

## **SUPPORT HB 687/SB597: Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices**

My name is Ellen Gordon. I'm a 30 year resident of Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve and a longtime member of the board of Sugarloaf Citizens' Association, (SCA) a nonprofit established 48 years ago to protect the rural upper part of the county-- 8 years before the birth of the Reserve. We fight to prevent farmland loss to industrial & commercial uses, and have worked diligently to protect our groundwater—now a designated sole source aquifer—as well as the many streams and creeks distributed throughout the Reserve.

Sugarloaf Citizens' Association is an all-volunteer group: no paid staff. We use membership dues, fundraisers and income from our land to pay experts, e.g., land use attorneys and hydrologists when we need their expertise. Linden Farm, in Dickerson is our headquarters, with nearly 150 acres of farmable land that has been in conventional row crop rotation--corn, soybeans, wheat--for at least 50 years. In 2019, our concern grew as we watched the damage wrought by climate change on prime food growing areas of our country—a year-round fire season in California, intense flooding in the Midwest, saltwater intrusion and toxic cyanobacteria blooms in Florida and elsewhere—and our board made the decision that we needed to change how our land was farmed. We have a role to play in ameliorating climate change while growing more food and protecting our waters, so we dove into learning about regenerative agriculture. We discovered that we need to move away from our land's long tradition of commodities crops to advance the health of our soil, raise its carbon sequestration rates and improve the quality of all of our water sources. Our search for the right farmer to enable this transition has opened our eyes to the mounting interest in the benefits of regenerative agriculture. And we are only one of many landowners looking to transform our lands with regenerative agriculture. Our vision doesn't stop at rejuvenating our acreage; we intend this to be a demonstration project, with opportunities for others to see how beneficial regenerative farming can be, reducing erosion, protecting groundwater and surface water, producing high quality food and ultimately yielding a profit!

We made a decision to forgo the leasing fees on the property for 2020 and some years into the future, to help that farmer transition the land. But that's not nearly enough financial aid to change our farm. Grazing animals on some of the acreage may prove to be the most effective way to recover our soil—but we don't have any perimeter fencing. The single, existing, very old agricultural well isn't functioning. We were left with bare ground once the previous farmer harvested the soybeans last fall, so we invested about \$5000 of Association money to ensure that a cover crop went in to provide roots in the ground over the winter. That's hard-earned funding for our volunteer group.

SCA, together with the farmer who will work the land, need equitable access to funding for rotational grazing--including stout perimeter fencing and moveable interior fencing. We need to not be penalized for planting permanent perennial pasture for grazing, which will help heal the soil, increase fertility and reduce runoff. We need the opportunity to get help on a water system. Please support this bill, to give us more equitable access to state cost share assistance. Please report favorably on **HB687/SB598**. Thank you.

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