

Support of HB 1216 - Department of Agriculture - U

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Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

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

March 30, 2022

To: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of HB 1216 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Fund**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 1216, legislation that would establish the Statewide Urban Agriculture Grant Program in the Department of Agriculture to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods. The Fund would be a non-lapsing fund held by the State Treasurer that could also receive monies from the any other source including the Federal Government. Through nonprofits, the program would focus on technical assistance, securing real property and grants for capital improvements for urban farmers. As amended, the bill requires \$250,000 per year for 4 years starting in FY24.

MDFB Policy: We support and encourage urban farming/agriculture.

We support ongoing skills development training in urban agriculture for all ages.

We support the expansion of urban farming and the creation of a clear pathway to land ownership for urban farmers.

We support grant programs to provide infrastructure for urban farms.

We support the use of Program Open Space funds to purchase easements on vacant lots and green spaces within planned urban developments and city limits to be used for urban agriculture.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 1216 AND REQUEST A FAVORABLE REPORT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colby Ferguson'.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

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

HB 1216_CBF SUPPORT_EHE.pdf

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CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 1216

Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Fund

Date: March 30, 2022

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: **Support**

From: Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 1216. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** **HB 1216**. 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 seeks to support the growth of urban agriculture statewide

Many areas in Maryland are experiencing an increase in interest in urban agriculture. HB 1216 will seek to support those start-up producers with additional training, education, and funding. This legislation would further the State's commitment to providing equitable access to healthy food, supporting locally owned businesses, and increasing green spaces in developed areas. Amendments expanding the eligibility of the grant program to urban farmers who do not also provide outreach to elementary students will further the reach of grant, especially to those beginning farming as part of a re-entry program.

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, in particular 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 HB 1216. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at 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

HB 1216 Testimony MARBIDCO EHEA.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV



MARBIDCO
growing rural ventures™

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
1410 Forest Drive, Suite 21 ~ Annapolis, MD 21403
Office: 410-267-6807 ~ Fax: 410-267-6809
www.marbidco.org

Mary Shank Creek, *Chair* / Stephen R. McHenry, *Executive Director*

TESTIMONY STATEMENT

BILL: House Bill 1216 (Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Fund)

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

DATE: March 30, 2022

POSITION: Favorable

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports House Bill 1216 which expands the existing Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program from only being available in Baltimore City into a statewide program and makes appropriate programmatic changes. The bill also proposes the grant program be funded at \$250,000 annually in FY 2024 through FY 2028. In addition, Supplemental Budget No. 4 provides \$500,000 for the Fund in FY 2023 contingent upon the enactment of this bill.

MARBIDCO has been co-leading in recent months efforts to develop supportive urban agriculture policy recommendations and has helped to facilitate several meetings with a variety of stakeholders around the State including the participation of urban farmers and agricultural service providers from State and local government agencies, University of Maryland Extension, Maryland Farm Bureau, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, MidAtlantic Farm Credit, and county soil conservation districts.

Brief Bill Background

During the 2021 session of the General Assembly, House Bill 286 was enacted which created an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program for Baltimore City. The program has not yet received any funding. House Bill 1216 expands the reach of the Baltimore City grant program to become a statewide program and makes available grants to agricultural producers, non-profits, or institutions of higher education. The purpose of the grant program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods.

While the program will be administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the bill creates a review board to review applications that includes: the Secretary of Agriculture (or designee), MARBIDCO, and various other representatives.

Additional Background Information

MARBIDCO supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland because it helps preserve green space within developed areas and can provide access to healthy food to residents that live in Healthy Food Priority Areas (formally called food deserts).

According to a recent study, 146,000 Baltimore City residents (23.5%) live in Healthy Food Priority Areas. Children and black residents are also disproportionately affected. According to the report, children are the most likely of any age group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (28.3%) and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (31.5%).

¹ Urban farming can provide another access point for healthy fresh food, as urban farmers often sell their product in the local community. Urban farms also may provide community benefits such as education and job training opportunities. And they can be the community focal point of a neighborhood.

MARBIDCO has also been supporting commercial urban farming through some of its existing loan and grant programs. MARBDIDCO currently offers the Maryland Urban Agriculture Commercial Lending Incentive Grant Program, which provides a grant incentive up to \$10,000 to encourage urban farmers to seek commercial lender financing for the development or expansion of their agricultural enterprises. The grant can provide the equity capital needed to qualify for the loan through the commercial lender.

MARBIDCO also offers grants of \$1,000 to any small farmer that completes Level 2 or Level 3 of Future Harvest's Beginner Farmer Training Program (including urban farmers). Upcoming this summer MARBIDCO will be providing grants of up to \$1,000 for cold storage equipment purchases – with 30% of the available funding set aside specifically for urban farmers. MARBIDCO has also financed a farm real estate purchase in Baltimore City (with a secured loan partnering with a commercial lender).

In Conclusion

MARBIDCO very much supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland. Urban agriculture offers increased access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate food while also creating job opportunities and helping to support local economies. Urban agriculture also helps to preserve greenspaces in urban areas which is good for the quality of life and reduces the distance food must travel. House Bill 1216, if passed, will significantly assist with the growth of urban agriculture across the State by making financial support available to both the urban farmers directly and the nonprofit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to them.

As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report for HB 1216.

MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807

MARBIDCO was established by the Maryland General Assembly 15 years ago to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries to help bolster rural economies, support locally produced food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. MARBIDCO is a nimble, quasi-public financial intermediary organization which has a mission to serve exclusively the commercial farming, forestry, and seafood industries of Maryland. Assisting young and beginning farmers are a special focus for MARBIDCO, as is farm operation diversification (through value added processing activities). Commercial urban farming has also become a focus of MARBIDCO's efforts.

