

# **Support of SB 673 - Department of Agriculture - Ur**

Uploaded by: Ferguson, Colby

Position: FAV



# Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

February 24, 2021

To: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of SB 673 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of SB 673, legislation that establishes an Urban Agriculture Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund to support the program. The bill authorizes the distribution of up to \$400,000 from the unclaimed property fund to the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund for each fiscal year from fiscal 2023 through 2026.

Finding new funding sources to stimulate Urban Agriculture in Maryland is critical to getting this sector of the Ag industry off the ground. The upfront input costs to starting an Urban Ag program are very high as, in many cases, infrastructure is needed as well as soil improvements. Many times, the available space is limited and more concentrated production methods are required to make the operation profitable. These land improvements typically make the project not cash flow and prevent the operation from starting. This bill is designed to lessen that economic burden on those that are trying to start an Urban Ag operation in Baltimore City. Creating jobs, providing local & healthy farm products and offering the ability for consumers in Baltimore City to actually see where their food comes from instills pride and accomplishment in those areas and addresses things like food deserts and reduces carbon prints from food.

## **Maryland Farm Bureau Policy:**

- We support and encourage urban farming/agriculture.

## **MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 673 AND REQUEST A FAVORABLE REPORT**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colby Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colby Ferguson  
Director of Government Relations

*For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396*

# **SB 673 Gallion Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Gallion, Senator

Position: FAV

JASON C. GALLION  
Legislative District 35  
Harford and Cecil Counties

Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee



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64 S. Main Street  
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chair and Members

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Re: SB 673 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Program

Position: Favorable

Chairman Pinsky and EHEA Committee Members:

SB 673 establishes an Urban Agriculture Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture and an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund to support the program. Maryland is home to numerous urban farms that do everything from beekeeping, growing flowers, and producing fresh food.

SB 673 will create a grant program through MDA that will distribute up to \$400,000 annually to promote and grow urban agriculture. This legislation will also help reduce health disparities in our state by creating fresh eating options and food stability in the regions of Maryland that need it most.

I respectfully ask for a favorable vote on SB 797.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Gallion".

Senator Jason Gallion

District 35 – Cecil & Harford Counties

**SB0673-EHEA-FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mehu, Natasha

Position: FAV



**BRANDON M. SCOTT**  
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations  
88 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

**SB 673**

February 24, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

**RE:** SENATE 673 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agricultural Grant Programs

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 673.

Senate Bill 673 would establish the Urban Agricultural Grant Program in the Department of Agriculture to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods; establish an Urban Agricultural Grant Fund to provide grants to non-profit organizations in Baltimore City to implement the Program; require the Secretary of Agriculture to administer the Fund; authorize the distribution of up to \$400,000 from certain abandoned property funds to the Fund for each fiscal year 2023-2026; etc.

Baltimore City Department of Public Works has a vested interest in Senate Bill 673. Recently, the Department has worked on a grant with the US Conference of Mayors, and Baltimore City's Office of Sustainability, which would also increase the viability of urban farming. A brief excerpt from their proposal, which follows highlights the importance of urban farming and the need for grant monies to assist in the implementation of the programs: "Healthy Roots Baltimore" is a new collaboration between the Department of Public Works and the Office of Sustainability in close partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools and Baltimore's network of urban farms, along with other non-profit and community partners. The program will develop community health and strengthen the sustainability of our waste and agricultural sectors by developing spaces for outdoor learning at City public schools, including infrastructure for vegetable gardening and composting, connecting students and community members to local urban farms, and providing high-quality outreach and training on healthy eating, gardening, and composting".

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<https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/>*

In addition, the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Solid Waste, is working to increase local capacity to compost as well as the local demand for the finished product. Urban farming is a great way to increase that demand and capacity, and is a way to educate residents on the benefits of composting and where it fits into the full cycle of food production. The Bureau hopes to be able to host in-person composting workshops in the near future at some of the urban farms that already compost. Other grants have already been provided to several urban farms to increase their composting capacity.

Baltimore City believes there is a need to address multiple major health and environmental challenges simultaneously particularly in this time of a global pandemic and its impact on our citizens. We believe there is a lack of access to the benefits of safe outdoor time for City youth, along with concerns about the effects of in-home learning during COVID-19. There is also a lack of information about and access to healthy food in the most vulnerable communities along with waste streams overloaded by organic materials, a lack of healthy soil for urban farmers, and the need for urban farmers to better connect with communities for long-term positive results to our population.

