



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

LEGISLATIVE COMMENT

DATE: March 4, 2020

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 432

SHORT TITLE: CHARLES COUNTY - PUBLIC SAFETY - BUILDINGS USED FOR AGRITOURISM

MDA POSITION: INFORMATION

EXPLANATION:

Senate Bill 432 exempts an agricultural building in Charles County used for agritourism from obtaining a change in occupancy permit if (1) the building's use for agritourism does not require it to be occupied by more than 200 people at any one time; and (2) the width of egress for the building meets specified building code standards.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) works to support the sustainable, economic success of Maryland farmers. In a state with many consumers who have the resources to spend on recreation, agritourism presents a viable opportunity to diversify farm operations. Agritourism supports the preservation of farm-based amenities, fits well with maintaining open space, helps counties retain cultural, historic values and can protect our counties' sense of place.

The last agricultural census completed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service in 2017 indicated there were 295 agritourism farms in Maryland, with revenues of nearly \$10 million.

In 2018, the General Assembly passed legislation allowing counties the opportunity to adopt a statewide definition of agritourism in zoning and/or other ordinances. Governor Hogan signed Chapter 672 of 2018 (House Bill 252) into law in May 2018. This law defines "agritourism" as an activity conducted on a farm that is offered to a member of the general public or to invited guests for the purpose of education, recreation, or active

involvement in the farm operation. This includes farm tours, hayrides, corn mazes, seasonal petting farms, farm museums, guest farms, pumpkin patches, “pick your own” or “cut your own” produce, classes related to agricultural products or skills, and picnic and party facilities offered in conjunction with any agritourism activity.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at cassie.shirk@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.