

SB240 Crone Letter of Support .pdf

Uploaded by: Amy Crone

Position: FAV



January 24th, 2025

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Amy Crone, HopScratch Farm

Re: Senate Bill 240 - Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

The Maryland Agricultural Commission is charged with the duty of advising the Secretary of Agriculture, proposing agricultural improvements, promoting State agricultural industries and products, and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. Since its inception in 1961, the Commission has continued to grow and evolve its membership to ensure that it is on the cutting edge of agricultural advancements and emerging industries. In 1968, this Advisory Board doubled its membership with the spirit of being more representative of the agricultural sector and became the Maryland Agricultural Commission. The Maryland Agricultural Commission proposed the development of a Department of Agriculture in 1971 within the Executive Branch to adopt the duties of enforcing agriculturally related laws and separate the dual responsibilities of the State Board of Agriculture and University of Maryland Board of Regents. Today, the 31-member Maryland Agricultural Commission serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Agriculture, comprised of Governor-appointed members in industry-specific seats to bring key voices to the table and advance the industry by providing recommendations and consideration on the initiatives of the Department.

I currently serve as the Vice Chair of this Commission, representing the Farm Direct sector. This testimony is being submitted on my personal behalf, as the Commission does not submit testimony. I am the owner of HopScratch Farm, a diversified family farm that produces beef, lamb, hops and eggs in Harwood MD. I encourage you to vote in favor of the proposed legislation.

In February 2024, the Commission engaged in a survey to identify key priorities that impact Maryland agriculture and connect industries that are not represented on the Commission but are integral in the success of the whole industry. At the March 2024 meeting, the first draft of their strategic plan was introduced and modified at each subsequent meeting until June 2024 when it was unanimously adopted.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. In conjunction with the establishment of working committees we moved to adopt the Young Farmers Advisory Board to now be a standing Committee on Young Farmers with leadership from a newly established Young Farmer seat. The Young Farmers Advisory Board was formed in 2004 and charged with advising the Maryland Agricultural Commission on issues pertinent to young farmers and the next generation of agriculture. Adoption of the Young Farmers Advisory Board into the Maryland Agricultural Commission, as proposed in this legislation, ensures that the future of Maryland agriculture is always considered.

Intentional nomenclature changes to the membership seats as outlined in the strategic plan expand the Agritourism industry to include Value Added Agriculture, amend the Horse Breeding industry to represent the entire Equine industry, clarify the horticulture industry to focus on fruit production which will be a sister seat to the vegetable producer, and engage with the nursery, landscape and greenhouse industry in addition to the original Nursery seat. Duplicative Poultry, Dairy, Nursery, and Related

Agricultural Service seats were removed to ensure all industries carried an equal voice, and the longstanding tobacco grower position was removed, marking a historic shift from the crop that was once prolific throughout the State. Lastly, several new seats were added to represent growing industries like Controlled Environmental Agriculture and the Urban & Small Farm Sector, and ensure that Historically Underserved Farmers, Veteran Farmers, and New & Beginning Farmers have a seat at the table.

Advisory bodies have played an integral role in spurring the success of the agricultural industry for over 60 years and the evolution of those bodies from a grassroots initiative ensures that its unified voice is fully representative of Maryland's number one commercial industry. Thank you for your consideration of the proposed legislation that makes the statutory changes formulated through several months of examination from the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Crone", written over a horizontal line.

Amy Crone
Maryland Agricultural Commission Vice Chair
HopScratch Farm

SB 240 - Maryland Agriculture Commission and Young

Uploaded by: Grayson Middleton

Position: FAV



Educate. Advocate. Innovate.

Date: January 28, 2024
To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
From: Grayson Middleton, Government Affairs Manager
Re: SB 240 – Maryland Agriculture Commission and Young Farmers – **Support**

Delmarva Chicken Association (DCA) the 1,600-member trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, companies, and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and Delaware supports SB 240 and urges a favorable committee report.

SB 240 would alter the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission by eliminating redundant industry representation and adding seats for a new and beginning farmer, a veteran farmer, an urban/small farmer, and a socially disadvantaged farmer, among others. The bill would also establish a Committee on Young Farmers.

