisted the Cecil County Public Library with purchasing equipment (laptops, printers, flash drives, etc.) to establish a mobile technology lab in their Bookmobile. The mobile technology lab will provide job, career, and business resources and services to those in geographically underserved areas who often face barriers, including lack of transportation, broadband internet, or devices, and limited digital literacy skills. With the mobile technology lab, Cecil County business and outreach librarians can provide individualized workforce assistance to the unemployed and underemployed, expert guidance to entrepreneurs starting, building, or expanding a business, and specialized courses to those in need of skills building.



“Educating the youth on agriculture and careers is a vital component of ensuring the long-term viability of the agriculture industry.”

—Jenny Rhodes, Principal Agent, Agriculture & Food Systems, University of Maryland Extension, Queen Anne’s County

“Agriculture Awareness Day is an event that really connects our kids in the county with our strong agriculture community. They see so much agriculture around them every day in Queen Anne’s County and it is a pleasure to be able to have this event to really make them aware of what they are seeing as they ride down the road and put all the pieces together.”

— Jessica Clarke, Crop Insurance Agent, Horizon Farm Credit

Agriculture Awareness Day

USRC has been a proud sponsor of Queen Anne’s County’s annual Agriculture Awareness Day. This day-long program is organized by agricultural educators and professionals in Queen Anne’s County. The event is designed to educate 7th-grade students about the rich diversity of agriculture on the Delmarva Peninsula and the potential career opportunities within the field. Each year, over 600 students participate.

Queen Anne’s County Agriculture Awareness Day offers an array of educational stations covering a wide range of topics. These include the ever-evolving technology in agriculture, food safety practices, the importance of pollinators, aquaculture, animal production, and the various grains grown in the county and their versatile uses. This program dispels common myths about the agricultural sector and showcases the abundant career prospects available to Queen Anne’s County students in this industry.

“Our team works together as a family to continuously improve our stations to fit the 7th graders across the county. We are honored to have such great volunteers and educators to help make this annual event a huge success and keep the students involved and interactive. Thank you to everyone who is involved.”

— Jenell Eck McHenry, Programs and Public Relations Director, Thompson Ag Consulting (Maryland Grain Producers)



“Agricultural Awareness Day is an amazing opportunity for our students to engage in learning about the agricultural field and the multitude of career opportunities it offers right here on the shore. I am thankful for the partnership with the University of Maryland Extension and other dedicated agriculture organizations, as well as the many volunteers that made this event possible.”

—Dr. Patty Saelens, QACPS Superintendent of Schools

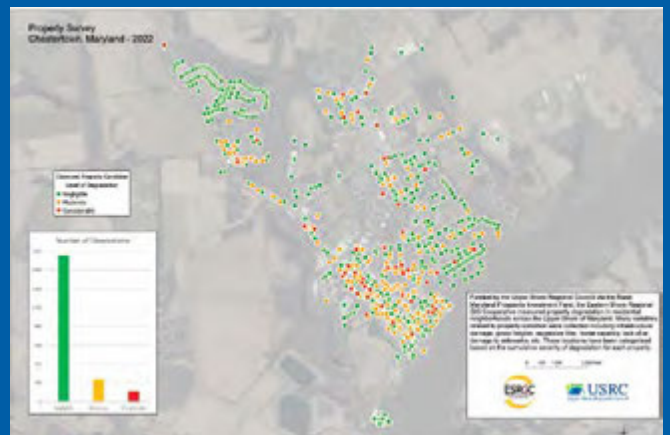


Chestertown Housing Study

In 2022, USRC partnered with Kent County, the Town of Chestertown, Washington College, and the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative to conduct a housing structure conditions study for Chestertown. The study sought to identify contributing factors leading to property decay; the goal was to take the data collected to strengthen grant applications for rehabilitation housing and community development initiatives.

Student interns were sent into the field using a customized digital survey application and tablets to collect data assessing various risk variables leading to property degradation, including infrastructure damage, property accessibility for emergency services, and site attributes such as property vacancy, litter, and vandalism. When the study was completed information was provided to both Chestertown and Kent County.

USRC was excited to support this initiative for Chestertown and is committed to ongoing collaboration and assistance in extending this opportunity to other regional municipalities.



Winter Lights Cecil Nights

The Upper Shore Regional Council is a proud sponsor of Winter Lights Cecil Nights (WLCN); USRC's support through grant funding allowed the project to come to fruition in 2021 and continue for years after. Originally conceived as a response to help local businesses weather the challenges of a COVID-impacted winter, WLCN was not initially intended to extend beyond its first year. However, as of 2023, it has now successfully completed its third consecutive campaign. WLCN capitalizes on the interest of families seeking local adventures and culinary delights during the months of January and February. Participating towns include Cecilton, Charlestown, Chesapeake City, Elkton, North East, and Perryville. Additionally, Port Deposit contributed by providing town decorations throughout January and February.

