



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

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February 15, 2023

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of HB 389 - Department of Agriculture - State Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture**

On behalf of our Farm Bureau member families in Maryland, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 389, legislation that establishes a State Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture as a position in the Department of Agriculture.

Value-added agriculture means: (1) the alteration of a raw agricultural product in a way that increases the product's worth to a consumer and brings more revenue to a farmer, producer, or processor; and (2) includes all enterprises in which an agricultural business or the agricultural business's products are altered, marketed, produced, or processed in a way that adds income to a farmer, producer, or processor.

The state ombudsman for value-added agriculture shall: (1) serve as the primary point of contact for individuals engaging in, or interested in engaging in, value-added agriculture in the state; (2) provide information regarding state and federal regulations relating to value-added agriculture; (3) act as a liaison between state and federal partners involved in value-added agriculture; and (4) perform any other duty or function that supports value-added agriculture in the state, as required by the secretary.

For many years now, farmers have tried to expand their operations and include value-added food processing. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the consumer interest skyrocketed for local food and meats. Unfortunately, the regulatory process from the county, state and federal government agencies has prevented most farmers from trying to capture this consumer interest in local food. This bill is a product of a summer study where the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) met with interested producers along with existing food processors to determine what was needed to help increase local food and meat processing in the state. It was determined that the problem was not with the USDA meat inspection, but with the many layers of regulation and permits needed just to build a value-added food processing facility. This position will assist farmers through the layers of regulation and permitting.

MDFB Supports the amendments that were included in the Senate cross file, SB 34 to change from Ombudsman to specialist and cleaning up additional clarification language.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 389 & REQUESTS A FAVORABLE REPORT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colby Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396