



Fair Farms[®] Maryland

a campaign for healthy food, land & waterways

House Bill 1176 (Delegate Stein)
Agriculture - Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program
Position: Support with Sponsor Amendments

February 21, 2020

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 1176, sponsored by Delegate Stein, which establishes the Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program.

The Fair Farms campaign of Waterkeepers Chesapeake brings together consumers, farmers, public health professionals, and conservationists to advocate for a food system that is equitable, fair to farmers, invests in homegrown healthy foods, and restores our waterways. We are a growing movement of over 35,000 Marylanders and close to 200 partners across the state. These partners include national organizations like Farm Aid, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Family Farm Defenders, and National Family Farm Coalition and local groups like the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility. In addition, we are a member of the Million Acre Challenge whose long-term goal is to reach a transformative tipping point: no fewer than one million acres in Maryland in regenerative production by 2030.

During the 2017 General Assembly Session, Maryland passed a law to incentivize farming practices that contribute to healthy soils--practices that increase organic matter, improve soil structure and water and nutrient holding capacity, and sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Maryland Healthy Soils Program was created under the Department of Agriculture and charged with providing to farmers incentives such as education, technical assistance, and funding.

Fair Farms advocated strongly for the legislation and celebrated the bill's passage. But, there's more work to be done. For Maryland to truly protect our vital farm soils and combat climate change, we must ensure that we incentivize proven practices that are sustainable and meaningful.

House Bill 1176 would make grants available for projects that increase carbon sequestration and reduce emissions in the atmosphere from greenhouse gases (GHGs). These grants would be available for projects that may not otherwise be funded by a state or federal grant program. The amount of a grant would be proportional to the amount of greenhouse gases that the project will reduce per acre.

Farmers have tremendous potential to be real agents of change when it comes to climate change mitigation. By implementing practices that promote soil health and sequester carbon, they can play a critical role in lessening GHGs. It's imperative that we provide our farming community with opportunities to take on this role. Increased soil health and carbon sequestration will not only have profound benefits to Maryland farmers' bottom line, it will position farmers as more resilient to extreme weather brought on by climate change.

Ultimately, this bill will ensure the viability and resilience of Maryland farms, position farmers as leaders in the climate movement, and help substantially reduce the amount of GHGs in the atmosphere – which is why we are standing strongly behind this bill and urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report of House Bill 1176.

For Fair Farms,

Shelby Kalm
Campaign Manager