



Maryland Grain Producers Association
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House Bill 1328 - Solar Energy and Energy Storage - Development and State Procurement

Committee: Economic Matters

MGPA Position: Opposed

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA opposes House Bill 1328 which would authorize counties to create a Conservation and Restoration Fund and require solar development companies to pay a reasonable fee into the fund if they cite a solar project on land zoned for agriculture. The fund is to be used for conservation and restoration of agricultural, environmentally sensitive, and historically sensitive areas. The bill also requires the creation of a commission that will make recommendations for best practices of citing solar that balances the need for solar development and protecting farms, forest, soil and natural resources.

When the expanded Renewable Portfolio Standard passed in 2019, 14.5% of the state's energy be produced by in-state cited solar energy. The land use of choice for solar developers seems to be agricultural land as it is available in large, flat parcels and is therefore the least expensive site for ground mounted solar. It is unclear exactly how many acres of farmland will be taken for solar development. Estimates in various reports range from 30,000 to 130,000 acres. This would represent up to 10% of Maryland farmland.

Maryland farmland and farmers are already under immense pressure from development and land conversion. From 2017 to 2022, Maryland lost 12,000 acres of agricultural land. Since the RPS was first passed in 2002, Maryland has lost nearly 100,000 acres of agricultural land. This has lasting impacts on farm families, food production and the environment.

By requiring solar developers who are profiting from the conversation of farmland to pay into a conservation and restoration fund, these funds can be used to protect, preserve and restore farmland. MGPA believes this is a fair compromise.

Additionally, a thoughtful commission is needed to develop best policies and practices for balancing renewable energy production and the future of Maryland agriculture.

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Thank you,

Lindsay Thompson

Executive Director