



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education

## House Bill 156

Local Governments – Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones – Authorization

Date: March 30, 2022

To: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Position: **Support**

From: Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS HB 156**. This bill would authorize a local government to designate an area as an urban agricultural incentive zone to support opportunities for local economic development associated with urban agriculture activities, providing funding for educational programs focused on nutrition and local urban farms, and improving community access to healthy food choices.

### **HB 156 recognizes the potential of urban agriculture and the needs of the movement at this moment.**

Small, urban and suburban farms can strengthen communities, create business opportunities, and address gaps in access to healthy foods throughout Maryland, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with food transport, and creating green spaces that can filter polluted air and water. In speaking with urban farmers and urban farm service providers, the greatest challenges and needs include navigating local laws and regulations and accessing needed farmer training. Though HB 156 has been amended to remove sales and use tax revenue as support for its components, the bill's creation of particular zones for urban farms, and a framework for local economic development associations to support urban farmers has the potential to move the industry forward.

### **Urban agriculture may improve equity and access to healthy food.**

This bill may increase 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. Supporting locally grown food from sustainable farms is integral to CBF's mission to Save the Bay. 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. CBF's Clagett Farm supports access to food for vulnerable populations in Maryland through *From the Ground Up*, a program that for more than 40 years has provided fresh produce to people living in poverty and near-poverty in the Washington, D.C. area.<sup>1</sup> The proposed grant program can increase access to fresh food among those who need it most.

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<sup>1</sup> [Social Justice Grows on Clagett Farm](#), Chesapeake Bay Foundation, last visited 1.14.2022.

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**Local, regenerative food production may reduce pollution into the Chesapeake Bay.**

The agriculture sector accounts for nearly one third of global greenhouse gas emissions and is the largest source of non-point pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay. This legislation is a complement to other stateside and local efforts to support a growing trend of small, regenerative, urban and suburban farms that provide fresh fruit and produce to Marylanders. The use of property within City centers, town and suburban developments for sustainable agriculture may help improve local water quality and reduce runoff into the Chesapeake Bay. If successful, the continued investments of residents in local food providers may help grow a greenprint of sustainable agriculture plots throughout Maryland's developed areas.

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 156.** For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at 443.995.8753 or [rclark@cbf.org](mailto:rclark@cbf.org).