



Worcester County Office of Tourism

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January 20, 2022

Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
11 Bladen St. Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Worcester County Commissioners as well as the Office of Tourism and Economic Development, I respectfully request your support of Senate Bill 32- Worcester County- Public Safety- Buildings Used for Agritourism. This bill adds Worcester County to the list of counties where an existing agricultural building used for agritourism is not considered a change of occupancy that requires a building permit if the subordinate use of agritourism does not require more than 200 people to occupy an individual building at any one time and the total width of means of egress meets or exceeds the International Building Code standard that applies to egress components other than stairways in a building without a sprinkler system.

With the rich agricultural landscape and multi-generational farms in Worcester County, we have always placed a major focus on protecting and preserving this industry. However, with local the farms facing declining revenues and development pressure, we must take creative and innovative measures to help these farms diversify and create new revenue streams through agritourism to ensure future prosperity for the next generation. Here locally, we have spent the last 2 years working on initiatives to amend local code in coordination with our development, review and permitting as well as environmental services departments to be more accommodating and less restrictive to agritourism businesses in an effort to assist in our current farms to diversify and expand, as well as attract new investment in the county making the opportunities more available and accessible.

With our strong tourism industry in Worcester, this also affords guests to our region the opportunity to explore and experience our local farms. These farms with existing structures such as barns or horse stables, often historic in nature, would be able to transform into a tasting room, farm markets, educational and demonstrative venues and deliver other agritourism related activities. This bill would help alleviate some of the onerous requirements that make it nearly impossible to delve into these diversified operations. However, it is important to note, buildings under this statute still must be structurally sound and meet or exceed ingress/egress requirements.

Again, we urge your support for SB 32, which adds Worcester County to the list of jurisdictions in which farm structures used for agritourism activities with an occupancy under 200 are exempted from certain requirements generally applied to commercial buildings. By supporting this bill, you are helping us locally develop a thriving agritourism industry and keep these family farms alive and thriving.

Thank you in advance and if you have any question, please feel free to contact me directly at 443-880-3555 or mpursel@marylandscoast.org

Sincerely,

Melanie Pursel

Melanie Pursel, M.S

Director

Worcester County Office of Tourism & Economic Development