

**Testimony in Support of Farm to Food Security Act
Lauren Goldberg, Crossroads Community Food Network
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Dear Members of the Committee:

My name is Lauren Goldberg, and I'm the Executive Director at Crossroads Community Food Network in Takoma / Langley Park. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Farm to Food Security Act.

This legislation invests in three programs to reduce food insecurity and foster food system resiliency in Maryland. The need could not be more urgent: This pandemic continues to exacerbate the economic struggles of Marylanders living in poverty and expose our food supply chain vulnerabilities. We need to invest in local infrastructure to reduce supply chain disruption, and this Act does just that, while also strengthening our support system for people experiencing food insecurity.

Creating the MD Food and Ag Resilience Mechanism:

This is the exact type of measure that strengthens Maryland supply chains. It supports organizations that are accessing, aggregating, and distributing food to our lower-income neighbors. Who could have predicted that these organizations would be getting into food sourcing, aggregation, and processing, but here we are. By investing in infrastructure for food purchasing, distribution, and surplus recovery, we are enhancing resiliency and setting the stage for the long term food supply chain reliability that we need here in the state.

Expanding the Reach of Maryland Market Money (MMM):

SNAP - or food stamp - redemption at farmers markets has increased dramatically over the past decade. This is largely due to the rise of incentive programs that match SNAP dollars spent at farmers markets. This kind of "double-dollar" program, now at hundreds of markets across the country, started right here in Maryland at Crossroads Farmers Market. It was founded in 2007 to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to the Takoma/Langley Crossroads, a primarily immigrant, lower-income community. It was the first farmers market in Maryland to accept SNAP and other federal nutrition benefits as a form of payment and the first in the country to match them dollar for dollar. Shoppers using SNAP receive up to \$50 of our incentives, called Fresh Checks, each week to spend on twice as much fresh, healthy food.

The Fresh Checks program at Crossroads Farmers Market is based on a simple idea: make fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable, and people will buy them. Since this idea was proven to be

successful at our market, an initiative soon followed to extend this reach throughout the state and the Maryland Market Money program was born. We worked closely with our colleagues to develop and implement the MMM program, and want to see it expand.

Maryland Market Money is a game-changer for food-insecure people shopping at farmers markets and for the local Maryland farmers their purchases support. Shoppers use their nutrition benefits: SNAP, WIC, senior vouchers, and Pandemic-EBT, for example, and MMM matches those dollars up to a specific threshold, whether that is \$20 per person per week, \$50, or unlimited. At Crossroads Farmers Market, we've seen SNAP use alone increase by 148% since the 2019 season. This tells us that people are using their benefits, that the demand is growing, and that we need to invest in MMM to provide more matching dollars. After all, those matching dollars end up in the hands of our Maryland farmers.

Launching the Farm to School Grant Pilot:

Lastly, launching the Farm to School Grant Pilot is a win-win and just makes good sense. Increasing sales opportunities for Maryland farmers is always a best practice, and through this program, our school children will get the freshest, most nutritious produce that will help them focus and learn every day: that grown by our Maryland farmers.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill, and for your efforts to ensure every Maryland resident is food secure.