

**BILL:** SB0985, Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund - Establishment

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

**POSITION:** Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0985-- Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund - Establishment

**BILL ANALYSIS:** Establishing the Office for the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program in the Department of Agriculture; establishing the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program in the Office to encourage certain units to try to achieve an overall percentage goal of 20% of the unit's total dollar value of procurement contracts for food from certain certified local farm enterprises; establishing a Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund; etc.

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee :

The Montgomery County Food Council urges you to **SUPPORT** this bill as it seeks to strengthen the Maryland food system by increasing in-state procurement by State institutions. A strong, interconnected local food system is critical to bolstering Maryland's economy, farming communities, residents' physical health, and environmental sustainability.

This bill is designed to connect Maryland institutions to Maryland farms, create economic opportunities for Maryland farmers, and increase the amount of state procured, locally sourced food. The 20% procurement goal will provide a direct and substantial economic benefit to Maryland farmers, not only by creating a stable and consistent market to sell to, but also by implementing new aggregation and distribution infrastructure that will enable farmers to engage more effectively with private institutions as well. There are more than 220 farms in Montgomery County that grow crops for human consumption, and this measure would enable many of these farms to be designated as "certified local farm enterprises," thereby providing an opportunity for these farms to expand their operations and reach new markets throughout the state. Increased local procurement will keep more Maryland dollars in the Maryland economy, and will promote an increase in local employment opportunities. Locally grown food also has a higher nutritional content than food that is grown miles away, as it can be harvested and consumed on a shorter timeline, thus retaining many of the nutrients that would otherwise dwindle over the course of a lengthy transportation process.

Increased procurement of Maryland-grown foods will also facilitate a more environmentally sustainable food system. This bill would encourage farms throughout the region to enhance their nutrient management plans, thus improving the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Buying local reduces the carbon impact resulting from food transportation, and having a network of reliable local food sources provides resiliency to prepare the State for any type of emergency or natural disaster that would affect our access to out-of-state food supplies.

For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports SB0985 and urges you to vote FOR this bill.

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual community members and representatives of local businesses, government, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. Our mission is to bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders to improve the environmental, economic, social and nutritional



health of Montgomery County, Maryland through the creation of a robust, local, sustainable food system. Our vision is to cultivate a vibrant food system in Montgomery County that consciously produces, distributes, and recycles food, making it accessible to all residents while promoting the health of the local food economy, its consumers, and the environment.

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

