

Support of SB 538 - Land Use - Agritourism - Defin

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

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

March 9, 2022

To: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of SB 538 - Land Use - Agritourism - Definition**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of SB 538, legislation that adds to the definition of "agritourism" to include special events and occasions conducted on a farm that generates income from an agricultural activity.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are looking for more open-air opportunities to host meetings and special events. Allowing farms the opportunity to offer these events as an accessory to their working farm allows them to make needed additional income to offset when the farming margins are tight. Allowing farms to diversify so they can improve their income generated from the farm, should be Maryland's top priority if there is to be increased financial sustainability for our farms in the future.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy:

- We support wedding and event venues as an accessory use on a working farm.
- Agritourism should be defined as activities conducted on a farm and offered to the public or to invited groups for the purpose of education, recreation, or active involvement in the farm operation.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 538 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

SB0538_AGRITOURISM_FAV_OC CHAMBER_SCARLATO.pdf

Uploaded by: DENNIS RASMUSSEN

Position: FAV



**The Greater Ocean City, Maryland
Chamber of Commerce, Inc.**

**TESTIMONY OFFERED ON BEHALF OF
THE GREATER OCEAN CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0538 – Altering the Definition of Agritourism to
Include Special Events and Occasions**

**Before the:
Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 9th, 2022
1:00 P.M.**

As Executive Director of the Greater Ocean City Chamber of Commerce, an organization that represents approximately 850 plus members in Ocean City and the surrounding region, I am asking you to support **SB0538 – Altering the Definition of Agritourism to Include Special Events and Occasions**.

In Worcester County, agriculture is one of the largest industries, with most farms being family-run and/or family-owned. The cost of feed, seed and other supplies have in many instances quadrupled in cost over the last year leaving many farm owners in a position of forced sale or development.

Allowing them to use their farm buildings for agritourism would allow them to diversify practices and maintain ownership. We welcome the opportunity to support legislation that would support two of the largest industry sectors in our region, both tourism and agriculture.

Again, we humbly ask that you support **SB0538**.

Best regards,

Lachelle Scarlato
Executive Director
Lachelle@oceancity.org

Salvatore Fasano
Legislative Committee Chair
Salvatorefasano1980@gmail.com

SB0538-EHE_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
Association of
COUNTIES

Senate Bill 538

Land Use - Agritourism - Definition

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee

Date: March 9, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 538. The bill expands the state definition of “agritourism” to include hosting agriculture-related special events and occasions and enables counties to adopt this model definition or their own standard based on local needs and conditions.

Agritourism is becoming a strong force for economic development in nearly all corners of Maryland. Recent advancements in the agricultural industry have led to new methods for generating revenue, while also preserving the core of what it means to be a farmer. Agritourism gives small farms—many of which have been in the same family for generations—a chance to increase revenue and potentially maintain the family business for generations ahead.

This bill strikes a balance between local autonomy and state policy. Counties would remain free to either opt into the State’s model definition or set their own standard.

SB 538 gives counties another tool in the toolbox while also preserving their ability to decide what definition of agritourism works best for their community. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 538.

SB538_FAV_AtticksGrowFortify.pdf

Uploaded by: Kevin Atticks

Position: FAV



Bill #	SB538
Position	SUPPORT

March 8, 2022

Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

ATTN: Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

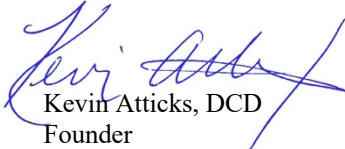
With local the farms facing declining revenues and development pressure, we must take innovative—yet reasonable—actions to provide new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

Agritourism is a primary means of providing new revenue opportunities for our farms.

We support adding “special events and occasions” to the state’s agritourism definition. On-farm activities have become increasingly popular, and it’s important to codify their inclusion in agritourism to provide guidance to local agencies as they work to accommodate new activities that support a farm’s profitability.

We urge your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,



Kevin Atticks, DCD
Founder

*Cultivating an environment where value-added agricultural producers,
startups, operators and growers innovate and thrive.*

SB 538 Senator Carozza Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Position: FAV

MARY BETH CAROZZA
Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 9, 2021

The Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Bill 538 Land Use - Agritourism - Definition
Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you, Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 538, which adds special events and occasions to the statewide definition of agritourism under § 4-212 of the Land Use Article.

