



FUTURE HARVEST

Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture

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House Bill 1176 (Delegate Stein)
Maryland Healthy Soil Grant Bill
Position: Support with Sponsor Amendments

February 20, 2020

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Future Harvest, and as the Million Acre Challenge Manager, I am testifying in support of the Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program, with sponsor amendments.

For more than 20 years, Future Harvest has been providing education and advocacy to advance agriculture that sustains our region's farmers, environment, and communities. Recently, we have added research to our work strategies. The majority of our approximately 800 members are farmers. We run a beginner farmer training program; two field schools that provide peer-to-peer and expert-led education to all farmers; and an annual conference that this year drew over 700 farmers from Maryland and nearby states.

Future Harvest is also one of 6 organizations partnering on the Million Acre Challenge, a collaborative effort to advance regenerative agriculture on 1 million acres of MD farmland over the next decade.

The potential of agronomic practices to build healthy soils that sequester carbon and reduce GHG emissions is now well-established, as recognized by the enacting of Maryland's Healthy Soil Program, in 2017, as well as legislation in other states, including California, Massachusetts, New Mexico and New York, to name just a few.

Maryland has been a leader in promoting and incentivizing the adoption of cover cropping, which serves as a great example of how farmers are willing, able and effective at mobilizing to address critical environmental concerns. However, in many cases, the benefits of new practices may take years to actualize, and require up-front investments in both time and money- scarce commodities on most farms. There is also increased pressure on producers to not only provide food, fuel and fiber, but to take responsibility for restoring and replenishing natural resources, and the climate itself. This is a big ask, and a responsibility that farmers should not have to carry alone.

Providing financial support for adopting additional measures, such as: minimizing or eliminating tillage; rotational grazing of livestock; converting cropland to pasture and increasing fungal

biomass of soils- again, to name just a few, will help in Maryland's efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, and at the same time will reward our risk-saturated farmers with numerous co-benefits, including: reduced soil erosion and run-off; reduced production costs and increased crop yield via more efficient nutrient cycling; improved wildlife and pollinator habitat; reduced risk of flooding and increased biodiversity.

The positive side-effects associated with healthy soil benefit all Marylanders, and represent a clear win for both Maryland's environment, and for the long-term productivity and economic health of Maryland farmers.

We would like to thank Delegate Stein for sponsoring this Bill.

Sincerely,
Lisa Garfield