

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: PRESERVING ST. MARY’S COUNTY TOBACCO
 BARNs: THE INFLUENCE OF THE TOBACCO
 BUYOUT AND THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND
 AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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This thesis investigates threats to tobacco barns in St. Mary’s County, Maryland and suggests ways in which the barns may be preserved. In reviewing the architectural history of the barns, the basic timber framing is traced to show how the building form changed over time and to illustrate its functional versatility in the face of a constantly changing agricultural economy. The history of tobacco cultivation and of the fluctuations of the tobacco market demonstrate the uncertainties associated with growing the crop. By the late twentieth century, for instance, many farmers had already switched to other crops or enterprises, thereby creating the first threat to tobacco barns—abandonment.

Beginning this year (2001) the Tobacco Crop Conversion Program approved by the Maryland General Assembly will pay remaining tobacco growers to stop planting the

crop. Approximately fifty-six percent of the growers have decided to participate, potentially spelling an end to tobacco cultivation in Maryland. This thesis looks at the Tobacco Buyout Program to determine what effect it could have upon the survival of tobacco barns. If the Tobacco Conversion Program is successful in helping farmers develop new crops, tobacco barns may be adapted for new uses. However, if agricultural diversification does not succeed, farms and the tobacco barns on them will disappear. A survey of tobacco farmers included in this thesis probes how farmers plan to participate in the Buyout and enumerates their ideas for new uses for former tobacco barns.

Sprawl is a major threat to tobacco barns and to the agricultural landscape of St. Mary's County. Growth patterns in the County that were examined, using information from annual reports prepared by the Department of Planning and Zoning, and statistics provided by the Maryland State Department of Planning indicate a majority of residential development is ironically permitted within Rural Preservation Districts. The County is now hoping to counteract this trend and direct new housing toward areas already zoned for growth. Relevant sections of the proposed Unified Land Development Code for St. Mary's illustrate how the County plans to direct residential growth and preserve farmland. Less significant threats to tobacco barns such as replacement by metal barns, demolition by neglect, and dismantling for sale of the timbers are also considered.

To counteract these threats, a combination of current tax incentives, agricultural zoning overlays, land easements, and the Scenic Byways and Rural Legacy Programs is described. A summary of Maryland's Smart Growth Initiative illustrates the helpful effect it may have on the implementation of local and state programs to preserve and protect tobacco barns and the agricultural landscape of St. Mary's County.