“This effort is a wonderful demonstration of partnership at its best. The combination of your sponsorship support, towns/chambers/ stepping up to plan lights and activities, and tourism being the coordinating team, is a great collaboration for the benefit of small towns and tourism businesses.”

—Sandy Turner, Director of Cecil County Tourism

In 2023, Winter Lights Cecil Nights introduced a new and immensely popular activity: a night hike to Turkey Point Lighthouse. The ‘Sip and Stroll’ event also experienced record attendance, with **1,400 tickets sold**. Winter Lights Cecil Nights has proven to be a resounding success, significantly boosting tourism and providing essential support to local businesses within Cecil County.



Days Of Learning

The Cecil County School of Technology offers CTE programs to Cecil County Public School students, providing them with valuable learning experiences and competitive skills to prepare for the dynamic global workforce. With the support of USRC funding, students enrolled in the Agricultural Sciences and Landscape and Horticultural Production programs had the opportunity to explore nine agricultural destinations in 2023. During this immersive experience, students gained firsthand exposure to the diverse range of job and career opportunities within agriculture. Some of these on-site visits included trips to Kilby Farms, a dairy production and biodigester facility; Fresh Source, a high-tech indoor microgreen urban agriculture production business where students learned aseptic product packing and storage techniques; a calving workshop hosted by the University of Maryland; Wye Angus Farm; and the University of Maryland Institute of Applied Agriculture, where students toured the college farm and its facilities, among other enriching experiences.

Resource Development

The Upper Shore Regional Council is deeply committed to harnessing the land, resources, and unique attributes of Kent, Cecil, and Queen Anne's Counties to enhance the opportunities within the region. USRC's resource development efforts primarily revolve around identifying opportunities to enhance the quality and quantity of available resources. By expanding knowledge and improving access to local amenities, employment opportunities, and transportation strategies, we actively encourage residents to work where they live.

Datastory

To assist the region's business attraction efforts, USRC funded a regional Datastory and Datastories for the three USRC counties. A Datastory is a sophisticated business attraction and expansion tool that allows users to visualize the region/county's data points through an interactive map. They offer data on the region's population, economy, transportation, and infrastructure to enterprises. Datastories also emphasize the area's advantages and qualities, like its closeness to major markets, the skilled workforce, and the quality of life.

The USRC Datastory effectively attracts businesses and promotes the region as a viable option for their future growth. Datastories provide businesses with the information they need to make informed decisions about relocating or expanding.

Cecil County



Queen Anne's County



Kent County



USRC



GIS Circuit Rider Program

Many municipalities on the Eastern Shore cannot carry out GIS-related duties, as was acknowledged by the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC). Responding to this need for on-site assistance, the USRC joined the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Circuit Rider Program (ESRGC) for on-site help. Through this program, jurisdictions throughout the Upper Shore have access to specialized GIS solutions. Circuit rider projects may include GIS implementation, web mapping, technical support, data collection, cartographic services, GIS training, data analysis, and task automation.



Cecil County:

- The ESRGC continued to support the Cecil County Tourism Foodie Cecil web map application.





Kent County:

- The ESRGC researched ArcGIS Utility Networks and provided ArcGIS Survey123 and webhooks assistance.
- The ESRGC reviewed the Chestertown Housing Study project with County stakeholders.
- The ESRGC supported the Town of Millington with web map application updates and the design, development, and delivery of QR code stickers linked to the web map application.
- The ESRGC provided building height values and examples of 60-foot buildings to Kent County to support a development proposal.

Queen Anne's County:

- The ESRGC supports the Town of Centreville and the Town of Queen Anne by reviewing CAD and GIS data to be added to their existing web map application and supporting questions about data collection tools.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are supportive relationships between programs and other community agencies; they contribute

to strengthening neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and the quality of life along the Upper Shore. By collaborating on behalf of the Upper Shore, USRC's partners seek to understand each other's goals, perspectives, strengths, and challenges to allow for growth and regional prosperity.



