



February 23, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
91 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1904

**House Bill 855 Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant
Program and Fund - Establishment**

Delegate Regina T. Boyce

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman. Barve and Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

Fair Farms asks for a favorable report of HB 855. Fair Farms is a campaign of Waterkeepers Chesapeake with a growing movement of over 20,000 Marylanders working together for a new food system – one that is fair to farmers, invests in homegrown healthy food, and restores our waterways instead of polluting them. We have more than 150 partners, including urban and rural farmers, state and national organizations, and business owners.

For too long, U.S. institutions have viewed urban farming as a hobby. Only now, after seeing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security, governments and institutions are taking urban farming seriously as a viable way of feeding communities. There are myriad benefits provided by urban agriculture in Maryland. According to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, urban farming is an “integral part of the community food system,” “plays an important role in food system planning,” “requires local collaboration of local citizens and other stakeholders,” and “can be a valuable tool for economic development, environmental protection, and community development.”¹

Urban farms are also a great place for educational and entrepreneurial development, and have been shown to improve social networks and organizational capacity in urban communities. Even more, property values increase within a 1,000-foot radius of urban farms. Urban farming can also serve to reduce carbon and energy dependence associated with food transportation, green vacant lots (thereby reducing stormwater runoff),² and provide access to fresh food in areas impacted by food apartheid where such food is scarce.³

Without water and electrical power, no farm—rural, or urban—can be functional. This legislation offers critical infrastructure support that urban farmers need to thrive and serve their communities, and it has the opportunity to bring in more urban farms with associated economic, environmental, and public health benefits.

Thank you to Delegate Boyce, her staff, and the other stakeholders involved in drafting this important legislation. We urge a favorable report. We hope to work Delegate Boyce and this committee on similar bills in the future.

Sincerely,

Humon Heidarian

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Campaign Manager, Fair Farms

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

1 A Tool for Creating Economic Development and Healthy Communities in Prince George’s County, MD, *The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission*.

2 The Environmental Benefits of Urban Agriculture on Unused, Impermeable and Semi-Permeable Spaces in Major Cities With a Focus on Philadelphia, PA, *University of Pennsylvania*, Knizhnik L. Heather (2012).

3 Pandemic pushes more Black Americans to take up urban farming to fight ‘food apartheid’, *Black News Voices* (2019).