The Maryland Agricultural Commission provides invaluable collaboration between different sectors of agriculture and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. By eliminating the duplicative seats on the commission, we hope that the Commission will foster closer collaboration, while also including voices that have unfortunately been absent in the development of agricultural policy.

The additional seats are also apt to directly benefit our chicken community. About 23% of chicken farmers are from minority groups, compared with 4.5% of farmers nationally. In addition, chicken farming is one of the most accessible enterprises for new and beginning farmers, owing to the relatively minimal land and equipment requirements. Therefore, we believe the additional representation of underserved and new and beginning farmers will also represent the interests of many of our members.

The new composition of the Commission will be more reflective of the citizenry of Maryland and the future of our industry, fostering more productive and meaningful collaboration across sectors. As such, we urge a favorable vote on SB 240.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at Grayson Middleton at middleton@dcahicken.com or 410-490-3329.

Sincerely,

Grayson Middleton

Government Affairs Manager

SB240 Maryland Agricultural Commission Letter of S

Uploaded by: Harrison Palmer

Position: FAV



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Kevin M. Atticks, Secretary
Steven A. Connelly, Deputy Secretary

Maryland Agricultural Commission

Agriculture | *Maryland's Leading Industry*
mda.maryland.gov

The Wayne A. Cawley, Jr. Building
50 Harry S Truman Parkway
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-841-5882 Baltimore/Washington
410-841-5914 Fax

January 23rd, 2025

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Harrison Palmer, Executive Secretary

Re: Senate Bill 240 - Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

The Maryland Agricultural Commission is charged with the duty of advising the Secretary of Agriculture, proposing agricultural improvements, promoting State agricultural industries and products, and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. Since its inception in 1961, the Commission has continued to grow and evolve its membership to ensure that it is on the cutting edge of agricultural advancements and emerging industries. A 1990 survey of Commission members encouraged the inclusion of the rapidly growing nursery industry. Within a decade, this industry was the [#2 agricultural commodity](#) in the state, and by 2018 generated over [\\$1.376 billion](#) in agricultural product sales per a Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association survey. Today, the Nursery representative serves as Chair of the Commission, highlighting the valuable foresight and awareness of the Maryland Agricultural Commission as it makes recommendations to restructure membership in this proposed legislation to embody the future of the industry.

In 1916 a 9-member State Board of Agriculture was established and charged with enforcing the agriculturally related laws of Maryland, as well as serving as the Board of Regents for the Maryland State College of Agriculture, later named the University of Maryland. In 1961, the legislature formed the Agricultural Advisory Board of Maryland to identify challenges within the agricultural industry and bring them to the attention of the State Board of Agriculture. 7 years later, this Advisory Board doubled its membership with the spirit of being more representative of the agricultural sector and became the Maryland Agricultural Commission. The Maryland Agricultural Commission proposed the development of a Department of Agriculture in 1971 within the Executive Branch to adopt the duties of enforcing agriculturally related laws and separate the dual responsibilities of the State Board of Agriculture and University of Maryland Board of Regents. Today, the 31-member Maryland Agricultural Commission serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Agriculture, comprised of Governor-appointed members in industry-specific seats to bring key voices to the table and advance the industry by providing recommendations and consideration on the initiatives of the Department.

Over the past 63 years the Commission has kept its finger on the pulse of agriculture in Maryland and carried out its charge through the establishment of standing committees focused on key issues of the time, including budgets, legislation, pollution, livestock and wetlands. These committees empowered the Commission to leverage the expertise of its appointed members and make policy recommendations regulating pesticides, poultry and livestock inspection, farmland assessment, and dozens of other State and Federal legislative proposals to ensure that the farmer voice was prioritized. In February 2024, the Commission engaged in a survey to identify key priorities that impact Maryland agriculture and connect missing industries that are not represented on the Commission but are integral in the success of the whole industry. At the March 2024 meeting, the first draft of their strategic plan was introduced and modified at each meeting until June 2024 when it was unanimously adopted.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. This diverse and comprehensive board of industry leaders throughout Maryland's vibrant agricultural sectors is well equipped to serve and will continue with clear direction to advance the industry within the State. In conjunction with the establishment of working committees they moved to adopt the Young Farmers Advisory Board to now be a standing Committee on Young Farmers with leadership from a newly established Young Farmer seat. The Young Farmers Advisory Board was formed in 2004 and charged with advising the Maryland Agricultural Commission on issues pertinent to young farmers and the next generation of agriculture. Adoption of the Young Farmers Advisory Board into the Maryland Agricultural Commission, as proposed in this legislation, ensures that the future of Maryland agriculture is always considered.

Intentional nomenclature changes to the membership seats as outlined in the strategic plan expand the Agritourism industry to include Value Added Agriculture, amend the Horse Breeding industry to represent the entire Equine industry, clarify the horticulture industry to focus on fruit production which will be a sister seat to the vegetable producer, and engage with the nursery, landscape and greenhouse industry outside of the original Nursery seat. Duplicative Poultry, Dairy, Nursery, and Related Agricultural Service seats were removed to ensure all industries carried an equal voice, and the longstanding tobacco grower position was removed, marking a historic shift from the crop that was once prolific throughout the State. Lastly, several new seats were added to represent growing industries like Controlled Environmental Agriculture and the Urban & Small Farm Sector, and ensure that Historically Underserved Farmers, Veteran Farmers, and New & Beginning Farmers have a seat at the table.

Advisory bodies have played an integral role in spurring the success of the agricultural industry for over 60 years and the evolution of those bodies from a grassroots initiative ensures that its unified voice is fully representative of Maryland's number one commercial industry. Thank you for your consideration of the proposed legislation that makes the statutory changes formulated through several months of examination from the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. B. Palmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Harrison B. Palmer
Executive Secretary

Senate Bill 240 Support Letter.pdf

Uploaded by: John Lewis

Position: FAV



January 24, 2025

To: Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
From: J. Kelly Lewis, Chairman Maryland Agricultural Commission
Re: Senate Bill 240 – Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

I am the Nursery representative on the Maryland Agricultural Commission, and I am very pleased to serve as Chairman of the Commission. Professionally I am the General Manager and Partner at Ruppert Nurseries. We are a 900 acre farm in Montgomery County Maryland. I appreciate the opportunity to voice support on my own personal behalf for Senate Bill 240.

The Commission is charged with advising the Secretary of Agriculture and has a long history of promoting Maryland agricultural industries and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. Also, since its inception in 1961, the Commission has a history of adjusting to the ever changing world of agriculture in the state of Maryland. Currently the Commission has 31 Governor-appointed members who represent the incredibly wide range of agricultural industries within of state.

In March of 2024 a draft of the Commission strategic plan was introduced and modified at each Commission meeting until it was unanimously adopted in June of 2024. This plan made nomenclature changes to Commission seats to better match the current state of agriculture in the state. Expanding Agritourism to include Value Added Agriculture, pairing the Horse Breeding industry with the entire Equine industry, matching Fruit Production with Vegetable producers, and expanding Nursery to include Landscape and Greenhouse. Also duplicated seats were removed to ensure equal representation of all industries and the long vacant Tobacco grower seat was removed. New seats were added to include industries like Urban and Small Farmers, historically underserved Farmers, Veteran Farmers and New and Beginning Farmers.

We believe the adoption of Senate Bill 240 will allow the Commission to focus on and impact the key priorities that impact Maryland Agriculture. Our new committee structure allows Commission members to focus on the priorities that best match their experience and expertise in a smaller more nimble group. Ideas and strategies are then presented to and adopted by the full Commission.

Also proposed is the Adoption of the Young Farmers Board into the Maryland Agricultural Commission ensuring the connection of the next generation of Farmers with the current generation and giving the future of Maryland Agriculture a voice that will help shape our Agriculture for these future Farmers.

1/24/2025
Page 2 of 2

Thank you for your consideration of the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Kelly Lewis', is positioned above the printed name.