The committee may recall Senate Bill 296 sponsored by Senator Gallion that would add camping to the statewide agritourism definition that passed this committee and the Senate unanimously. Senate Bill 538 would be an additional option for farm families to diversify, provide additional economic opportunity, and allow tourists to have more options to explore and experience our local farms.

I am especially proud of the leadership of the Worcester County Commissioners and Maryland's Coast, Office of Tourism for the extra effort they have been making to give our farm families more options to diversify and expand rather than selling their valuable farm land for development. Senate Bill 538 would be a successful tool in giving more local farms the opportunity to protect their way of life in new and creative ways.

Today my panel includes Melanie Pursel, Director of the Worcester County Office of Tourism and Kevin Atticks with Grow and Fortify who are in strong support and will further explain the direct benefits of this legislation.

I respectfully ask my colleagues and friends on the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for a favorable report on Senate Bill 538. It is an important local priority and will be a great opportunity for farmers across the state.

SB538_msonnenfeld_UNfav.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Sonnenfeld

Position: UNF

Michael J. Sonnenfeld
3531 Mount Zion Road
Upperco, Maryland 21155

March 8, 2022

Re: SB 538 Michael Sonnenfeld: Unfavorable Written Testimony

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am writing about SB 538 / HB 673, which define “special events and occasions” as agritourism for farms that “generate income from an agricultural activity.” This bill is being referred to as the “wedding bill,” as it would allow any farm that generates any revenue from agriculture, renting a field to a farmer to make hay for example, to also rent facilities for special events like weddings and call those events “agritourism.”

I think Maryland has a great opportunity to promote agritourism to support our agricultural economy, but I do not think that allowing commercial event venues unrelated to agriculture in an agricultural or rural conservation zone is a good idea.

I think there is a big difference between events that support an active farm business, for example a vineyard that holds occasional bluegrass concerts to bring customers to the property to whom they can sell wine, and events hosted by a commercial venue that are unrelated to agriculture but are held on a property that is zoned for agricultural and residential use. A commercial event venue that regularly hosts weddings in a rural setting will bring lots of traffic and late-night noise that otherwise would be required to be located in areas zoned for commercial use.

Property owners that put in place minimal agricultural activity should not be encouraged or authorized by this legislation to avoid the land use guidelines and restrictions that otherwise relate to their property under the respective County zoning or under the terms of an agricultural or conservation easement that relates to their property.

I am particularly concerned that owners of conserved farms would attempt to use this bill’s expanded definition of agritourism to argue that they should be allowed to host commercial events and weddings unrelated to agriculture on conserved farms. Most agricultural and conservation easements specifically prohibit the property owner from commercial activities unrelated to agriculture. The State of Maryland and most Counties in Maryland have invested a significant amount of time and money to purchase agricultural and conservation easements on properties in order to keep a critical mass of land devoted to agriculture in support of Maryland’s important agricultural economy and to preserve open space and maintain the rural character of our communities.

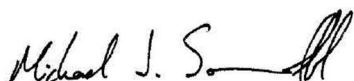
I think SB 538 and HB 673’s characterization of a commercial event venue as agritourism could undermine the significant work the State and Counties have done to preserve agriculture, maintain open space and support our rural communities and our rural legacy.

Accordingly, I request that you vote against adoption of this bill, and if the bill is likely to be adopted, I would respectfully request that you seek to have a clarifying clause added to the bill to the effect of:

(c) NOTHING IN THIS BILL SHALL BE INTERPRETED TO ALLOW COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES ON PROPERTIES IF THOSE ACTIVITIES WOULD OTHERWISE BE PROHIBITED BY THE TERMS OF AN AGRICULTURAL OR CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON THE PROPERTY.

I live on a conserved farm in Baltimore County Maryland in the midst of a wonderful area of contiguous protected agricultural and conserved properties, and my wife and I have purchased and protected land neighboring our farm.

Thanks in advance.



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