In delivering its financing programs, MARBIDCO works cooperatively with commercial banks and farm credit associations, as well as a host of federal, State, regional and local government agencies, and universities. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has approved 1067 financings totaling nearly \$81.5 million for food and fiber business projects located in of all Maryland's counties (including Baltimore City) – and in the process has leveraged more than \$170 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: www.marbidco.org.

¹ [Report: 'Food Desert' Gets a Name Change in Response to Baltimore Community Feedback](#), Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, January 17, 2018.

HB1216_FAV_MD Food System Resiliency Council.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV

March 30, 2022

**2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB 1216: Department of Agriculture -
Urban Agriculture Grant Fund**

BILL: HB 1216: Department of Agriculture-Urban Agriculture Grant Fund
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 1216

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of House Bill 1216.

This letter is submitted by Stephen McHenry, Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) and member of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (MD FSRC) and Heather Bruskin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC), Co-Chair of the MD FSRC. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Council, and do not necessarily represent the views of MARBIDCO, MCFC, or the State of Maryland. The Food System Resiliency Council was established by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19.

One of the key mandates of this Council was to develop, by November 1st, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of Maryland's food system.

One way this can be achieved is by supporting and promoting urban agriculture. Urban agriculture offers increased access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate food while also creating job opportunities and helping to support local economies.

During the 2021 session of the General Assembly, House Bill 286 was enacted which created an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program for Baltimore City. House Bill 1216 expands the existing Baltimore City Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program, which is currently unfunded, into a statewide program and provides the program be funded at \$250,000 annually in FY 2024 through FY 2028. Moreover, Supplemental Budget No. 4 includes \$500,000 in general funds to support the Urban Agriculture Grant Program in fiscal 2023, contingent upon the enactment of this bill. Grants would be available to agricultural producers, non-profit organizations, and institutes of higher education.

The bill establishes a review committee to implement a competitive grant application process that prioritizes applications that benefit socially disadvantaged farmers in urban areas. Furthermore, non-profit organizations that receive grant funds through this program to distribute to agricultural producers must distribute 85% to agricultural producers in low-income census tracts or designated food deserts.

Supporting the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland will help preserve green space within developed areas and can provide access to healthy food to residents that live in Healthy Food Priority Areas (formally called food deserts). According to a recent study, 146,000 Baltimore City residents (23.5%) live in Healthy Food Priority Areas. Children and black residents are also disproportionately

affected. According to the report, children are the most likely of any age group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (28.3%) and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (31.5%).¹ Urban farming can provide another access point for healthy fresh food, as urban farmers often sell their product in the local community. Urban farms also may provide community benefits such as education and job training opportunities. And they can be the community focal point of a neighborhood.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of HB 1216. House Bill 1216, if passed, will significantly assist with the growth of urban agriculture across the State by making financial support available to both the urban farmers directly and the nonprofit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to them.

Stephen R. McHenry
Executive Director, MARBIDCO

Heather Bruskin
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

¹ [*Report: 'Food Desert' Gets a Name Change in Response to Baltimore Community Feedback*](#), Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, January 17, 2018.

HB 1216_dadams_fwa.pdf

Uploaded by: Humon Heidarian

Position: FWA



March 2, 2022

Re: House Bill 1216 (Delegate Wells)

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1216 (Urban Agriculture Grant Fund)
- Delegate Wells**

Dear Delegate Wells,

I am the owner and operator of New Brooklyn Farms, a 5 year-old urban farm business located in Mt. Rainier, MD. In 2019, I lead grassroots efforts to pass 2 pieces of legislation to expand urban farming in Prince George's County. I am also a member of the Farmer Advisory Council for the Fair Farms Campaign (Waterkeepers Chesapeake).

I am writing to express my support (with 3 requested amendments) of House Bill 1216 and your proposal to alter the purpose and contents of and the requirements and qualifications under the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund.

I am excited to see House Bill 1216's plans to expand statewide access to greatly needed financial support of the nascent yet beneficially diverse business sector that I work in.

In addition to the well-documented positive impacts on community health, education, and preservation, there are several case that display urban agriculture's economic viability. However, similar to its rural counterpart, the urban agriculture industry has risk & volatility (e.g. crop failure, natural disasters), as well as high barriers to entry (e.g lease/acquisition of land in urban areas, equipment, infrastructure). I believe that urban agriculture requires similar support to reach its full economic potential.

While I fully support the majority of the bill, I would like to note the following requested amendments:

1. **Page 4, line 28-29:** As an owner of the .25 acre urban lot that I farm on in Prince George's County and a follower of local real estate trends, I feel that securing space to operate in is the single biggest obstacle facing new urban farmers. *I believe that a 20% cap on the grant funds eligibility toward securing real property could be very restrictive, and that the cap should be increased and/or removed.*
2. **Page 6, line 4:** While there are several farm training or continuing education programs offered by well-established organizations, I do not believe that there are any that are USDA-certified. *Perhaps this requirement could be modified to include different or additional program certifications?*
3. **Page 6, lines 7-9:** While I understand the important of the community education component of urban agriculture, I believe that this requirement will inadvertently disqualify individuals with criminal records, and urban farmers who do not have business infrastructure (staff with youth education expertise, necessary insurance clearance, etc.) required to offer elementary student-

targeted education. *Perhaps this requirement could be removed or modified to be more inclusive to urban farmers and urban farm businesses?*

Thank you again for your efforts thus far in proposing this bill. I look forward to providing live testimony at the bill hearing on Friday 3/4. Please let me know how I can further support.

Best regards,

Doug Adams

Owner - New Brooklyn Farms, Benefit LLC

grow@newbrooklynfarms.com