J. Kelly Lewis
General Manager/Partner
Ruppert Nurseries Inc.

SB 240 MD Ag Commission -- FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: KIMBERLY EGAN

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

P.O. Box 606 | Lisbon, Maryland 21797
www.mdhorsecouncil.org

One Common Bond: The Horse
One Common Voice: The Horse Council

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 240

Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission & Young Farmers

FAVORABLE

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the \$2.9. billion, state-wide, horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

The horse industry is the largest component of Maryland's agricultural industry, which is itself the largest commercial industry in the state. The horse industry comprises at least \$2.9 billion of the \$8.25 billion in agricultural economic impact on the state, compared to only \$1.23 billion in economic impact from the next largest segment, the poultry industry.¹

We are, therefore, pleased to see the Department of Agriculture taking the initiative to change the composition of the Maryland Agriculture Commission to reflect more accurately the farmers it represents.

The current seat on the Maryland Agricultural Commission is restricted to "horse breeding." While the horse breeding industry in Maryland is significant – one of the largest Standardbred breeding operations in the country is in Maryland, and Maryland's numerous sport horse breeding farms produce some of the best equine athletes in the world – it is but one portion of the overall industry.

¹ See AMERICAN HORSE COUNCIL ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY FOR MARYLAND (2023) (available at <https://mdhorsecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Maryland-Report-2023-Pages-HQ.pdf>) and MHC's infographics re same (attached)



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

An American Horse Council economic impact report released in 2024 shows the relative size of the non-breeding sectors as follows:

- Recreational riding (including lesson barns, boarding barns, private farms, etc.) has a \$421 million impact on the state;
- The competition sector (excluding racing and breeding) has at least a \$370 million impact on the state;
- The harness racing sector has a \$278 million impact on the state in addition to the \$43.1 million in economic impact in gambling revenue generated by the Ocean Downs Casino;
- The equine-assisted services sector contributes \$36 million; and
- The horse rescue and horse sanctuary sector contribute \$3.16 million.

SB 240, if passed, would bring the perspective of these critically important components of the commercial horse business to bear on the Maryland Agriculture Commission's work, which will, in turn, improve the Department of Agriculture's ability to fulfill its mission "to provide leadership and support" to this, the largest portion of its constituency.

We urge a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

(844) MDHORSE (844-634-6773)

Info@mdhorsecouncil.org

The Economic Impact of THE MARYLAND HORSE INDUSTRY

Horse Industry Wages
\$1.1 billion



Total Economic Impact
\$2.9 billion

Jobs Supported
28,134



Total Impact on GDP
\$1.77 billion

Direct Impact on GDP
\$1.05 billion



~95,000 horses
~800 licensed stables
~38,000 volunteers
717,611 horse enthusiasts
(30.4% of all MD households)



Thoroughbred Racing

\$591 million total impact
5,937 jobs
3 tracks
1 Triple Crown race

Recreational Riding

\$421 million total impact
4,560 jobs
10% of MD households trail ride
6% of MD households take lessons



Sport Horse Competition

\$370 million total impact
4,154 jobs
4 international competitions
>11 sanctioned venues

Harness Racing

\$278 million total impact
3,616 jobs
2 tracks and 1 casino
24 stallions standing





Equine-Assisted Services

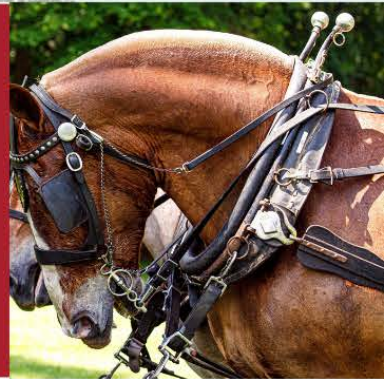
\$36 million total impact
263 jobs

*67 licensed EAS operations
~335 horses in EAS use*

Traditional Working Horses

\$19 million total impact
229 jobs

*Amish & Mennonite communities
Draft horse pull and harness shows*



Rescues & Sanctuaries

\$3.16 million total impact
52 jobs

*58 licensed rescues
~\$1.8 total wages*



19.4% of all MD households participate in horse activities

9.8% of all MD households spectate at horse events

45% of US horse owners earn <\$100k/year*

Median age of MD horse owners: 38

Median age of MD spectators: 26

**MD 2022 median income = \$108,200*



SB 240 - CBF - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 240

Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

Date: January 28, 2025

To: Education, Energy, & Environment Committee

Position: **Favorable**

From: Jared Planz,
Clagett Farm Program Manager

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 240 which establishes a Committee on Young Farmers, which will replace the existing Young Farmers Advisory Board. SB 240 will also add representation for young and beginning farmers to the state Agriculture Commission. We believe this bill is a crucial step toward addressing the unique challenges faced by young farmers while amplifying their voices in shaping the future of the agriculture industry in the state.

