



Support for House Bill 539

Income Tax Credit - Qualified Farms - Food Donation Pilot Program - Expansion and Extension

February 1, 2021

Position: Support

Dear Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 539 to extend the income tax credit for qualified farms who donate food to charitable organizations. Manna Food Center is Montgomery County's largest food bank and distribution center. We distributed 3.3 million pounds of food in 2020. Demand for food grew 40% due to COVID-19. We operate as more than just a food bank; we are also a center of distribution and nutrition education. Since our beginning in 1983, we have grown from serving hundreds of people each year to serving 50,510.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet, and many Montgomery County residents do not have access to these important foods, which is why Manna created its Farm to Food Bank initiative in 2010. Manna purchases fresh produce from neighboring farms throughout the growing season—125,290 pounds last season. We believe it is critical to support our local farmers as well as our food insecure neighbors.

Another way Manna supports local farmers is through the Farm Food Donation Pilot Program. Manna is a Certified Tax Credit Administrator and through our Community Food Rescue program has received 17,688 lbs. of locally grown food in the past three growing seasons. When farmers have surplus, unsold food they wish to donate, we pick up and redistribute this food through our Community Food Rescue network of 104 non-profit food providers throughout Montgomery County. We see the Farm Food Donation Program as a win, win, win. Not only does this healthy, fresh, delicious produce, dairy and meat go to people who need and appreciate it, but farmers are compensated, and good food does not go to waste.

Manna farm partner, Butler's Orchard has been a proud supporter of The Food Donation Tax Credit since its inception. Farm and Finance Manager, Ben Butler, says of the Tax Credit, "Its extension is critical to maintaining the financial benefit that farms need to offset some of their costs when donating produce. This tax credit literally can be the difference between crops rotting in the fields and ending up on the plates of those who need it."

Manna enthusiastically supports SB539 that extends the Farm Food Donation Program. Farmers statewide will be able to receive tax credit as an added incentive to donate their unsold, surplus food. Many more people throughout Maryland who experience hunger will be able to receive nutritious fresh food. By not wasting food, farmers also conserve precious natural resources. I urge your adoption of SB539.

Sincerely,

Jackie DeCarlo

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