



Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Opposition of
Senate Bill 690 – Agriculture – Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg
Production - Prohibitions
Education, Energy, and the Environment
March 2, 2023

The Rural Maryland Council opposes Senate Bill 690 – Agriculture – Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions. This bill prohibits a certain farm owner or operator from knowingly confining egg-laying hens in an enclosure in a certain manner, subject to certain exceptions, on and after January 1, 2025; prohibiting a business owner or operator or a farm owner or operator from selling shell eggs or egg products under certain circumstances on and after January 1, 2025; and specifying that a certain certification be obtained in a certain manner to sell shell eggs and egg products.

The Council opposes SB690 because it will create economic hardship to egg-laying farmers by banning their traditional practices and forcing them to make costly changes to their existing barns in order to sell their product – the result would be a 41% increase in cost production to retrofit existing barns and an 119% increase in labor.

For the health of the birds, cages are used as a form of protection and are an approved animal agriculture practice. By moving to a cage-free operation, the hen mortality rate increases significantly due to more bacterial habitat being introduced in the barn. Lastly, these farms are contracted with out-of-state companies that will just drop their contracts with the farms and then these farms will have to create a new demand for their eggs in a market where there is already an oversupply of cage-free eggs. This bill would put the Maryland egg-laying farms, that farm this way, out of business. Currently, the industry is about 5% of all poultry (approximately \$50 to \$60 million in sales), which means a lot of growers would be negatively affected.

The Rural Maryland Council supports the State's poultry industry – the largest agricultural sector in Maryland and requests that you oppose Senate Bill 690.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.