

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 3rd, 2020

Sponsor Testimony in Support of SB986 - Agricultural Education and Grant Programs

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB986. This bill would require each county board of education to implement an agricultural education program that:

- Prepares students for successful careers in agriculture related fields;
- Provides instruction in a wide range of disciplines related to agriculture including science, math, technology, communications, and leadership;
- Provides students with classroom, laboratory, service/work-based, and leadership experiences with an agricultural focus;

An accompanying agriculture grant fund would also be created to support agricultural education programs around the state, providing grants to county boards, non-profit organizations, and other entities that further the goals of agricultural education programs in the State of Maryland.

As you have heard me say in the past, Maryland agriculture is one of our most efficient economic sectors in terms of multiplier effects, with every \$1 generated directly from Agriculture resulting in 45 cents of secondary economic benefit in other sectors. Additionally, in 2015 our agricultural sector contributed \$3.3 billion to the state economy, supported 23,878 jobs, and contributed nearly \$110 million in state and local tax revenue. Bottom line - investing in agriculture is arguably one of the best long term expenditures of the State's time and resources.

The nature of agriculture has also changed considerably over the recent past, and will continue to experience a rapid transformation in the near future. The emerging use of precision equipment and big data has expanded agricultural education to include aspects of engineering, computer science, and even cybersecurity that until recently one would have never considered as part of this field. Furthermore, projections in population growth and the urgency of climate change will require a generation of agricultural workers that are prepared to utilize a multidisciplinary approach to solving complex problems.

In 2050, the global agricultural sector will have to feed 9 billion people, with approximately 7 million of those people right here, in Maryland. Meanwhile, the climate continues to change at an alarming rate, requiring immediate action to sequester carbon from the atmosphere and to mitigate the effects of this global crisis. Agriculture is uniquely positioned in both these regards, both in terms of the possibilities, but also in terms of the consequences. Using cover crops, precision agriculture, and novel agritech innovations, some farms have been successful in going net zero in terms of carbon emissions, with some even tipping past the 100% mark to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. However, the effects of climate change are already being felt by farmers around the world, with changing climate patterns affecting the ability of agricultural communities to continue producing sufficient crops on their land.

The agricultural sector presents an incredible economic and environmental opportunity for a new generation of Marylanders, but taking advantage of these opportunities requires a well educated workforce that is able to contribute to this industry in novel and innovative ways. Providing our children with a multifaceted education in relation to agriculture, and raising awareness of the fact that having a “career in agriculture” can have so many different meanings will set them up to do so. Coming generations of biological engineers, natural resource managers, data analysts, and farmers will turn the tides on climate change and ensure that there is food on the table for families around the world, but only if we make the investments to educate them today. **I respectfully request a favorable report for SB986.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Carroll Counties