Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

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February 21, 2020

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: Support of HB1176 – Agriculture - Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of HB1176. This is legislation that establishes the Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program to provide funds to eligible grantees to administer projects to improve the health, yield, and profitability of soils of the State. It requires the Department of Agriculture to implement and administer the grant program and to calculate an eligible grantee's greenhouse gas reduction per acre by using the COMET-Planner developed by USDA. Lastly, it authorizes but does not mandate the Governor to include $300,000 in the budget bill for the grant program beginning in fiscal year 2022.

Carbon sequestration from production agriculture has proven to greatly reduce the greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Healthy soils practices like cover crops, no-till farming, rotational grazing and conservation tillage greatly increase the removal of greenhouse gasses. Increasing these practices in Maryland will help lessen climate volatility in the region. Healthy soils programs are a key part of Maryland's regional greenhouse gas reduction goals. Data collected that compares Maryland's current healthy soils practices to the State's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) finds that over the last 10 years, Maryland's healthy soils practices have reduced the amount of GHG by 6.14 mmt compared to 3.6 mmt for RGGI over the same timeframe.

Asking farmers to do more with less, and with no assistance, makes it very difficult for farmers to afford to participate. This bill addresses the funding deficiencies needed to create a robust program that will help all of Maryland.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB1176 AND ENCOURAGES A FAVORABLE REPORT.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations