

Testimony: House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 3, 2020
In **SUPPORT** of H.B 772: Food Procurement – GHG Emissions
Presented by Claire Bowdren, MSPH

Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnk and members of the committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B 772 to establish a target of reducing Maryland’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030. This would be accomplished by reducing food waste and shifting to more environmentally sustainable and nutritious menus in our public institutions.

My name is Claire Bowdren and I’m a Sustainable Food Systems researcher living in Annapolis. I have a Master’s of Science in Public Health, with a focus in Human Nutrition, from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I also have a Certificate in the Food System, Environment, and Public Health from the Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Last year, the team of 37 leading scientists who comprise the EAT-*Lancet* Commission on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems published a report that describes the type of diets that humans across the globe should adopt in order to meet our nutritional needs and stay within a set of defined planetary boundaries, which are an agreed-upon “safe operating space” for human activity relative to our environment and Earth systems. The diet described by the EAT-*Lancet* Commission is not entirely plant-based, but does include far less meat, poultry, and eggs than we currently eat and calls for higher consumption of vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, nuts, seeds, and fish.

In the U.S., we eat far more meat and poultry than we ought to (according to both the EAT-*Lancet* Commission and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans); we consume, on average, about 2.6 times as much meat as the rest of the world.¹ As you have heard and will hear, this makes it next to impossible to meet the Paris Agreement and keep global temperature rise under 2 degrees Celsius.

But we still have a window of opportunity. We must shoulder some of the global burden and reduce the environmental impacts of the food we consume. Doing so would benefit our health and leave future generations with a climate that resembles the one we’ve all been fortunate enough to live in.

This bill would begin to address Maryland’s scope 3 emissions, which are those emissions that don’t come directly from activities in Maryland but rather are generated outside of Maryland. For example, if the University of Maryland serves salmon that’s not produced in Maryland, the emissions associated with feeding, raising, and processing that salmon are considered scope 3 emissions because they were not generated here but are still the result of a demand here in Maryland.

Because this bill primarily targets scope 3 emissions, it will have a negligible impact on Maryland farmers. While the state doesn’t track how much food is purchased directly from Maryland farmers, we estimate it’s less than 1%.² This bill targets food the state purchases through the global market from distributors such as Sysco and US Foods that are sourcing nationally and globally. Especially because this

¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

² This estimate comes from Friends of the Earth and is based on conversations with the Department of General Services, the farmer listening sessions during the summer of 2019, and a conversation with Delegate Charkoudian about her work on local purchasing.

bill applies only to orders over \$15,000 and calls for a moderate shift in purchasing over time, Maryland farmers will not feel any negative effects.

If and when you hear that we should ignore scope 3 emissions from our food and focus instead on cover cropping and sequestering carbon in the soil here in Maryland, let it be clear that I am in favor of those initiatives, but they are irrelevant. This bill addresses emissions from food we are purchasing as a state, and that is food that is largely not grown in this state. With this bill, you have an opportunity to make a dent in the state's procurement-related scope 3 emissions; pivoting to cover cropping and soil health initiatives in Maryland alone would be wasting that opportunity.

This bill also presents a cost-saving or cost-neutral climate mitigation opportunity. You can look to Oakland Unified School District as an example: by reducing meat and dairy on the school district's menus over a two-year period, the district saved 42 million gallons of water and achieved a 14% reduction in their carbon footprint. Even after increasing their purchases of local produce and meat, the district still saved \$42,000 by implementing these changes. Student meal satisfaction increased over the period as well.

In Maryland, the price of an average meat-based dinner via the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is \$ 1.66, compared to \$1.30 for a vegetarian dinner. By shifting more meals to be vegetarian by default, the state could save money that could be reinvested into more local and fresh produce and meat, supporting Maryland farmers and saving on healthcare costs down the road.

H.B 772 presents an opportunity for Maryland to lead the country in climate mitigation strategies. Reducing food-associated emissions will help protect our environment, prevent climate change, offer Marylanders more nutritious options, save the state money, and make the world a livable place for future generations. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.