

- Survey Says Marylanders Want to Buy Local Food, Preserve Farmland for Farming
- Marylanders remain concerned about the sources of Chesapeake Bay Pollution.

ANNAPOLIS, MD (April 3, 2009) – The 2009 Policy Choices Survey by the University of Baltimore Schaefer Center for Public Policy reported that a full 77 percent of survey respondents want to buy locally-grown and locally-made products and 94 percent say it is important to preserve land for farming. The survey also collected respondents' thoughts about major sources of pollution to the Chesapeake Bay with farm runoff ranking behind industrial discharges and sewage treatment plants in responses.

"Consumer response to this survey is good news for Maryland farmers," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "This survey indicates that Maryland residents appreciate the importance of farmland protection and the fresh, local food that comes from that land as well as the conservation efforts farmers are taking to protect our land and water. Buying locally will help to protect and strengthen our middle class, our family owned businesses and our family farms as well as the soil and water that we treasure."

The telephone survey of 801 adult Marylanders found that residents are concerned about the environment, but did not delve into their understanding of the environmental pressures. Industrial discharge (84%) and sewage treatment plants (76%) were perceived to pose the most serious threats to the health of the Bay. This year, 59 percent of people saw farm runoff as a major threat to the Chesapeake Bay, down 10 percent from last year's 69 percent. This was the first year that the survey asked respondents if they thought automobile emissions and runoff from residential lawns and backyards pose a threat to the Bay. Forty-six percent of respondents saw automobile emissions as a major threat while 31 percent thought residential runoff was a major threat to the Bay.

"Farmers can't make a living or provide the healthy food, scenic farms and strong quality of life that consumers want if they don't protect our natural resources." Agriculture Secretary Roger Richardson. "We appreciate the public's support for farming and the funding needed for farmers to take the strongest environmental protection measures. Sustainable agriculture strengthens rural economies, keeps land open and in production rather than being developed, and protects natural resources and the local food supply. Through decades of installing on-farm best practices and centuries of working the land, farmers are some of Maryland's strongest conservationists."

Seventy-seven percent of Marylanders are more likely to buy produce that is identified as having been grown by a Maryland farmer while 72 percent said they had purchased a Maryland-grown fruit or vegetable in a grocery store. Consumers also stated they had purchased local produce at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands and pick-you-own farms in the past year.

Ninety-four percent of people surveyed said that it is at least "somewhat important" that the state preserve land for farming. In a separate question asking those surveyed to prioritize categories of state spending, 43 percent of respondents said preserving farmland was very important, thereby ranking it 11th out of 17 possible priorities. Only four percent said state spending for farmland preservation was not important at all. It remains evident that an overwhelming majority of Marylanders finds preserving land for farming to be a strong priority.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture has participated in the Schaefer Center Policy Choices Survey since 2002 to gauge public opinion about a number of farming issues and consumer preferences. The telephone survey is conducted annually. The 2009 survey has a 3.46 percent margin of error of percent at the Ninety-five percent confidence level. More information about and results from the 2009 Policy Choices Survey can be found online at <http://scpp.ubalt.edu>.