Any additional grants, funding sources and programs which promote the well-being of our communities through healthy eating, healthy activities and sustainable environmental habits of composting and recycling are essential to Baltimore City moving forward with these quality of life issues.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 673.

# Senate Bill 673 - MASCD - Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Nelson, Jen

Position: FAV





February 24, 2021

The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chairman  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

**Re: Senate Bill 673 – Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program**

Position: *Support*

Chairman Pinsky & Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts to express our *support* for Senate Bill 673, Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program. This bill establishes an Urban Agriculture Grant Program with dedicated funding within the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). The Urban Grant Fund will authorize the distribution of up to \$400,000 annually from the unclaimed property fund.

Currently, there are 20+ Urban farms operating in Baltimore City doing everything from beekeeping to growing vegetables and flowers. Farming techniques such as vertical farming and hoop houses have been implemented all throughout the city to help contribute to a sustainable food network. These farmers have worked well within the urban environment, but at times face unique issues such as soil quality, stormwater management on non-agricultural parcels, neighbors, and much more. By providing these resilient farmers with additional funding we can help promote and grow urban agriculture within our high-density landscapes.

I respectfully request a *favorable* report of Senate Bill 673, which shows your dedicated support to the entire agricultural community. Thank you for your kind consideration and attention to this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jen Nelson, Executive Director  
Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts

**SB673\_CBF\_Support\_CarmeraThomasWilhite.pdf**

Uploaded by: Thomas-Wilhite, Carmera

Position: FAV



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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*Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education*

## **Senate Bill 673**

Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program

Date: February 24, 2021  
To: Senate Education, Health  
and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: **Support**  
From: Carmera Thomas-Wilhite,  
Baltimore Program Manager

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS SB 673**. This bill would establish the Urban Agriculture Grant program in the Department of Agriculture to support urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods.

### **Urban agriculture may reduce pollution into the Chesapeake Bay**

Urban agriculture has the potential to reduce pollution into the Chesapeake Bay through expanding a green footprint within developed areas, and reducing stormwater runoff through natural filters, and capturing carbon through plant life and healthy soils.

### **This legislation complements existing Baltimore City initiatives**

Baltimore City has an existing initiative to increase production, distribution, and consumption of urban-grown foods in the City. SB 673 requires grant recipients to distribute funding to urban agricultural producers to maintain safe, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsible practices. This legislation would further the City's commitment to providing equitable access to healthy food, support locally owned businesses, promote environmental sustainability, and increase the City's green spaces.

### **Access to healthy food is an environmental justice aim and aligns with federal agricultural funding policies**

This bill increases equity and access for low income and communities of color, especially for those communities with a lack of access to healthy, fresh, local food sources. Federal agricultural funding programs provide funding for urban farming practices. A next step beyond this legislation could be to incorporate eligibility for practices like hoop houses and water systems for irrigation in all relevant Maryland Department of Agriculture grant programs.

### **Local sustainable agriculture is part of CBF's mission**

CBF supports local food purchases through its Buy Fresh Buy Local Chesapeake program which helps consumers, sustainable farms, and businesses find each other and support efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. Supporting locally grown food from sustainable farms is integral to CBF's mission to Save the Bay.

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 673.** For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at [rclark@cbf.org](mailto:rclark@cbf.org) and 443.995.8753.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403  
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

# **Senate Bill 0673 - Department of Agriculture - Urb**

Uploaded by: Matthews, Dakota

Position: FWA



John Hartline, Chair

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Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

#### POSITION STATEMENT

Senate Bill 0673 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Program  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
February 24, 2021

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENT** Senate Bill 0673 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Program. The purpose of this program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods. The bill establishes the *Urban Agriculture Grant Program* in the Department of Agriculture. Additionally, it establishes *the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund* to provide grants to nonprofit organizations in Baltimore City to implement the Program. The Secretary of Agriculture is designated to administer this Fund; authorizing the distribution of up to \$400,000 from certain abandoned property funds to the Fund for each fiscal years 2023 through 2026. The Rural Maryland Council greatly supports this bill but would like it to be amended so that grant funds are available to urban agricultural producers across the state and not just Baltimore City.

