



POSITION STATEMENT  
**HB 389/SB 34: State Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture**  
February 12, 2023

As the Project Director for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, I am advocating on behalf of the creation of a State Ombudsman of Value-Added Agriculture for the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

There is an ever-increasing number of budding food entrepreneurs from all over Maryland wanting to sell their creations to friends and family, in farmer's markets, and even in their local grocery store, and even those who want to open a butcher shop selling USDA inspected meat cuts. However, the county, state, and federal regulations currently in place to sell these products are not only complex, but are also hard to find, difficult to understand, and in some cases, expensive to meet. This is not to say that the regulations are too stringent or unnecessary, everyone wants to have a safe food supply chain. What it is saying though, is while there is no lack of sticks used to police food safety, there is simply not anyone offering carrots at the State level to put a human face on these regulations, instruct rather than punish, and teach best practices rather than issue citations. We at SMADC know the dilemma food entrepreneurs face as we are one of the few "go to" places to guide these aspirants through the maze of requirements, documentation, on farm processing, temperature logging, packaging, and labeling.

**I will offer two examples:**

On February 6, 2023, SMADC in cooperation with the State of Maryland Department of Health hosted a "How To" seminar for producing, processing, and retailing Cottage Foods in Maryland. We were astonished when the sign-ups exceeded 300 participants. At the 1 ½ hour presentation when 20 minutes was allocated for questions from attendees, only a fraction of the questions were able to be answered leaving dozens of questions for future follow up. 300+ signups. 200 signed in for the presentation, and over 50 questions from the audience, and many, many more into our offices after the Webinar. The need for guidance and instruction is real.

On May 8, 2021, the Amish community in St. Mary's County celebrated the opening of the first off-the-grid red meat harvesting facility under USDA inspection in the nation. It was opened after the Amish and SMADC worked for 2 ½ years to erect a building, establish HACCP, SOP, SSOP, and GMP plans to meet USDA regulations. The only assistance available in meeting these guidelines was found by gleaned by studying case studies, reading available literature, and visitations to other abattoirs. Federal regulators only appear at final inspections and are "only in the business of regulation, not instructing." The Amish were fortunate to have SMADC as their consultant during this process, or it would have never been.

In sum, a state Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture is desperately needed for farmers and producers in Maryland who are diversifying their products and growing their small businesses in a safe, effective, and fiscally sound manner.

Thank you,  
Craig Sewell,  
Project Director, SMADC

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