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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 589 - Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland - Southern Maryland Agricultural
Development Commission - Funding
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 14, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 589 - Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland - Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission - Funding. This bill requires an annual appropriation of \$1,000,000 for the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. This funding is directed to the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC). SMADC's purpose is to support farms and the future of agriculture in Southern Maryland. They are committed to expanding and promoting a viable and profitable agricultural farming community in Southern Maryland and the five southern Maryland counties of Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's.

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the livelihoods of rural communities by providing employment opportunities, sustaining the local economy and ensuring food security. The demand for locally-produced food—or food produced in the same region in which it is consumed—has been on the rise. In 2020, farmers produced and sold \$9 billion of local food directly to consumers, retailers, institutions, and intermediaries; an increase of 3% of direct farm sales of food in 2015. Local and regional food systems are one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's four pillars of agriculture and rural economic development. Promoting local and regional food systems is also identified as one of the Rural Development Agency's seven strategies for economic development.

The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis in its publication *Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform Communities (2017)*, reported that existing studies provide evidence of positive regional economic impacts resulting from local food system initiatives. Through strengthening local inter-industry linkages, local food systems generate additional regional economic activity and retain wealth. The new markets resulting from growing consumer interest in local and regional foods support improved profitability outcomes for some small- and midscale producers.

SMADC supports approximately 2,000 farms and almost 200,000 acres in agricultural production. They provide vision, support, grants, marketing and promotion to area farmers and help to streamline regulations and reduce obstacles. This state investment will promote the development of a diverse local food system in Southern Maryland, positively impact its economy and support Southern Maryland farmers.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 589.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.