Urban agriculture has been most concisely defined by Wagstaff and Wortman (2013) as “all forms of agricultural production (food and non-food products) occurring within or around cities.” This definition includes all production in or near cities of plants or animals, whether for personal use or for sale, whether soil based or hydroponic production. While most of Maryland’s food production lies in rural areas (north-central portion of the State and upper Eastern Shore), there are a multitude of urban farms located in the State’s urban areas- Baltimore City alone has approximately 20 thriving urban farms.

Access and availability to food impacts the health, culture, and a person’s quality of life and resources. In the United States, healthy food is difficult to access for nearly 24 million people who live in areas without a grocery store. Recent reports from the *Preventative Medicine and Education for Health* show that low-income neighborhoods have 25% fewer grocery stores than middle and high-income neighborhoods. This disparity contributes to higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. SB673 is an investment in urban agriculture, an investment in our urban communities, and investment in a healthier Maryland. This Program and Fund enable resources to reach meaningful initiatives with the potential to grow healthier communities, food diversity, accessible markets, job opportunity, and build a sense of ownership and well-being through agricultural related activity in urban areas.

Rural Maryland Council looks for strategic partnerships to bridge rural and urban communities. The agriculture sector can help bridge the gap between these two communities. SB673 will help educate urban residents on the challenges that rural farmers encounter. The Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 673 with the proposed amendment.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland.*

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”

# **SENATE - FF Urban Ag Grant Program Testimony 2021.**

Uploaded by: Oveisi, Nicole

Position: FWA



# Fair Farms<sup>®</sup> Maryland

a campaign for healthy food, land & waterways

**Senate Bill 673 (Senator Gallion)**  
**Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program**

Position: Support with Sponsor Amendments

February 24, 2021

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 673, sponsored by Senator Gallion, which establishes the Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund.

The Fair Farms campaign of Waterkeepers Chesapeake brings together consumers, farmers, public health professionals, and conservationists to advocate for a food system that is equitable, fair to farmers, invests in homegrown healthy foods, and restores our waterways. We are a growing movement of over 35,000 Marylanders and close to 200 partners across the state. These partners include national organizations like Farm Aid, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Family Farm Defenders, and National Family Farm Coalition and local groups like the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Senate Bill 673 will be a critical step toward a better supported urban agriculture community in Maryland. Although urban farms are a growing part of the modern agricultural landscape, they are often left out of the larger agricultural conversation—despite providing myriad benefits to Maryland's cities and peri-urban areas. Urban farms can provide a valuable use for otherwise vacant city lots—both providing more usable green space and offering a chance for community members to connect with their food and their neighbors. These spaces also help to build strong and healthy communities that are better positioned to fight food insecurity and areas of food apartheid and promote food sovereignty. This is particularly critical during food supply chain disruptions like what we saw in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund also has the opportunity to support historically-disadvantaged urban growers. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Black farmers account for 1.4% of the country's 3.4 million producers. This is a major decline compared to the 5.1 million Black farmers who made up 14% of the farming population 1920. Much of this decline can be attributed to discriminatory practices and policies carried out by the

United States Department of Agriculture. However, in recent years there has been an increase in Black farmers, especially in urban areas. Programs like the Urban Agriculture Grant Program and Fund can play a small, but vital role in helping to reverse the damaging effects of these policies by providing more support to urban farmers, especially farmers of color.

Ultimately, this bill will lift up Maryland's urban farmers and act as an important step in creating a more resilient and equitable food system. For these reasons, we urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report of SB 673.

Sincerely,

Shelby Kalm  
Fair Farms Campaign Manager  
Waterkeepers Chesapeake

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Additional Supporters:

Caroline Selle, *Winding Roots Farm*  
Carolyn E. Ricketts, *Climate Stewards of Greater Annapolis*  
Catherine Nardi, *Montgomery County Food Council*  
Gabriel Bustos, *Elemental Education*  
Kate Medina, *Charles Koiner Conservancy for Urban Farming*  
Melanie Smith-Bell, *Community FARE*  
Michael Hill, *Suns of ReAwakening*





**MDA - SB 673 - Letter of Info.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shirk, Cassie

Position: INFO



# Maryland Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary

Larry Hogan, Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor  
Joseph Bartenfelder, Secretary  
Julianne A. Oberg, Deputy Secretary

