



January 19, 2022

**2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0147: Farm to Food Security Act**

BILL: HB0147: Farm to Food Security Act
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 0147
BILL ANALYSIS: Passing the Maryland Farm to Food Security Act; This bill will expand the Maryland Market Money program, which matches federal food benefits at Maryland farmers markets; create the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (MD FARM), ensuring locally sourced produce, products, and services will be utilized by food assistance organizations; launch the Farm to School Grant Pilot, which will allow Maryland school districts to apply for grants provided their meals include a Maryland food component.

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council urges you to **SUPPORT** the Maryland Farm to Food Security Act, which will enhance healthy food access for food insecure Maryland residents and place money in the hands of Maryland farmers by expanding the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program, establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture that will leverage Maryland agriculture for procurement by food assistance organizations, and launch the Farm to School Grant Pilot, a program that will provide incentives for school districts to purchase produce from Maryland farmers and provide healthy locally-sourced meals for students.

MMM provides a dollar-for-dollar match for purchases made using federal nutrition benefits at Maryland farmers markets. This helps remove economic barriers for food-insecure Marylanders to access nutrient-rich foods and bolsters revenues for local farmers. Since its establishment in 2013, MMM has helped thousands of Marylanders who participate in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, eWIC, and SNAP to purchase locally grown produce, distributing over \$900,000.¹

In 2020, the former convener of the program, the Maryland Farmers Market Association, disbanded due to budgeting shortfalls caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and state funding cuts. In June 2020, the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission and the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation acquired the program and revamped operations on a more limited basis. As record numbers of Marylanders are still relying on federal food benefits, it is imperative that this program receive adequate state funding so it can fulfil its mission to increase access to nutritious foods to improve diet quality among food-insecure households, support the economic viability of farmers markets, and generate additional revenue for local farmers and producers.

Another key component of this bill is the creation of the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (MD FARM), which will alleviate economic hardships and COVID-19 related supply chain issues. MD FARM will support food assistance organizations to utilize Maryland produce, products, and services to purchase surplus food, cover distribution costs, secure contracts, and create food boxes. This bill would provide \$1.25 million for the Maryland Department of Agriculture to coordinate the procurement and distribution of food and services needed to quickly deliver hunger relief

¹ Maryland Market Money, 2020. "Maryland Market Money 2020 Annual Report."



in the state. It will also support local farmers and food business owners to recover from the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic through funding for direct purchases and technical assistance.

MD FARM is modeled after successful programs already implemented in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Virginia that ensure locally produced food, services, infrastructure, and processing are utilized for those in need, particularly during emergency situations. For example, Virginia's Agriculture Food Assistance Program has provided state funding for food banks to cover food production, procurement, and distribution costs. New York's Nourish New York initiative has already received \$85 million in state investment for emergency food providers to purchase surplus products from local food producers to assist those in need. The Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS), established in 2008, uses state funding to cover farmers' production costs used to supply food banks. It is time Maryland joins these states in passing legislation that will create a more resilient food system for the families that need it most and local food producers, especially during this time of crisis.

Lastly, this bill will launch the Farm to School Grant Pilot program, which will make it more financially feasible for school districts to purchase local food by allowing them to apply for grants valued at 20 cents per meal that contain a Maryland food component. Maryland currently has no such funding or staffing for this purpose. It is crucial this bill pass to jumpstart this program with \$500,000 in funding to provide local nutritious food for Maryland's school children. The science is clear-- nutrient-rich foods are crucial for children's cognitive development and health and are needed to give them the energy to remain engaged throughout the school day². This bill would play an active role in boosting educational and health outcomes, especially for the 43% of Maryland students who rely on free and reduced meals³, and provide revenue for Maryland farmers and producers.

Several states have already implemented similar programs, such as Michigan, where locally grown produce now reaches 445,000 students in 146 school districts with 10 cents per meal reimbursed. In New Mexico, schools may receive grants at the beginning of the year to purchase food from local farms. Nearby, in the District of Columbia, schools may receive 5 cents per meal if they contain at least one component of locally grown, unprocessed food as part of DC's Healthy Schools Act. MCFC recommends Maryland take a page from these programs and develop our own to provide school-age children greater access to fresh and local foods, contributing to reducing food insecurity and promoting educational achievement. This bill will be instrumental in reaching this goal and in creating the incentives needed for school districts to foster partnerships with local food producers.

HB0147 presents bold solutions toward ensuring food security for Marylanders in times of need and crisis, guaranteeing school children access to local, healthy meals, and promoting the economic viability of Maryland food producers. **For these reasons the Montgomery County Food Council is FOR HB0147 and urges a favorable report FOR this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger; expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources.

For more information, please contact: Heather Bruskin, MCFC Executive Director at the email and phone number below.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021 "Childhood Nutrition Facts"

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018 "Kids Count Data Center."

