



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY FARM BUREAU, INC.

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To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Prince George's County Farm Bureau

Re: Support of SB 34 - Department of Agriculture – State Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture

On behalf of the Prince George's County Farm Bureau, I would like to express our support of SB 34 - Department of Agriculture – State Ombudsman for Value-Added Agriculture. This bill dedicates a statewide ambassador to directly aid value-added producers, both new and existing, in guiding them through the regulations surrounding their endeavor.

Value-added agriculture has opened new pathways for agricultural producers to be profitable and successful in their business. Increased growing pressures, rising costs, and lack of labor for farmers has made it challenging to keep family farms in production, and has forced most farmers and farm families to maintain at least one off-farm job. To combat this, farmers have become more creative with their products to generate a sustainable income using products they are already producing, and further marketing them or processing them to be a more valuable product. Value-added production also attracts young, new and beginning farmers who now see agriculture as a successful and profitable business opportunity, both in the rural and the urban market.

The rise in demand for locally produced foods has created a new market for producers to sell their product directly to consumers, both raw and value-added, to receive a higher profit margin. A recent study done by the Business Economic and Community Outreach Network of Salisbury University showed that "Maryland's Value-Added Agriculture industry supports close to 74,000 jobs and brings a total economic impact of over \$20.6 billion annual to the states economy...nearly \$875 million of the State's fiscal resources."

Entering into the value-added agriculture market can be extremely tricky, particularly around food safety protocol, business licensing, state and local permitting, and labeling requirements. This has historically been a major barrier for producers who are looking to get into the market and generate income to preserve their farm, or start their business. Prince George's County Farm Bureau fully supports this bill, and looks forward to working with the State Value-Added Agriculture Ombudsman to serve our farmers.

Best Regards,

Harrison Palmer

Vice President

Prince George's County Farm Bureau