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## Maryland Department of Agriculture

### Legislative Comment

**Date:** February 24, 2021

**BILL NUMBER:** Senate Bill 673

**SHORT TITLE:** Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program

**MDA POSITION:** Information

#### **EXPLANATION:**

Senate Bill 673 would establish an Urban Agriculture Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). The purpose of this program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods. MDA would also be required to administer the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund, which will provide grants to nonprofit organizations in Baltimore City.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Urban agriculture in Maryland offers the potential to provide economic opportunity and positive societal benefits. For example, Baltimore's Strength to Love urban farm has the following mission statement: "To create opportunities of growth and employment for residents of Sandtown-Winchester and surrounding neighborhoods who have experienced incarceration, through the planting, tending, harvesting, and selling of organically grown produce and flowers."

MDA currently provides marketing materials and promotes urban agriculture through its Maryland's Best program. Additionally, urban agriculture producers frequently participate in MDA's Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), accepting FMNP checks from Women, Infant and Children (WIC) recipients and senior citizens with limited income.

MDA promotes urban agriculture in its partnership with Maryland Public Television's hit program, "Maryland Farm & Harvest." In an episode that initially aired in fall 2019, the program featured Baltimore City's Strength to Love II farm. [video.mpt.tv/video/episode-703-dv2vfa/](https://video.mpt.tv/video/episode-703-dv2vfa/)

A 2019 study by Cornell University's Small Farms Program shows that while much attention has been paid to societal benefits of urban farms, there is real economic potential, as well. Challenges for urban farmers are significant: it is harder to find land to farm in cities and capital start-up

costs are high. Despite the risks and slim profit margins, some urban farms have managed to develop successful business strategies that merge economic objectives and social missions, according to Cornell.

Urban agriculture in Maryland has the potential to provide empowerment of entrepreneurs; access to employment opportunities, job training, and skill development; expanded access to local nutritious food in underserved communities; community beautification; and opportunities to build connections among city residents.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, "From rooftop gardens to aquaponics centers in old warehouses to growing crops on abandoned properties, urban agriculture provides many benefits to a community, including closer neighborhood ties, reduced crime, education and job training opportunities, and healthy food access for low-income residents."

Baltimore City's Urban Agriculture Plan aims to increase the production, distribution, sales and consumption of food locally grown within Baltimore.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at [cassie.shirk@maryland.gov](mailto:cassie.shirk@maryland.gov) or 410-841-5886.

**SB 673 Urban Ag Grant (Gallion)-EHEA 2.24.21.pdf**

Uploaded by: Wilkins, Barbara

Position: INFO



# Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET  
AND MANAGEMENT

LARRY HOGAN  
*Governor*

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD  
*Lieutenant Governor*

DAVID R. BRINKLEY  
*Secretary*

MARC L. NICOLE  
*Deputy Secretary*

## **SENATE BILL 673 Department of Agriculture-Urban Agriculture Grant Program (Gallion)**

### **STATEMENT OF INFORMATION**

**DATE: February 24, 2021**

**COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs**

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** SB 673 creates an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund to provide grants to nonprofit organizations that distribute funds to urban agriculture producers. The legislation diverts \$400,000 from the unclaimed property fund to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods.

**EXPLANATION:** The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) focus is not on the underlying policy proposal being advanced by the legislation, but rather on the diversion of \$400,000 in General Fund revenues.

DBM has the responsibility of submitting a balanced budget to the General Assembly annually, which requires spending allocations for FY 2022 to be within the official revenues estimates approved by the Board of Revenue Estimates in December 2020.

Economic conditions remain precarious as a result of COVID-19, making revenue predictions for the remainder of FY 2021 and FY 2022 highly volatile. Many individuals and households are unemployed or underemployed, with many industry sectors operating at much less than 100% capacity. Federal stimulus programs are providing much needed relief, but the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a significant budgetary vulnerability.

The General Assembly and Administration have successfully enacted the Governor's emergency Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families Act (SB 496 RELIEF Act), which provides \$1.2 billion in direct stimulus and tax relief for Maryland working families, small businesses, and those who have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is incumbent upon us to allow the impact of this unprecedented relief package on the State's economy to take effect. Further mandated spending increases need to be reevaluated within the context of an ongoing pandemic.

**For additional information, contact Barbara Wilkins at  
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