

February 7, 2022

To: Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

From: Joan Hill Bearden

Re: Support of SB0378 – Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland - Funding for Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission

I am Joan Hill Bearden of PZ Hill Farm LLC in Mechanicsville MD. My family and I have been involved in farming for many years, and I am writing to you in strong support for SB0378 Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland - Funding for Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission. The bill is asking for an annual budget of \$900,000 from the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF) to be funded to the Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland for their SMADC department (TCCSMD/SMADC). The CRF fund is part of the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) that comes into the state every year in perpetuity. SMADC currently receives \$900,000 from that fund, however it is due to sunset soon; this bill would ensure that SMADC continues to receive funding from the continual non-lapsing CRF fund.

For many years now, SMADC has utilized the CRF fund to help farmers transition out of tobacco production and into other sectors of agriculture. SMADC has a proven track record in providing valuable assistance, programs, and grant funds to the farming community, as well as being a valued partner to other ag industry organizations such as the Maryland Farm Bureau, MARBIDCO, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, and others.

Funding SMADC is crucial because:

- SMADC serves 2,011 farms on 205,000 acres in the five county Southern Maryland area; Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, & St. Mary's Counties, and maintains several statewide agricultural programs now as well.
- In FY22, with only \$900,000 in operating funds provided by the State to run the organization, SMADC proceeded to bring an additional \$1.3 million dollars into Maryland via non-state funding for programs and grants supporting the Maryland farming & small business community. SMADC is a good investment for the state.
- SMADC is currently in the process of building a \$4.7 million dollar Regional Agricultural Center (RAC) that will transform the agricultural business economy in Southern Maryland and beyond.
- SMADC's Maryland Market Money Program serves 550 local producers and 46 farmers markets statewide, providing over \$449,000 worth of fresh food to low income families.

As a farm owner and current board member of SMADC, I have experienced firsthand the value of SMADC support and the dedication of the staff to resolve agriculture issues in Southern Maryland. I am particularly proud of the recent accomplishment of securing the construction of the Regional Agriculture Center in St. Mary's County. I feel this project is a perfect example of how SMADC supports agricultural and community needs.

I feel the accomplishments listed above clearly demonstrate the value of supporting SMADC and the benefits it provides to agricultural and community interest in the region. As we head into an uncertain

future it is critical that we ensure that agriculture continues to remain a vital industry in the region and the state of Maryland.

Best Regards,

*Joan Hill Bearden*

Joan Hill Bearden, Co-owner/Operator PZ Hill Farm LLC