A key part of CBF's mission is engaging and supporting young farmers through hands-on workshops and mentorship program. Recently, we have hosted workshops focused on BIPOC farmers, covering essential topics such as high tunnel construction, recordkeeping, and microirrigation. Additionally, our beginner farmer trainees – many of whom have gone on to establish successful farm businesses across the state – receive comprehensive training on farm basics, regenerative practices, and strategies for creating viable farm businesses. We have also created resource guides tailored to young and beginning farmers directing them towards key resources, industry-specific grant and loan funding opportunities, and established industry contacts. Our recordkeeping system has been adopted by over 60 young farmers across the region, helping to build more sustainable and profitable agricultural operations.

The success of CBF's engagement efforts with young farmers demonstrate both the significant need for guidance and resources, and the way young farmers can thrive in the industry with appropriate support. With the average farmer now over 58 years old, we recognize the critical importance of equipping and empowering young farmers. Their success is vital for fostering a thriving local agricultural economy and ensuring the long-term health of the Chesapeake Bay. **CBF supports the Maryland Department of Agriculture's continued efforts to better engage young farmers and request the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 240.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

SB 240_HB 262 - MDA LOS.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel Jones

Position: FAV



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor

Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor

Kevin Atticks, Secretary

Steven A. Connelly, Deputy Secretary

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading
Industry

The Wayne A. Cawley, Jr. Building

50 Harry S Truman Parkway

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

mda.maryland.gov

410.841.5885 Baltimore/Washington

410.841.5846 Fax

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

DATE: January 24, 2025

BILL NUMBER: SB 240/HB 262

SHORT TITLE: Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and
Young Farmers

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

This legislation SB 240 alters the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission by eliminating certain seats and adding seats that will provide broader representation across the industry. The bill also establishes a Committee on Young Farmers.

The 31-member Maryland Agricultural Commission (The Ag Commission) serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Agriculture, comprised of Governor-appointed members in industry-specific seats to bring key voices to the table and advance the industry through the initiatives of the Department.

Over the past 63 years the Ag Commission has kept its finger on the pulse of agriculture in Maryland and carried out its charge through the establishment of standing committees focused on key issues of the time, including budgets, legislation, pollution, livestock and wetlands. These committees empowered the Commission to leverage the expertise of its appointed members and make policy recommendations regulating pesticides, poultry and livestock inspection, farmland assessment, and dozens of other State and Federal legislative proposals to ensure that the voice of the farmer was prioritized.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. Working committees were established and The Commission moved to adopt the Young Farmers Advisory Board as a standing Committee on Young Farmers with leadership from a newly established Young Farmer seat.

Members of the Commission voted in support of the strategic plan to make the following alterations to the membership:

- Expand the Agritourism seat to Value Added Agriculture
- Amend the Horse Breeding seat to represent the entire Equine industry
- Clarify the horticulture seat to focus on fruit production which will be a sister seat to the vegetable producer,
- Modify the Nursery seat to Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse
- Remove duplicative Poultry, Dairy, Nursery, and Related Agricultural Service seats, and the longstanding Tobacco Grower seat,
- Addition of seats for Controlled Environmental Agriculture, Urban & Small Farm Sector, Historically Underserved Farmers, Young Farmer, Veteran Farmers, and New & Beginning Farmers

We appreciate the Committee's consideration and request a favorable report on SB 240.

If you have additional questions, please contact Rachel Jones, Director of Government Relations, at rachel.jones2@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.