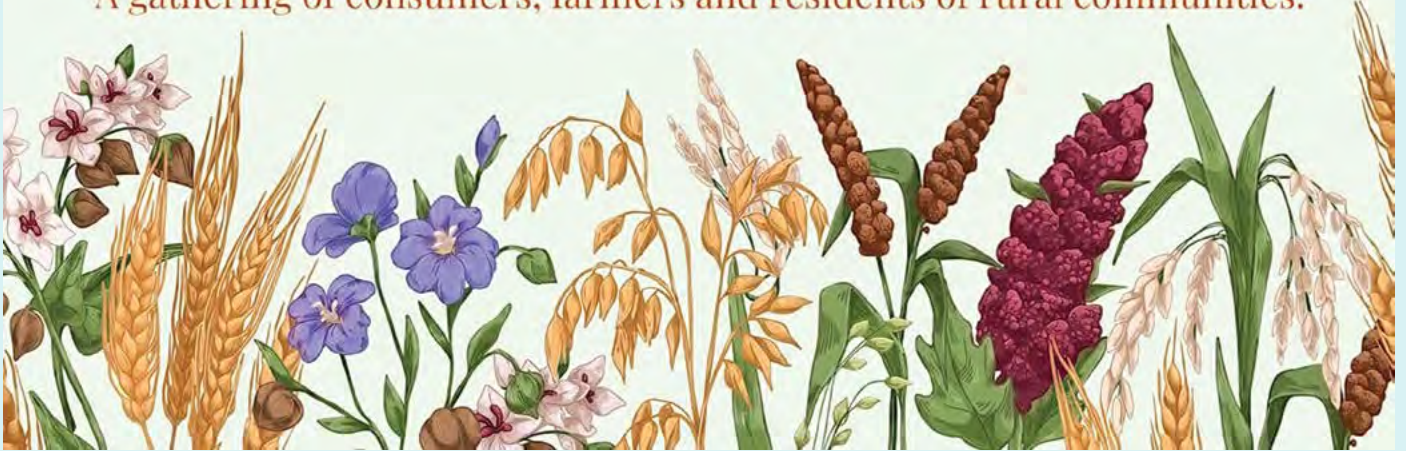
Chef Alicia Boyd and Humble Hearts Catering at Field to Table Event 2023

Field To Table

In June 2023, Queen Anne's County Economic & Tourism Development (QACETD) hosted its inaugural Field to Table event. Over the past three years, QACETD has supported more than **25 local agricultural businesses** through the Agricultural Microgrant Program, a program made possible by the USRC and the Queen Anne's County Commissioners. The Field to Table event elevated the impact of the grant program by showcasing the products of grant recipients and fostering connections among agricultural entrepreneurs, local businesses, and community leaders.

Rooted in Our Community: *Positioning for the Future*

A gathering of consumers, farmers and residents of rural communities.



Rooted In Our Community

The third annual 'Rooted in Our Community' event took place in March 2023 at Cecil College. The primary mission of this annual series is to educate the community about the significance of agriculture, dispel negative perceptions surrounding it, and enhance understanding of modern agricultural practices. With nearly 200 registered attendees, the event featured a diverse array of speakers and presentations focusing on the importance of agriculture, its future, and the crucial role of soil health in boosting crop yields to meet the demands of a growing population. The Cecil County Office of Economic Development

collaborates with Cecil College and several regional agricultural organizations to organize this event, encouraging direct interactions between community members and local farmers.

Each year, the symposium revolves around a relevant theme tied to current agricultural industry issues and trends. The themes for the past three events were 'Positioning for the Future' in 2023, 'Investing in Agriculture' in 2022, and 'Farming Up-Close and Personal' in 2020. USRC has been a steadfast supporter of this event since its inception in 2020 and has witnessed its continuous success and growth year after year.

"Rooted in Our Community is an incredible program held in Cecil County that showcases our rural community and creates a safe space for residents and farmers to come together to discuss their food system and all that goes into it. In the first three years, we have seen an amazing response from our residents and farmers alike. We are providing a judgment-free zone for questions, discussion, and community development with this symposium, and we are excited to see this event continue to flourish."

- Maureen O'Shea Fitzgerald, Event Organizer



*Chesapeake Gold Farms
Cheese's donation to the Taste
of the Eastern Shore 2023*

Taste Of The Eastern Shore

In partnership with the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Mid-Shore Regional Council, and the USRC, Taste of the Eastern Shore is a networking event highlighting local vendors. This event serves as a platform to endorse local enterprises and cultivate connections among businesses, elected representatives, and the community. Each year, the gathering is hosted at the Graduate Annapolis Hotel and has drawn the attendance of more than **175** Maryland senators, delegates, cabinet secretaries, staff members, and elected officials representing the Eastern Shore region.



Cecil Cares

The Upper Shore Regional Council allocated funds for Cecil Cares, an annual county-wide day of service coordinated by the Cecil County Department of Community Services (DCS).

Under the direction of a planning team comprised of DCS staff and community representatives, Cecil Cares offers local organizations an opportunity to coordinate and manage a one-day, hands-on service project or donation drive. Cecil Cares was initially created for the purpose of helping residents meet community needs through acts of service, fostering relationships between organizations, volunteers, and businesses, and creating a sense of community pride and spirit.

