

HB232-Maryland Agricultural Commission – Hemp Industry Member Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo Sponsor Testimony

I am happy to report that the efforts of the Environment and Transportation Committee to bring back hemp as an agricultural option for Maryland farmers are finally reaping the benefits. Farmers are now growing hemp and working through the early phases that most “start-ups” experience. I had the distinct pleasure of speaking to and meeting with a packed room of growers and producers of hemp last February. They are excited about new opportunities that hemp is bringing to Maryland.

At last count, Maryland has 69 registered farmers using their resources to grow approximately 1,500 acres of a valuable crop previously unavailable to them. In addition, an estimated 786 acres of hemp was grown in Maryland in 2019.¹ I am particularly passionate about the industry’s potential impact on our local economy. With our ideal climate, close proximity to major markets, and transportation assets, hemp could quickly become a cash crop with major benefits to our state. Hemp could be a tool to help revitalize agricultural communities and create jobs. We need to support this industry as it gets its footing. Hemp is practically a new commodity for Maryland and farmers need the support of the Department of Agriculture to succeed.

HB232 takes a positive step forward in supporting this new industry by creating a new member on the Maryland Agricultural Commission designated to represent the hemp industry. The Commission is appointed by the Governor and serves as an advisory body to the secretary and deputy secretary of Agriculture. The commission currently consists of 30 members representing various commodities across Maryland. A designated seat for the hemp industry will allow the Commission to achieve a better understanding of the unique challenges facing our hemp farmers and create an environment where our farmers can thrive while also providing direct benefits to Maryland. I ask you for a favorable report for HB232 to provide the support required for this new industry to develop Maryland into a leader in the hemp market.

¹ [Maryland State Hemp Laws and Hemp Farming Legislation | Vote Hemp](#)