

**TESTIMONY TO THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION**

HB0253: On-Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption

Position: Favorable

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On behalf of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, I am submitting this written testimony in support with amendments of *HB0253: On-Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption*. This bill will expand the area allowed to be used for composting of food residuals and other Type 2 Feedstocks under MDE’s on-farm composting facility permit exemption from 5,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet. My name is Linda Bilsens Brolis and I am the Senior Project Manager in the Composting for Community Initiative at the national nonprofit, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR).

Maryland disposes of more than 920,000 tons of food each year, with only 15.5% being recycled in 2019. This is because there’s only a handful of permitted facilities composting wasted food in Maryland. Simply put—Maryland needs more composting infrastructure.

Whereas trash generated ends up in polluting landfills or incinerators, food scraps and other organic materials that are composted have many benefits including improving soil health, protecting the climate, and reducing garbage. Compost is a valuable soil amendment that provides needed organic matter, reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers, and improves soils’ water and nutrient retention. Indeed, the Maryland Healthy Soils Program is promoting the widespread use of healthy soils practices among farmers in Maryland. Increasing soil organic matter is specifically named, along with the ability of soil to sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The act of composting is an essential agricultural waste management activity, it is also a practice that can provide economic benefits to farmers. One beauty of composting is that it ranges from small sized and medium sized—such as at farms—to large industrial sites. There is an unprecedented opportunity to spur locally based composting in Maryland and connect it to soil health, resilient food systems, and climate protection. Small and medium sized sites can scale up to create a robust distributed and diverse infrastructure. See ILSR’s [Hierarchy to Reduce Food Waste & Grow Community](#) (also included below).

Expanding on-farm composting has been identified as a strategy for minimizing the amount of food scraps disposed in the solid waste stream at the State level. In 2019, the Maryland Department of the Environment released a report summarizing the findings of the Yard Waste, Food Residuals, and Other Organic Materials Diversion and Infrastructure Study Group. It specifically recommended that the State promote on-farm composting and tasked MDE, the University of Maryland Extension, Soil Conservation Districts, and MDA to help train farmers.

The report also notes that the incorporation of food residuals into existing on-farm composting systems may improve manure management efficiency. Yet to date, little action has been taken to support on-farm composting. We believe that HB0253: *On-Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption* provides an important step in this direction. It is also imperative that the State provide farmers with access to technical assistance to assure that they are equipped with knowledge of composting best management practices. Access to training on composting best management practices for farm service providers and regulators will also be essential. Thank you for taking action on this. I urge you to pass this bill.

