

House Bill 1488 - Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise  
Food Aggregation Grant Fund – Establishment

Position: Favorable

Good afternoon

Thank you Mr. Chair and Committee for the opportunity to be heard today and share my testimony with you.

My name is Amanda Hand. I own and operate MKONO FARM in Calvert County Maryland. Our farm is a heritage niche pork operation that specializes in the preservation and conservation of the KuneKune pig. My husband and I founded MKONO FARM in January 2018 after he retired from 22 years of Naval Service. After 22 years of moving around the world, we decided to settle down in Maryland.

I come to testify that I am, as a Maryland State resident and constituent of Calvert County, in support of the Establishment of the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund also known as HB1488.

As a small Maryland farmer, I rely on selling our products through local farmer's markets and direct to consumer sales through my online store via my farm website. While I love to connect with the wonderful people of Maryland face to face at local markets, as I get older, I am realizing that this sales model can not be sustainably scaled and it also does not reach the majority in my community. As our farm grows, we will have to lessen our reliance on DTC sales as there is not enough time to scale a farm and travel from market to market to make sales. In order to responsibly scale, my farm will have to partner with cooperatives and aggregate distribution channels for distribution of our quality pork. Even though we are a small craft farm, this bill will afford our farm and other Maryland farms such as mine the ability to leverage entities such as the future Southern Maryland Regional Agriculture Center and other MDA funded local food distribution channels as a means for sustainable market entry and provide our Maryland institutions with quality healthy products that are locally grown, locally sourced, and locally consumed.

I would like to point out as an example how beneficial it has been for our farm to be listed and certified under other funded programs such as "Maryland's Homegrown Heroes", Maryland's Best, Farmlink, and the Southern Maryland Meats Program. These certifications have directly and positively impacted our sales to our local community by giving us credibility and exposure. With that said, I can confidently say that this bill will provide a unique market differentiation of locally sourced Maryland products that will undoubtedly benefit all farms in Maryland. This bill will set small farms such as mine up for success with an alternate source of direct path revenue. A revenue that stays and multiplies within our state and local communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter, it has been a pleasure being with you today.