

Testimony before the Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee
SB 942 Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant 2
Program and Fund – Establishment
Favorable

Dear Mister Chairman and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

Thank you for considering the important issue of expanding support for urban agriculture. I am writing to share my experiences providing technical assistance to urban farmers, on the topic of accessing water and energy. Farmers in urban areas face unique challenges and expenses related to accessing the water and energy they need to successfully grow and market food and other agricultural products.

Water access challenges and expenses:

Many urban farms are located on vacant lots where buildings have been torn down. In many cases, during the building demolition process the water meter was also demolished and the pipe capped and re-buried. This results in many farmers either snaking hoses long distances from the nearest water access point, or if no water access is available, hauling water in heavy totes or relying entirely on rainwater. None of these are sustainable options in the long-term, because fresh vegetables and other specialty crops requires reliable access to potable water for irrigation and post-harvest washing.

One Baltimore City farm, The Greener Garden, belonging to Mr. Warren Blue and Mrs. Lavette Blue, received a cost-share grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install efficient drip irrigation in eight high tunnels (temporary greenhouses). However, installing a water meter to feed the drip irrigation required tearing up the street to lay pipe to the city water main, which cost an additional \$9,000, and which was a category of cost which was not eligible to be covered by the USDA-NRCS grant. This held up completion of the drip irrigation grant for over a year, and almost resulted in the grant being rescinded. In the end, the farmers were only able to pay to have the water main installed due to a crowd-funding campaign organized by Atiya Wells, the leader of BLISS Meadows urban farm.

The Farm Alliance of Baltimore is in the process of developing a teaching farm on city parkland. They are in the beginning stages of hiring a contractor to install a water meter for the farm, and have been quoted \$40,000 as the cost.

Energy access challenges:

A third Baltimore City Farm, Real Food Farm, is located on the grounds of a vacant high school building. Last month the high school building lost electricity, which cut off electricity access for the farm. Because the building through which they access electricity is vacant, this has complicated solving the issue. In the meantime, they are paying for a

generator to keep their vegetable walk-in cooler running. Baltimore Gas and Electric's SEED program is likely to provide some financial help with reconnecting the electricity, but Real Food Farm still needs to pay an electrician \$5,500 and is spending roughly 10 hours of staff time per week on the problem.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge a favorable report on SB0942

Sincerely,



Neith Little
Urban Agriculture Extension Educator
University of Maryland Extension, Baltimore City Office

References

Little, N. G., McCoy, T., Wang, C., & Dill, S. P. (2019). Results of a needs assessment of urban farmers in Maryland. *Journal of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents*, 12(1), 1–8. <https://www.nacaa.com/journal/452eeb58-36c3-44ac-978d-f2999c49ddb9>

Little, N. (2021). What is urban agriculture? University of Maryland Extension Factsheet 1169 <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/what-urban-agriculture>

Richardson, M., Thompson, M.J., Carson, A.D., Taylor, J.R., Rangarajan, A. VanVranken, R., Hanumappa, M. Little, N.G. (unpublished data) A profile of urban agricultural growers, organizations, their needs, and differences based on profit status in the northeastern United States.