

CHAPTER 650

(House Bill 1331)

AN ACT concerning

Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation – Removal of Districts

FOR the purpose of altering the requirements relating to the purchase of easements by the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation; removing the requirement for the establishment of agricultural districts on a certain date; eliminating districts from the Foundation by a certain date subject to certain exceptions; prohibiting the Foundation from accepting a district petition after a certain date; correcting certain cross–references; making stylistic changes; and generally relating to agricultural land preservation easements.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Agriculture
Section 2–509 and 2–510(a)
Annotated Code of Maryland
(1999 Replacement Volume and 2006 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Agriculture

2–509.

(a) **(1) THE FOUNDATION SHALL FOLLOW THE PROVISIONS UNDER THIS SECTION FOR THE EASEMENT APPLICATION PROCESS FOR:**

(I) PROPERTIES WITHOUT ESTABLISHED DISTRICTS; AND

(II) PROPERTIES ENTERING INTO A DISTRICT.

(2) The Foundation shall adopt regulations and procedures for:

[(1)] (I) Establishment and monitoring of agricultural districts AND EASEMENTS;

[(2)] (II) Evaluation of land to be included within agricultural districts **OR LAND TO BE SUBJECT TO AN EASEMENT**; and

[(3)] (III) Purchase of easements, including the purchase of easements under an installment purchase agreement.

(b) Regulations and procedures adopted by the Foundation for the establishment and monitoring of agricultural districts **AND FOR THE PURCHASE OF EASEMENTS** shall provide that:

(1) One or more owners of land actively devoted to agricultural use may file a petition with the county governing body requesting the establishment of an agricultural district [composed of] **OR AN APPLICATION FOR THE PURCHASE OF AN EASEMENT BY THE FOUNDATION ON** the land owned by the petitioners. The petition shall include maps and descriptions of the current use of land in the proposed district **OR FOR THE PROPOSED EASEMENT**.

(2) Upon receipt of a petition to establish an agricultural district **OR APPLICATION TO PURCHASE AN EASEMENT** the local governing body shall refer the petition **OR APPLICATION** and accompanying materials both to the agricultural preservation advisory board and to the county planning and zoning body.

(i) Within 60 days of the referral of a petition **OR APPLICATION**, the agricultural preservation advisory board shall advise the county governing body as to whether or not the land in the proposed district **OR PROPOSED EASEMENT** meets the qualifications established by the Foundation under subsection [(c)] (D) of this section, and whether or not the advisory board recommends establishment of the district **OR THE PURCHASE OF THE EASEMENT**.

(ii) Within 60 days of the referral of a petition **OR APPLICATION**, the county planning and zoning body shall advise the local governing body as to whether or not establishment of the district **OR THE PURCHASE OF THE EASEMENT** is compatible with existing and approved county plans and overall county policy, and whether or not the planning and zoning body recommends establishment of the district **OR THE PURCHASE OF THE EASEMENT**.

(3) If either the agricultural preservation advisory board or the planning and zoning body recommends approval, the county governing body shall hold a public hearing on the petition **OR FOR THE PROPOSED EASEMENT**. Adequate

notice of the hearing shall be given to all landowners in the proposed district **OR THE PROPOSED EASEMENT**, and to the Foundation.

(4) (i) Within 120 days after the receipt of the petition **OR APPLICATION**, the county governing body shall render a decision as to whether or not the petition **OR APPLICATION** shall be recommended to the Foundation for approval.

(ii) If the county governing body decides to recommend approval of the petition **OR APPLICATION**, it shall so notify the Foundation and forward to the Foundation the petition **OR APPLICATION** and all accompanying materials, including the recommendations of the advisory board and county planning and zoning body.

(iii) If the county governing body recommends denial of the petition, it shall so inform the Foundation and the petitioners.

(5) The Foundation may approve a petition for the establishment of an agricultural district only if:

(i) The land within the proposed district meets the qualifications established under subsection [(c)] **(D)** of this section;

(ii) The petition has been approved by the county governing body; and

(iii) The establishment of the district **OR THE PURCHASE OF THE EASEMENT** is approved by a majority of the Foundation board of trustees at-large, by the Secretary, and by the State Treasurer.

