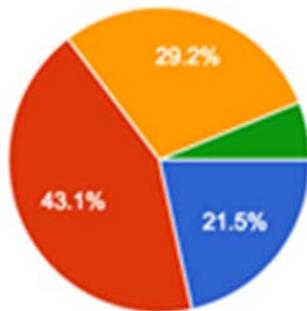


MidAtlantic CommonGround Program – FY16 Report

CommonGround is a national collaboration developed by the National Corn Growers Association and the United Soybean Board to reach urban consumers with a factual story of food production. Consumers are gaining trust in the food system, which is showing greater support for our farmers and the crops they grow.

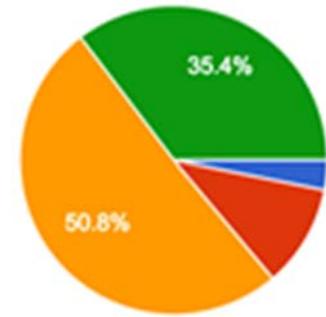
A program impact study was conducted for the national CommonGround program, of which 80% of the responses were from the Baltimore/Washington DC area. The study asked consumers to rate their understanding of food topics before and after they spoke with a CommonGround volunteer. Results were dramatic.



Before

RATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF FARMING/FOOD:
Huge increase in understanding facts in all categories!

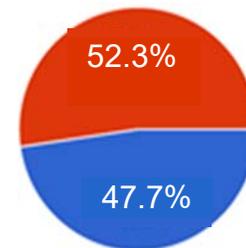
22%	I was confused/lacked information	3%
43%	I was somewhat aware of the facts	11%
29%	I had a general knowledge of the facts	51%
6%	I had a solid understanding and enjoy sharing my knowledge with other	35%



After

DO YOU USE FARMERS AS A RESOURCE FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD & HOW IT IS RAISED?
Over half said no at first! Now the majority will seek information from a farmer.

YES (most common source, farmer's markets primary source)
NO (most common reason, never thought about it)



WILL YOU NOW USE FARMERS AS A RESOURCE FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD & HOW IT IS RAISED?



CommonGround Team:

The MidAtlantic CommonGround program is fortunate to have fifteen very enthusiastic, knowledgeable and personable volunteers. The ladies are dedicated to improving the image of agriculture and supporting their efforts helps the delivery of a positive message to the public. Key to attaining the consumer education goals of this program is the ability to provide training, materials, travel expenses and logistical support for the volunteers to enable their participation in activities.

Laurie Adelhardt directs the program for Maryland and Delaware, in collaboration with Sandy Davis of the Maryland Soybean Board and Suzanne Zilberfarb of the Delaware Soybean Board. The National Corn Growers Association and United Soybean Board provide support through volunteer training and materials development, such as the national website, issue briefings, exhibit materials and consumer handouts. It is the generous grants from the Maryland Grain Producers and the Maryland and Delaware Soybean Boards that provide the funds to conduct all local events and activities.

Note, as of October 1, 2016, USB is no longer funding state program activities. The Maryland Soybean Board will continue to provide funding and staff support, but will no longer handle grant reimbursements. The MidAtlantic CommonGround program has established a separate account to facilitate grants and streamline activity expenses and volunteer reimbursements.

Current Activities:

- Oct'15 & Oct'16 **Baltimore Teachers Night of the Farm** - Conversations with the 250 statewide educators centered around food safety and what practices farmers do on their farms to support a healthy environment and what consumers can do for a cleaner Bay.
- Nov'15 **Port Discovery Farm Exhibit** - A VIP reception brought Baltimore and Maryland leaders together to view the new farm exhibit at the children's museum. One CG volunteer was on the program and volunteers spoke to the attendees about food and farming.
- Nov'15 & Dec'16 **Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show** - The event attracted more than 15,000 urban consumers. The CG exhibit was in a high-traffic area. Volunteers met with two Food Network chefs, Michael Symon and Giada De Laurentiis. In their presentations, the chefs spoke on the importance of supporting farmers and Giada even asked our volunteer to address the audience. Both endorsements helped to direct traffic to the exhibit.
- Dec **Maryland Farm Bureau Convention** - CommonGround had an exhibit at the convention to recruit volunteers and inform supporters of the activities that the program does in the area.
- January **National CommonGround Conference** – The 2016 conference was in Washington DC, so most of the volunteers were able to attend, which provided a strong training program and broad perspective with people from all the participating states.
- February **Women in Ag Conference** - This one-day conference is strongly geared towards beginning small farms with a strong organic emphasis, so conversations with the 300 attending were valuable in talking about food safety and conventional farming.
- May-Sept **Farm Markets** - Two volunteers have farm markets where they answer questions daily with thousands of urban consumers traveling from Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington DC and beyond while vacationing at the beach.
- June **Harford County Farm Festival** - Celebrating all things agriculture, this festival brought in hundreds of urban visitors from northern Baltimore to enjoy the fruits of the farm and learn more about farming.
- July **Maryland Commodity Classic** - Exhibiting at the Classic provided the opportunity to showcase the positive impact of the CommonGround program and to reach those who contribute to the checkoff programs which fund CommonGround activities.
- August **Thrasher & Tractor Show** - CommonGround information was shared at the show, where historic farm equipment was on display and contrasted with education about modern-day practices. The Show was hosted at the farm of volunteer Linda Burrier.
- Aug-Sept **Maryland State Fair** - Farmers and farm facts were featured in fairground signage using hashtag #MyMarylandFarmers. The CG photo booth was very successful with visitors selecting a farm background and receiving their photo via email. The emails built a data base to share further farm facts and news.
- September **The Farmer & The Chef** - This fundraising event for the March of Dimes pairs a farmer, one of which is a CG volunteer, to talk about producing food with a chef who prepared a dish in a food demonstration with samplings for the 170 guests.
- September **Farm to Table Dinner** - Over 200 people were educated about local farming initiatives and enjoyed the bounty of local farms where volunteers provided information at the exhibit table and visited with guests on food and farming issues.
- November **Food Fight!** - Volunteers visited with 150 food-focused attendees when exhibiting and attending the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy's annual planning conference, this year focused on the food system.
- November **The Image of Agriculture Symposium** – Volunteers will attend and exhibit at LEAD Maryland's Many Faces of Maryland Agriculture Symposium.
- Ongoing **Social Media / Blogs** - Spanning an array of farm and food topics, volunteers are very active in social media, tackling the hot issues in agriculture and sending positive ag messages to over a million people.
 [Thefoodiefarmer.blogspot.com] [Farmerdansdaughter.com] [Storyworthtelling.me]

Summary:

The significant support of our local boards has helped make our program a model for the nation. The grant funding of the Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board is greatly appreciated to enable the MidAtlantic CommonGround program to continue to make great strides in increasing consumer knowledge and confidence in farm products and practices.