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POSITION STATEMENT

Senate Bill 986 – Public Schools – Agricultural Education and Grant Programs
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Budget and Taxation Committee
March 3, 2020

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 986 – Public Schools – Agricultural Education Programs. This bill requires each county board of education to implement an agricultural science curriculum in at least one public high school and one career and technology education center. The curriculum will focus on opportunities in agriculture by providing instruction and developing skills in certain areas through integrated classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural and leadership experiences. Additionally, this bill will establish the Maryland Agricultural Education Grant Program with the main purpose to increase access to agricultural education in the state.

Agriculture is the leading commercial industry in the state-employing approximately 350,000 people, including nearly 6,000 full-time farmers. It is the largest single land use in the State, with nearly 2 million acres of working landscapes (32% of total land area used for farming). Agriculture works in both rural and urban areas-while the majority of Maryland's farmland lies in the north-central part of the State and the upper Eastern Shore, about 20 urban farms thrive in Baltimore City. According to a report released by the Business Economic and Community Outreach Network at Salisbury University, with the support of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industries Development Corporation, agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture accounts for \$19.6 billion dollars and \$753 million dollars in state and local tax revenue in the state. Today, Maryland's agriculture industry is strong, but tomorrow this may change if steps are not taken now to support it.

American Farmland Trust coined the simple but poignant message, "No farms, No food", with the purpose of elevating America's farms as they provide an unparalleled abundance of fresh, healthy, and local food but also stressing the critical fact that farms are rapidly disappearing. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, there has been a 30% increase of farmers over the age of 75 and a 20% decrease of farmers under the age of 25. Furthermore, as these farmers retire or pass away, their land is often sold for development. The aging farmer populations, coupled with a growing demand for an agricultural workforce, and the threat of losing farmland to development, has led to a critical need to support the *farmers of tomorrow* through agricultural education curriculum in public schools.

In order to keep agricultural viable in Maryland, we need a robust agricultural education program. SB986 will strengthen the state's agriculture community by providing students with the tools, education, and experience needed to not only have access to successful careers in this essential industry, but to have a greater understanding and appreciation for it as well.

The Council respectfully requests your favorable support of SB986.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"