



## The Rural Maryland Council's Programs & Initiatives

**The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF):** Since 2001, the Rural Maryland Council's MAERDAF program has awarded nearly \$2 million in small grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that undertake statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education projects. Community colleges that support small and agricultural businesses are also eligible for grants.



**The Strengthening the Well Being of Rural Maryland Families Grant Program:** Since 2005, the Rural Maryland Council, with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has awarded grants to rural-serving organizations that help disadvantaged families obtain the financial skills they need to become economically stable. No taxpayer dollars have been used to fund this program. Finding new funding sources for this important program is one of the Council's major goals.



For upcoming grant application deadlines, visit. . .  
[www.rural.state.md.us](http://www.rural.state.md.us)

**Rural Maryland Broadband Coordination Board and Broadband Assistance Fund:** The Rural Maryland Council provides staff support to the Rural Maryland Broadband Coordination Board, which was created by the General Assembly in 2006 to coordinate efforts to deploy broadband infrastructure in rural and underserved areas. The Board has been given stewardship of nearly \$23 million in state and federal funds in three years. If adequate funding continues to be available, the entire state is expected to have access to broadband services by 2012. This will provide rural communities with a vital source of economic development potential. Expanding broadband services to all rural areas has been a priority of the Council's for many years.



**Smart Growth Program:** The Rural Maryland Council is actively engaged in the State's Smart Growth program, providing a rural perspective as growth and development continue to have a significant impact on rural areas. The Council chairs the **Smart Growth Inter-Agency Coordination Committee's** Rural Development Action Team, which is developing smart growth policies and programs for rural counties and small towns. The Council is also a member of the **Task Force on the Future for Growth and Development**, which is writing a State Development Plan.



### Looking Ahead

#### Rural Maryland Prosperity in 2020

The General Assembly established the **Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund** in 2006 to provide grants to regional nonprofit and educational entities for economic and community development projects that would help bring Rural Maryland's standards of living up to statewide averages by 2020. Grants would be awarded in four divisions:

- (1) Rural regional planning and development;
- (2) Regional infrastructure enhancement;
- (3) Rural entrepreneurship development; and
- (4) Rural programmatic support, including MAERDAF.



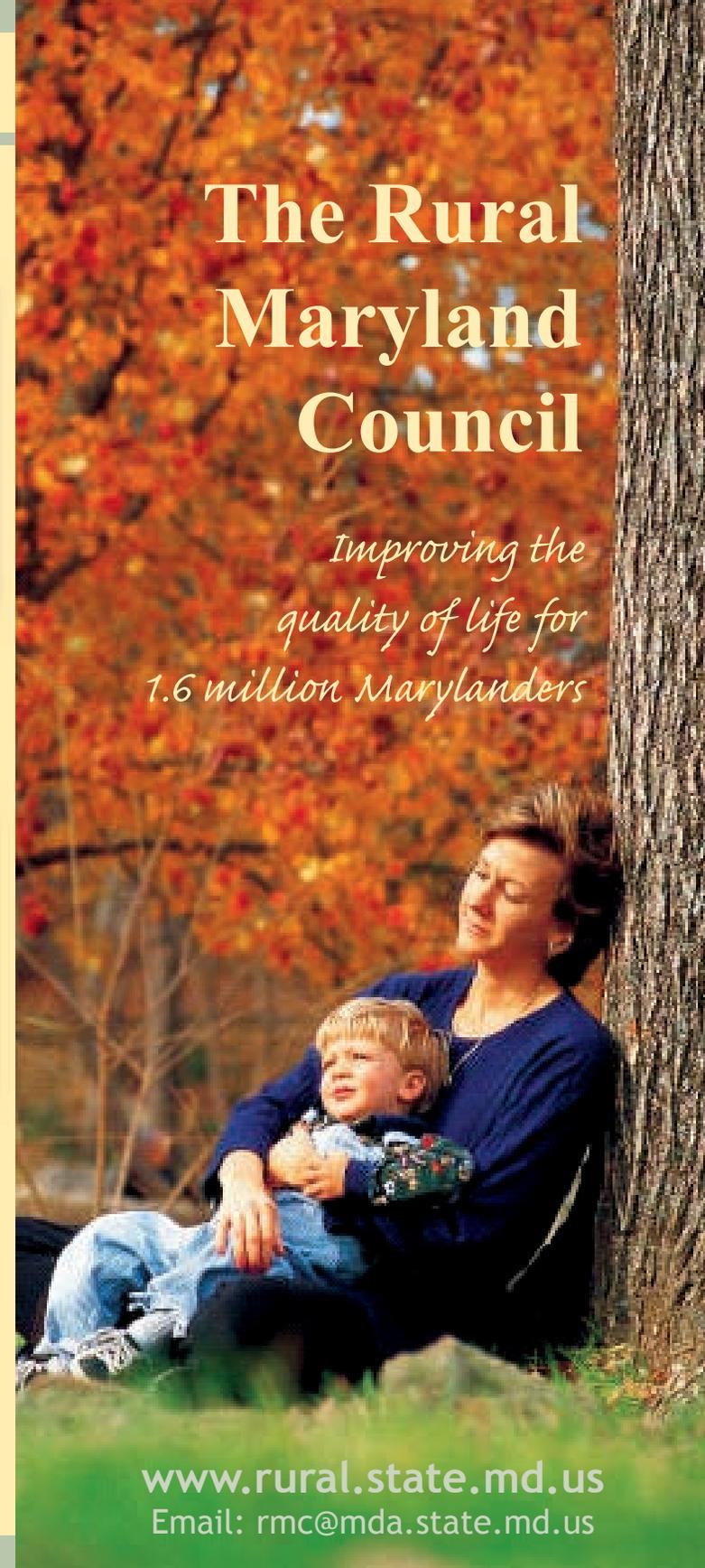
As of FY 2009, however, no funds have ever been appropriated for Rural Prosperity. Obtaining this critical support for rural development projects remains a top priority of the Rural Maryland Council Executive Board.