MDFB - Support - SB240 Department of Agriculture –

Uploaded by: Tyler Hough

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau

3358 Davidsonville Road | Davidsonville, MD 21035
410-922-3426 | www.mdfarmbureau.com

January 24, 2025

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: Support of SB240 Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in favor of SB240 Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers. This bill will alter the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission and establish the Committee of Young Farmers under the Maryland Agricultural Commission.

The Maryland Agricultural Commission is a long-standing advisory body that provides valuable information and insight to the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. The Commission plays an essential role in making proposals for the advancement of Maryland agriculture. While relevant when initially established, the makeup of Maryland Agriculture has changed slightly from the Commission membership outlined in the current language. The updated Commission membership will allow for adequate representation for all aspects of Maryland Agriculture, and the ability to diversify the Commission membership.

Currently there is the Young Farmers Advisory Board in the Department of Agriculture. This bill would modify the Young Farmers Advisory Board and re-establish the board as the Committee on Young Farmers. The new Committee would identify and address the issues relating to young and beginning farmers in the state and make recommendations to the Maryland Agricultural Commission. This change would allow for easier communication on the needs of the next generation of farmers in the state.

Maryland Farm Bureau Supports SB162

Sincerely,

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please contact Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions

ShoreRivers Testimony, SB240, FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Pluta

Position: FWA



Testimony, Favorable with Amendments, Senate Bill 240 – Department of Agriculture - Maryland Agriculture Commission and Young Farmers

January 24, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS** of **SB240** on behalf of ShoreRivers, a river protection organization serving Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect the waterways of Maryland's Eastern Shore through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.

SB240 proposes establishing a Youth Farmer Committee tasked with:

1. Raising public and governmental awareness of the importance of young and beginning farmers to Maryland agriculture.
2. Identifying and addressing issues impacting young and beginning farmers and making recommendations to the Maryland Agricultural Commission.
3. Convening quarterly to fulfill its mandate.

Under this legislation, committee members are nominated annually by the Secretary of Agriculture and must meet criteria, including being Maryland residents under 45, deriving at least 50% of their income from agricultural activities, and reflecting regional diversity and industry variety to the extent practical.

ShoreRivers supports this bill because it prioritizes the voices and leadership of the next generation of agricultural decision-makers. These individuals play a crucial role in safeguarding Maryland's agricultural economy while also fostering sustainable land stewardship practices. On the Eastern Shore, where agriculture contributes over \$1 billion annually to the state's economy and supports 3,717 jobs, protecting farmland and waterways is essential to sustaining both local communities and ecosystems.

In 2022, ShoreRivers launched the **Next Generation Land Stewards** program to empower and connect rising agricultural leaders on the Eastern Shore. This initiative focuses on helping young landowners establish conservation goals for their properties while fostering peer support. Workshops have covered vital topics such as conservation easements, habitat management, and incentive programs for implementing buffers and wetlands. This experience has shown us that integrating conservation into farm management is not just beneficial but essential for balancing agricultural productivity with environmental health.

Recommended Amendments

To strengthen SB240 and ensure its success, we respectfully request the following amendments:

1. **Incorporate Conservation Education:**
Include language emphasizing the committee's role in pursuing education on conservation practices and water quality as vital components of farm resource management. This addition will align the committee's mission with Maryland's goals for sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship.

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

2. **Clarify Expectations and Time Commitments:**

Recognize the significant demands placed on young farmers and adjust the responsibilities of committee members accordingly. For instance, requiring committee members to “communicate to the general public” about the challenges facing young farmers may be an overly burdensome expectation for a volunteer group balancing farm management and other responsibilities. A more collaborative approach to outreach could be considered.

By adopting these amendments, SB240 can not only elevate the voices of young farmers but also ensure their ability to contribute meaningfully without overextending themselves. Moreover, including conservation education in the committee’s scope will foster a more sustainable future for Maryland’s farms, waterways, and communities.

Thank you for considering our testimony. We look forward to working alongside the Maryland General Assembly to support the next generation of agricultural leaders in Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Pluta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matt" being more prominent than the last name "Pluta".

Matt Pluta,
Choptank Riverkeeper on behalf of ShoreRivers.