



Fair Farms[®] Maryland

a campaign for healthy food, land & waterways

House Bill 269 (Delegate Wells)
Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program

Position: Support

January 15, 2021

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 269, sponsored by Delegate Wells, which establishes the Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund.

The Fair Farms campaign of Waterkeepers Chesapeake brings together consumers, farmers, public health professionals, and conservationists to advocate for a food system that is equitable, fair to farmers, invests in homegrown healthy foods, and restores our waterways. We are a growing movement of over 35,000 Marylanders and close to 200 partners across the state. These partners include national organizations like Farm Aid, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Family Farm Defenders, and National Family Farm Coalition and local groups like the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility.

House Bill 269 will be a critical step toward a better supported urban agriculture community in Maryland. Although urban farms are a growing part of the modern agricultural landscape, they are often left out of the larger agricultural conversation—despite providing myriad benefits to Maryland’s cities and peri-urban areas. Urban farms can provide a valuable use for otherwise vacant city lots—both providing more usable green space and offering a chance for community members to connect with their food and their neighbors. These spaces also help to build strong and healthy communities that are better positioned to fight food insecurity and areas of food apartheid and promote food sovereignty. This is particularly critical during food supply chain disruptions like what we saw in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund also has the opportunity to support historically-disadvantaged urban growers. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Black farmers account for 1.4% of the country’s 3.4 million producers. This is a major decline compared to the 5.1 million Black farmers who made up 14% of the farming population 1920. Much of this decline can be attributed to discriminatory practices and policies carried out by the United States Department of Agriculture. However, in recent years there has been an increase in

Black farmers, especially in urban areas. Programs like the Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund can play a small, but important role in helping to reverse the damaging effects of these policies by providing more support to urban farmers, especially farmers of color.

Ultimately, this bill will lift up Maryland's urban farmers and act as an important step in creating a more resilient and equitable food system. For these reasons, we urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report of HB 269.

Sincerely,

Shelby Kalm
Fair Farms Campaign Manager
Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Additional Supporters:

Caroline Selle, *Winding Roots Farm*
Carolyn E. Ricketts, *Climate Stewards of Greater Annapolis*
Gabriel Bustos, *Elemental Education*
Kate Medina, *Charles Koiner Conservancy for Urban Farming*
Melanie Smith-Bell, *Community FARE*
Michael Hill, *Suns of ReAwakening*

