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St. Mary's Co. Ag **Commission Visits Hatfield**

Rising long before the break of dawn on July 23, 1987, 43 sleepyeved St. Mary's Countains boarded a chartered bus headed for the Hatfield Packing Plant in Hatfield, Pennsylvania to view firsthand what happens to the county's hogs once they leave the Hatfield Buying Station located in St. Mary's County, Maryland.

The trip was organized and sponsored by the St. Mary's County Agriculture Commission in an effort to impress upon county officials and members of the agricultural community the importance of hog production to the county's economy and to show special recognition to Hatfield officials for their decision to base a hog buying station in St. Mary's County.

St. Mary's County is a major hog producing county in Maryland and is fast becoming the top producer in the state. Based on figures provided by Hatfield, during the first five and one-half months of 1986 they purchased 13,000 hogs from St. Mary's County; during the same period of 1987, that number has increased by 14%.

The St. Mary's County Agriculture Commission, comprised of representatives from a broad range of agriculturally-related commodities, entities and agencies, was formed and funded by the Board of St. Mary's County Commissioners to identify and implement activities aimed at preserving agriculture as a prosperous component of

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the county's economy. Tobacco as historically been the county's major crop, but with the steady decline of the tobacco market, St. Mary's County is actively looking for ways to maintain the health and prosperity of agriculture and the rural atmosphere it provides to an otherwise steadily increasing hitech population.

Diversification would seem to be the road to such prosperity; hog production offers a promising future. Hatfield is planning to increase their daily slaughtering capacity from 3,800 to 5,000 upon the completion of a new processing facility in September 1988 and 10,000 daily by 1992. With this expansion comes the opportunity for expansion in hog production and in turn, this expansion creates a demand for greater feed production.

Another area of diversification being investigated by the Agriculture Commission is vegetable production and marketing. Efforts are currently under way to establish a local farmer's market.

The St. Mary's County Agriculture Commission is unique in that it is possibly the first Agriculture Commission in the state to be funded by a county. (Montgomery County has an Agricultural Resource Coordinator on its staff in their Office of Economic Development.

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