



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 855

DATE: February 25, 2022

SPONSOR: Delegate Boyce

ASSIGNED TO: Environment and Transportation

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POSITION: Support

Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment

House Bill 855, *Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment*, creates a program in the Department of Agriculture to provide grants to urban agricultural producers and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of purchasing and installing water supply and irrigation equipment. The bill also requires the submission of a report that assesses the program's effectiveness and mandates an annual State appropriation of \$500,000 from fiscal 2024 through 2027.

The purpose of the bill is to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens, which, in turn should improve access to fresh food. This is a goal well worth pursuing, for a number of reasons. From small vacant lots to rooftops, alleyways, and parks to urban open spaces, opportunities exist in almost every community to create gardens that feed people, teach the importance of agriculture, improve nutrition, and enhance community life. Along with providing a much-needed source of healthy, locally-grown food, urban gardens provide a wide range of benefits, including soil, air, and water quality improvements, stormwater management, increased property values and aesthetics, and education and recreational opportunities for communities and schools.

The Montgomery County Office of Agriculture supports this legislation. In order to farm, you must have access to water and access to electricity, whether it be in a rural or urban setting. However, urban settings can present some unique obstacles which this bill could help address. Overall, the additional urban farming support that would be enabled by the enactment of House Bill 855 would be welcome and could help counties like Montgomery meet their goals to increase urban farming activity and to reduce food insecurity. Accordingly, the Office requests the Committee to act favorably on this legislation.