

Senate Bill 0351, The Farmers Market Integrity Act
Name of Individual Submitting Testimony: See list below
Position on the bill – Support
[Farmers Market Shoppers]

January 25, 2020

Dear Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

As a supporter of the Maryland farmers market community, I am writing to ask that Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee adopt the Farmers Market Integrity Act into law and protect the integrity of direct-to-consumer sales between farmers and customers.

In addition to their rich cultural significance, farmers markets are vital direct-marketing platforms for farmers that, by cutting out the middleman, help shoppers spend more of their food dollars directly with farmers and ensure that shoppers receive the freshest, most nutritious, in-season, and flavorful food from their neighboring farmers. Small farmers are also invaluable stewards of our natural resources, helping to protect Maryland's farmland for future generations to enjoy and cultivate. Farmers markets provide a direct venue for these farmers to earn a living wage and ensure their economic viability.

Unfortunately, nationally and in Maryland, retail stores, grocery stores, and online outlets are appropriating the term "farmers market" and are thus undermining farmers markets as vital economic engines that support farmers and as trusted places where shoppers can get local, direct-from-the-farm food. Farmers are losing customers to these other sales venues because customers are being misled. When they discover that not every place labeled a "farmers market" has a farmer, customers lose faith in the term "farmers market" to tell them where to find their farmers.

The purpose of this law is to ensure truth in advertising to consumers and to promote the dignity and economic viability of the farming profession and farmers markets in Maryland. I believe that this legislation will ensure that consumers in Maryland know where to find their farmers and that consumers are not misled by grocery stores that misuse the term for their own profit. Moreover, creating a legally binding definition would clear the market of deceptive sales practices and names that confuse recipients of Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program ("FMNP") and Women, Infants & Children (WIC) FMNP about what is an authentic farmers market and where they can spend these benefits.

Please protect the integrity of these important cultural and economic spaces - for communities, for farmers, and for the future of sustainable agriculture in Maryland.

Sincerely,

(see next page for full list)

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