Since the inaugural event in 2016, Cecil Cares has proven to be a successful means of engaging volunteers for the greater community good while building - and nurturing - relationships with partner organizations and businesses. In 2016, Cecil Cares engaged **60 volunteers** with eight projects coordinated by seven local organizations. Since then, the number of volunteers recruited and engaged in service has steadily increased. In 2017, **120 volunteers** served with nine organizations to complete **10 projects**; in 2018, **160 volunteers** served with **11 organizations** to complete **14 projects**; and in 2019, **165 volunteers** served with **14 organizations** to complete **14 projects**. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic,

“Our Cecil Cares project gave our clients dignity: individuals now have racks of clothing to look at and select instead of digging through bins of unsorted clothing. We held a post-event evaluation meeting and ended the evening by asking attendees to describe Cecil Cares 2022 with one word. Here is a sampling of their responses: community, productive, camaraderie, caring, flexibility, and uplifting.”

Sara Weimer, Cecil Cares Project Coordinator.

The financial support from USRC was utilized to facilitate advertising efforts, cover the Volunteer Cecil site fee, procure essential supplies, provide lunch for the participating volunteers, and acknowledge volunteer contributions. Cecil Cares staff and volunteers actively promoted and maintained the Volunteer Cecil online volunteer recruitment and matching platform. Additionally, they extended their efforts to encompass other capacity-building services offered to various community organizations.

Cecil Cares boasted **85 volunteers** serving with **12 organizations** to successfully complete **13 donation drives** or hands-on service projects. In 2021, there was a return to normalcy AND an overwhelming response to Cecil Cares: **209 volunteers** and **17 projects**! Although there was a drop in volunteer engagement in 2022 (we had to tap into our rain date for the first time ever), we are still proud of the positive impact generated by the **167 volunteers** while serving with **17 organizations** to complete **15 donation drives** or hands-on service projects.

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- **Chair | Chris Corchiarino**, Queen Anne's Commissioner
- **1st Vice Chair | Tom Mason**, Kent County Commissioner
- **2nd Vice Chair | Jackie Gregory**, Cecil County Councilwoman
- **3rd Vice Chair | Jack Wilson**, Queen Anne's Commissioner
- **Secretary | Ron Fithian**, Kent County Commissioner
- **Treasurer | Bob Meffley**, Cecil County Councilman

2022 Full Council

- **Senator Steve Hershey**, *District 36*
- **Delegate Jay Jacobs**, *District 36*
- **Delegate Steve Arentz**, *District 36*
- **Delegate Jeff Ghrist**, *District 36*
- **Senator Jason Gallion**, *District 35*
- **Delegate Teresa Reilly**, *District 35 B*
- **Delegate Kevin Hornberger**, *District 35 A*
- **Delegate Mike Griffith**, *District 35 B*
- **Bob Meffley**, *Cecil County Councilman*
- **Jackie Gregory**, *Cecil County Councilwoman*
- **Al Miller**, *Cecil County Councilman*
- **Bill Coutz**, *Cecil County Councilman*
- **Donna Culberson**, *Cecil County Councilwoman*
- **Rich Taylor**, *Mayor, Chesapeake City*
- **Ron Fithian**, *Kent County Commissioner*
- **Tom Mason**, *Kent County Commissioner*
- **Bob Jacob**, *Kent County Commissioner*
- **Don Sutton**, *Mayor, Betterton*
- **Chris Corchiarino**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Jack Wilson**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Jim Moran**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Phil Dumenil**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Stephen Wilson**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Charlie Rhodes**, *Church Hill Commissioner*

USRC Staff

- **Susan O'Neill**, *Executive Director*
- **Janice Palmer**, *Executive Assistant*
- **Maureen O'Shea Fitzgerald**, *Grant Program Manager*
- **Jacob Herman**, *College Intern*

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- **Delegate Teresa Reilly**, *District 35 A*
- **Delegate Kevin Hornberger**, *District 35 B*
- **Delegate Mike Griffith**, *District 35 A*
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- **Al Miller**, *Cecil County Councilman*
- **Rebecca Hamilton**, *Cecil County Councilwoman*
- **Donna Culberson**, *Cecil County Councilwoman*
- **Rich Taylor**, *Mayor, Chesapeake City*
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- **John Price**, *Kent County Commissioner*
- **Don Sutton**, *Mayor, Betterton*
- **Chris Corchiarino**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Jack Wilson**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Jim Moran**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Patrick McLaughlin**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Phil Dumenil**, *Queen Anne's County Commissioner*
- **Charlie Rhodes**, *Commissioner, Church Hill*



*Standing Left to Right: Albert Nickerson, Ron Fithian, Chris Corchiarino, Jack Wilson
Seated: Bob Meffley, Jackie Gregory*

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