

February 13, 2023

2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0253/SB0262: Environment – On–Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption

COMMITTEE: House Environment and Transportation
POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 0253
BILL ANALYSIS: Establishes a permit exemption for on-farm food waste composting on farm-based facilities where the on-farm composting compromises 40,000 square feet or less.
SIGNED: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FRSC)

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record **in SUPPORT of H.B. 0253**. This letter is submitted by Michael J. Wilson, Chair of the Communications and Coordination Committee of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC). These comments are submitted on behalf of the Council, and do not necessarily represent the views the State of Maryland. The FSRC was established by the Maryland General Assembly in the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise to work toward a common goal of a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19. One of the key mandates of this council was to develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the Maryland food system.

The FSRC believes this legislation will advance several of our priority goals, including:

- **Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts.**

This legislation establishes a permit exemption for on-farm composting facilities under COMAR 26.04.11.06, if the on-farm compost site of food scraps uses 40,000 square feet of area (or less). The proposed permit exemption in H.B.0253/S.B.0262 align with the recommendations in the 2021 and 2022 FSRC reports, which details the importance of reducing food waste and expanding food scrap composting to build the long-term resilience and sustainability of our local food system. Enacting H.B.0253/S.B.0262 will strengthen the sustainability of our local food system by encouraging the adoption of on-farm composting facilities, thereby, reducing food waste, enhancing the resiliency of our food systems, and contributing to a more sustainable and circular food system within the state of Maryland.

This new legislation would also help support the Solid Waste Management – Organics Recycling and Waste Division – Food Residuals, Chapter 439 (law) passed by the Maryland General Assembly (H.B.264) during the 2021 legislative session by increasing the number of food waste composting facilities in Maryland. In September 2015, US The USEPA and USDA announced a national goal to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030. To divert this food waste from reaching landfills, there must be adequate facilities in Maryland that accept food waste for composting. Currently in Maryland, the composting of food scraps (15.5%) lags behind the composting of yard trimmings (84%), according to the Maryland Department of Environment. To date, 20 composting facilities have applied to be covered under Maryland's composting permits, and only five of the proposed operations include the composting of food scraps. This permit exemption for H.B. 0253 would allow food waste composting to grow in Maryland, which is desperately needed to reach our goal of 50% food waste reduction by 2030.

The Maryland Department of Environment has stated that compostable materials comprise the largest portion of waste generated (33.7%), with food waste scraps, specifically, being 21.6% of Maryland's total waste generated or 54.1% of the compostable material. Instead of going to landfills, by composting the food waste scraps on small on-farm facilities, the following benefits could be achieved: 1) reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, 2) extension of landfill/incinerator capacity, 3) production of soil conditioner that partially replaces the need for chemical fertilizers, 4) reduction of need for irrigation, 5), creation of jobs, and 6) improvement of water and air quality.

On behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), I would like to record SUPPORT of H.B. 0253.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Wilson
Chair, Communications and Coordination Committee
Maryland Food Council Resilience Council