



January 21, 2021

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 317 – Food-related GHG Reductions

Dear Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee,

We, the undersigned group of environmental, social justice, and health organizations and experts, are writing to express our support for HB 317 (Gilchrist). This legislation establishes a target of reducing Maryland's emissions from the food it purchases by 25% by 2030. HB 317 reflects a compromise version of last year's HB 772, which was agreed to in writing by the Farm Bureau and passed unanimously by this committee last year, before COVID-19 cut the legislative session short.

While Maryland does not currently track the emissions associated with food consumed in the state, food and agriculture account for at least a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Research has shown that we cannot meet the Paris Accord targets without shifting our diets toward foods with a smaller greenhouse gas footprint and slashing food waste. Reducing food waste and plant-rich diets were ranked the third and fourth, respectively, most effective climate solutions from Project Drawdown, a climate mitigation project led by Paul Hawken and worked on by a team of more than 200 scientists, policymakers, and other experts.

This legislation recognizes that the state's own food procurement - primarily for healthcare facilities, correctional facilities and universities - is the most direct point of leverage to reduce emissions associated with food consumption. Note that this legislation will not impact the individual food choices of Marylanders – it only shifts the menus at public institutions where the state is already making decisions about what students, incarcerated people, and healthcare patients eat.

There is precedent in Maryland for 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, for example. This legislation builds on that framework by requiring agencies and public universities to report their food-related GHG emissions and reduce them by 25% over the next nine years.

University of Maryland College Park is already tracking its food-related GHG emissions and has committed to the 25% reduction target.

Shifting purchasing toward more plant-based foods, which tend to have a much smaller GHG footprint than factory farmed meat and dairy, is a highly cost-effective climate mitigation strategy. Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) reduced its meat and dairy purchases over a period of two years and reduced their carbon footprint by 14%, while also improving student meal satisfaction. The school district invested some cost savings into buying more local and fresh produce and meat, and it saved \$42,000 annually on top of that. To achieve the same carbon savings by installing rooftop solar panels, it would have cost OUSD more than \$2 million dollars.

Procuring more plant-based foods will have co-benefits for the health of Marylanders served by public institutions. Research has shown that shifting to diets high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, and low in red and processed meat, can help prevent heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and some forms of cancer, saving the state millions of dollars in health care costs associated with diet-related chronic diseases. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends vegetarian and low-meat, Mediterranean diets as healthy eating patterns that “are associated with reduced risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer.” Maryland could meet the 25% reduction target by making very [modest shifts](#) in its public menus that align with the DGAs and recommendations from leading public health organizations.

The IPCC has warned that we have fewer than ten years left to avert the worst impacts of climate change. By tracking our food consumption-based emissions for the first time and setting a science-based target to reduce these emissions over the next decade, this legislation takes crucial steps toward addressing emissions from food and agriculture and positions Maryland as a climate leader.

Thank you for your consideration, and we respectfully urge a favorable report for HB 317.

Sincerely,

- 50by40
- Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
- Balanced
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Chesapeake Climate Action Network
- Clean Water Action
- DoTheMostGood Montgomery County
- Fair Farms Maryland
- Food Revolution Network

- Friends of the Earth
- Greenbelt Climate Action Network (CHEARS)
- Health Care Without Harm
- Maryland LCV
- NRDC
- Nuclear Information and Resource Service
- Plant Pure Communities
- ProVeg
- Reducetarian
- Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
- The Climate Justice Wing