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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 437 - Agriculture - University of Maryland Extension - Urban Farmer Assistance  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
March 09, 2022

**The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 437- Agriculture - University of Maryland Extension - Urban Farmer Assistance.** This bill will help grow and enhance Maryland's urban agriculture by hiring an extension agent dedicated to urban farm production methods and crop management, and another extension agent dedicated to urban farm and agribusiness management. These agents will help farmers by educating them on the best practices to operate a successful urban farm. Building a stronger urban agriculture in Maryland will also help grow the State's urban communities.

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 has an impact on health, culture, and 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 *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. The growth of Maryland's urban agriculture enables healthier communities, food diversity, accessible markets, job opportunities, and builds a sense of ownership and well-being through agricultural related activity in urban areas.

The RMC looks for strategic partnerships to bridge rural and urban communities. The agriculture sector can help bridge the gap between these two communities. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 437.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"