



February 28, 2022  
The Honorable Kumar P. Barve  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
91 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1904

**HB 936- Blue Ribbon Community Solar Land Use Commission**  
Delegate Kumar P. Barve

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sam White, and I'm testifying in support of H.B. 936. I'm testifying on behalf of Fair Farms Maryland, a WaterKeeper organization. I am a farmer in Allegany County. I run Leaning Pine Farm in Allegany County with my family. We are a cow-calf operation that also sells direct-to-consumer grass-fed beef, and we also offer pick your own raspberries.

Our farm has one of the oldest farmland easements through the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF). Please consider that agricultural conservation regulations do not allow for farms with preservation easements to install solar systems that generate more than 120% of their own electric usage.

Research by the Institute for Energy and Environment Research, IEER, found that Germany has developed and deployed two alternative solar system structures that are intended for dual farm use, so that those farmlands could continue being productive, while generating electricity through photovoltaics. The first of these types utilize elevated panels that simulate shade found in high tunnels. Small fruits, such as raspberries, and dwarf fruit trees grow exceptionally well under these panels, and farm equipment can be operated under them. A fruit farm in Pennsylvania recently agreed to have these raised panels installed. The second type of these alternative structures are vertical solar panels.

Unlike the panels we see in conventional ground based systems, these face east to west, can be installed on hills, and are being used as "fences" in cattle grazing operations. As a livestock operation that deploys managed intensive grazing (we move our herds at least once a day), this system would work well for us. IEER reached out to us to see if we would be willing to have these panels installed on our farm. The intention of this project would be to serve as a pilot project and provide an outdoor research lab for MD Extension, the solar industry, and other interested parties. Other plans include working with community solar partners in Allegany County and selling the electricity through that path. However, due to our Ag easement

protection, I confirmed with the helpful staff that we are not allowed to place a large solar installation on our farm.

I agree with those regulations when you consider the massive footprint that conventional solar developments require, essentially taking that land out of agriculture production. Yet vertical solar panels don't require that footprint and agriculture output can coincide on the same land.

Some areas in the northeast are already seeing a competition between solar developers and farmland preservation organizations for the remaining unprotected farmland. I believe these new types of solar systems could be the key to balancing ag preservation and providing solar power to the grid within Maryland, and be adopted throughout the northeast. This situation is a reason why a commission to study community solar guidelines is needed.

Fair Farms asks for a favorable report for H.B. 936. Thank you Chairman Barve for your leadership on this important issue. Fair Farms hopes to continue working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

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Fair Farms Campaign  
Waterkeepers Chesapeake



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