*"Enhanced state investment in targeted areas is needed if rural citizens are to enjoy the same standards of living as their urban and suburban counterparts."*

*From a February 2007 letter of the Maryland Rural Caucus, in support of the Rural Maryland Prosperity Fund*

# The Rural Maryland Council

*Improving the quality of life for 1.6 million Marylanders*



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## Rural Maryland Council at Work

## One Voice for Rural Maryland



About the  
Rural Maryland Council

**T**he Rural Maryland Council, an independent state agency, brings together rural leaders, government officials at all levels, and representatives of the non-profit and for-profit sectors to develop public policy solutions to the challenges unique to rural Maryland. Ultimately, our mission is to improve the quality of life while preserving the pastoral heritage of Maryland's rural communities.

The nonpartisan Council is governed by an Executive Board, and all meetings are open to the public. Approximately 1.6 million people live in Maryland's 18 rural counties of Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, St. Mary's, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester.

### Rural Maryland Today

Rural Maryland communities often appear to be pleasant, sparsely populated areas dotting idyllic landscapes of farms and forests. The reality, however, is that many rural communities face serious challenges, from difficult economic conditions to inadequate access to quality health care to a deteriorating physical infrastructure. The Rural Maryland Council works to identify specific challenges and craft solutions that work.

### Our Vision

In the year 2020, Marylanders living in rural communities are achieving success in education and employment, have access to quality and affordable health care and other vital services; enjoy an environment where civic and business entrepreneurship thrives, and where natural and cultural resources are being sustained for future generations.



The Rural Maryland Council's major role is to provide public policy leaders with one voice on the issues important to the rural quality of life. To do that, all interested and affected stakeholders must come together in a spirit of cooperation to share information, kick-around ideas, and come to consensus on possible solutions.

**R**ural Roundtables are flexible one- or two-day events held throughout the year and conducted with partnering organizations and agencies. The primary purpose of the Roundtables is to engage rural leaders in tightly focused discussions around a specific issue, such as health care or affordable housing, and to identify specific barriers to success. Roundtables also help identify knowledgeable and committed leaders to serve on a working committee.



**W**orking Committees provide public policy makers with information, analysis, research, and suggested positions on issues that impact Rural Maryland. Solutions usually involve recommending new or modified public policies and/or ways to make rural-related programs more effective for rural constituencies.

*Collaboration and consensus building are the principles behind everything the Rural Maryland Council does.*

**The Council's Health Care Working Committee**, a cross section of health care and rural development professionals from across the state, is working diligently to find creative ways to implement the **Maryland Rural Health Plan**, which was released in July 2007 by the State Office of Rural Health. (Two members of the Council's Board sit on the plan's Steering Committee.) Priority efforts are focused on enhancing the recruitment and retention of health care professionals in rural areas.



The Council's Agriculture and Natural Resources Working Committee identified a strong need for an economic development entity dedicated to agriculture and resource-based businesses and spent hundreds of hours developing the framework for the **Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation. MARBIDCO** was created in 2004 to provide economic development assistance to agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and seafood industries. The Rural Maryland Council provided staff support to MARBIDCO for two years and obtained state and federal start-up funding. Now, MARBIDCO is a stand-alone organization with more than \$40 million in mandated state funding scheduled to come its way by 2020. The Council maintains a seat on the MARBIDCO Board and continues to support its mission. For information, see: [www.marbidco.org](http://www.marbidco.org)



*Since 1994, the Rural Maryland Council has functioned as the State Rural Development Council under the USDA's National Rural Development Partnership Program*

Individuals who seek to identify challenges and develop solutions are invited to attend our Rural Roundtables and become a member of a Working Committee. Visit our website for information about upcoming events.



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