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**HB178 - State Designations – State Spirit – Maryland Rye**

Committee: Health and Government Operations

MGPA Position: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Grain Producers Association serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. On an annual basis, nearly a million acres of these crops are grown in Maryland.

House Bill 178 designates rye as Maryland's state spirit. More than 50 farmers in Maryland grow rye for harvest across the state. Many of these farmers sell the rye directly to Maryland distillers for the creation of Maryland Rye Whiskey. This is a great value added, local use of this crop.

There are many benefits to growing rye in Maryland including environmental benefits. Rye is planted in the fall and grows over the winter taking up any nutrients left in the soil from the previous crop and thereby protecting our waterways from excess nutrients. According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, planting rye in the fall can reduce nitrogen loss by 45% compared to an acre without a cover crop. Rye also serves as a cover to stabilize the soil over the winter to prevent erosion.

Designating Rye as Maryland's state spirit will draw attention to this unique opportunity for Maryland farmers to grow rye and benefit the environment and local economy.

MGPA is very supportive of House Bill 178 and respectfully asks for a favorable report.