

H.B 772 Maryland Green Purchasing Committee - Food Procurement - Greenhouse Gas Emissions

House Health and Government Operations Committee, March 3, 2020

Position: Favorable

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

On behalf of Food & Water Watch and our 43,000 members in Maryland, I urge a favorable report on H.B. 772, to establish a target of reducing Maryland's GHG emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030. This legislation would set up a process for tracking and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions associated with the state's food purchases.

Scientists have made it clear that we have 11 years to meaningfully address our climate crisis by drastically reducing carbon emissions. The agriculture sector accounts for nearly one third of global greenhouse gas emissions. The state's own procurement is the most direct point of leverage to reduce emissions associated with food consumption.

Food & Water Watch's food work in Maryland has largely focused on the negative impacts of factory farms on the Eastern Shore. These farms contribute to climate change and are an example of how H.B 772 would require the state to think about the impacts our food procurement has on climate. Smaller crop-and-livestock operations can better manage poultry litter by using it as fertilizer. But since most Eastern Shore factory farm operations lack cropland, they produce significantly more litter than they can manage onsite — an estimated 228,000 tons, according to an analysis by Salisbury University. Long-term storage and improper handling of poultry litter can increase greenhouse gas emissions from the litter. Additionally, poultry production releases greenhouse gases throughout all other steps in the production chain. This includes the growing and processing of chicken feed (often through intensive agriculture that relies on chemical inputs), as well as fossil fuel consumption to heat poultry houses and to process and transport poultry products. It is important that every time chicken is procured by the state, that these climate factors are taken into consideration.

Maryland has a legacy of using procurement to support our environmental and social values. State agencies give preference to recycled paper, compost on public lands, locally grown foods, and American-made goods. This legislation would build on these frameworks by asking agencies and state universities to report on the emissions from their food purchases and reduce those emissions by 25% by 2030. University of Maryland College Park, along with other institutions representing 800+ million meals, are already tracking emissions from food purchases and committing to a 25% reduction by 2030.

Passing H.B 772 would ensure that the state's food procurement policies and goals align with the action needed to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. Maryland must act to reduce emissions as much as possible, as quickly as possible, using every tool available. It is crucial that the state look at our government's own operations and reduce emissions there as well.

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