(6) The Foundation shall render its decision on a petition to establish an agricultural district within 60 days of the receipt of the petition, and shall inform the county governing body and the petitioners of its decision.

(7) (i) If the Foundation approves the petition, the agricultural district shall be established by an ordinance of the county governing body.

(ii) The establishment of the district shall not take effect until all landowners in the proposed district have executed and recorded [along with] **AMONG THE** land records an agreement with the Foundation stipulating that for a specified period of time from the establishment of the agricultural district, the landowner agrees to keep his land in agricultural use and has the right to offer to sell an easement for development rights on his land to the Foundation under the provisions of this subtitle.

(iii) In the ordinance that establishes an agricultural district:

1. The county governing body shall establish the length of time required for a district agreement under subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph; and

2. The time period of the district agreement shall be from 3 to 10 years, both inclusive.

(iv) In the event of severe economic hardship the Foundation, with the concurrence of the county governing body, may release the landowner's property from the agricultural district. Any person aggrieved by a decision of the Foundation regarding a determination of severe economic hardship is entitled to judicial review.

(v) Nothing in this section shall preclude the landowner from selling his property.

(8) At any time after the period of time stipulated in the district agreement, a landowner may terminate his property as an agricultural district by notifying the Foundation one year in advance of his intention to do so.

(9) After the establishment of an agricultural district the county governing body or the Foundation may review the use of land within the district.

(10) The Foundation may approve alteration or abolition of a district only if:

(i) The use of land within the district has so changed as to cause land within the district to fail to meet the qualifications established under subsection [(c)] **(D)** of this section;

(ii) The alteration or abolition of the district has been recommended by the county governing body; and

(iii) The alteration or abolition is approved by a majority of the Foundation board of trustees at-large, by the Secretary, and by the State Treasurer.

(c) Regulations and procedures adopted by the Foundation for the establishment and monitoring of agricultural districts **AND EASEMENTS** may not require, in Garrett County or Allegany County, a natural gas rights owner or lessee to

subordinate its interest to the Foundation's interest if the Foundation determines that exercise of the natural gas rights will not interfere with an agricultural operation conducted on land in the agricultural district **OR LAND SUBJECT TO AN EASEMENT**.

(d) Regulations and criteria developed by the Foundation relating to land which may be included in an agricultural district **OR SUBJECT TO AN EASEMENT** shall provide that:

(1) Subject to item (2) of this subsection, land shall meet productivity, acreage, and locational criteria determined by the Foundation to be necessary for the continuation of farming;

(2) As long as all other criteria are met, land that is at least 50 acres in size shall qualify for inclusion in an agricultural district **OR EASEMENT**;

(3) The Foundation shall attempt to preserve the minimum number of acres in a given district which may reasonably be expected to promote the continued availability of agricultural suppliers and markets for agricultural goods;

(4) Land within the boundaries of a 10-year water and sewer service district may be included in an agricultural district **OR EASEMENT** only if that land is outstanding in productivity and is of significant size; and

(5) Land may be included in an agricultural district **OR EASEMENT** only if the county regulations governing the land permit the activities listed under § 2-513(a) of this subtitle.

[(e) The Foundation may not purchase an easement on land which is located outside an agricultural district established under this subtitle.]

2-510.

(a) An owner of agricultural land [located in an agricultural district established] **THAT HAS AN EASEMENT APPROVED BY THE COUNTY** under this subtitle may [offer by written application to] sell an easement to the Foundation on the [entire] contiguous acreage of such agricultural land.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That:

(a) Effective July 1, 2007, districts may not be a requirement for the easement application process to the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation; and

(b) Except as provided in Section 3 of this Act, as of ~~June 20~~ *June 30*, 2012, all districts in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation shall be terminated and a landowner may not be bound to the terms of any Foundation district agreement.

SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the following agricultural land preservation districts established under § 2-509 of the Agriculture Article or by a county shall remain in force and may not be terminated:

(a) Any district in which an easement has been transferred to the Foundation; and

(b) Any district established by a county and a landowner for the purpose of providing a property tax credit to the landowner.

SECTION 4. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Foundation may not accept a district petition for any purpose after June 30, 2008.

SECTION 5. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2007.

Approved by the Governor, May 17, 2007.