



Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund Background

The MAERDAF program was born out of the frustration experienced by a number of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges who had difficulty obtaining adequate, much needed programmatic or special projects funding. Unlike their counterparts operating near or in the urban centers, nonprofits operating in rural communities typically lack access to public sector (county or municipal) or private sector (corporate and private foundation) philanthropic opportunities. Moreover, given the economic distress found in the rural regions of the State, many local governments do not have the financial wherewithal to address these important developmental needs. Consequently, a serious resource deficit existed where, in many instances, the need had been the greatest. The General Assembly created MAERDAF in 2000 in order to increase the overall capacity of rural-serving, nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education. In addition, MAERDAF provides targeted funding to community colleges that provide training and technical assistance to ag businesses. Since it was created, the program has helped many rural-serving organizations establish or continue programs and projects that have had a significant and positive impact on Rural Maryland. In addition, the modest State investment in the MAERDAF program has helped the nonprofit sector leverage a substantial amount of private and federal financial support. (The MAERDAF Board is required to give preference to organizations that leverage non-state matching funds and many grantees have had matches exceeding 100 percent.) Moreover, MAERDAF has helped many of these nonprofit service providers develop institutional capacity, improve grant-writing skills, and enhance the internal development of volunteer boards and staff.

“MAERDAF has provided the LEAD Maryland Foundation with a vitally important source of funding to help prepare the next generation of agricultural and rural leaders. I think it is fair to say that without the substantial financial support we have received from MAERDAF, LEAD would not be the great educational program it is today.” –Kenny Bounds, President LEAD Maryland Foundation