



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: February 15, 2023

BILL NUMBER: HB 63

SHORT TITLE: CERTIFIED LOCAL FARM AND CHESAPEAKE INVASIVE SPECIES PROVIDER PROGRAM- ESTABLISHMENT

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

The Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program was established by the General Assembly in 2020. This Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) program encourages state institutions, including four-year universities, to achieve an overall goal of purchasing 20% of their food from certified local farm enterprises listed on a directory compiled by MDA. To become a certified local farm enterprise, a farmer needs to meet Maryland's nutrient management law requirements. Currently, there are 85 farms on this voluntary list.

House Bill 63 will increase the scope of the program to include the invasive blue catfish. This is an important and positive step in working to reduce the blue catfish population in the Chesapeake Bay as they are a direct threat to the Bay's ecosystem. More than 2.2 million pounds of blue catfish was harvested in 2021 according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA). That had a dockside value for Maryland watermen of \$1.6 million. That has increased from 935,000 pounds worth \$341,000 in 2015.

MDA's Seafood Marketing Program has a robust advertising and promotion campaign working to increase sales of the invasive blue catfish to restaurants and other buyers of the fish. MDA's seafood marketing efforts work along the supply chain to increase demand and market share to include connecting wholesale buyers with processors and producers as well as holding numerous blue catfish tasting events for consumers throughout the state. MDA also is providing funding to the Maryland Food Bank in 2023-24 to purchase and distribute blue catfish filets from Maryland watermen through a federal grant.

The current Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program has successfully worked with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to purchase \$500,000 of food

from nine certified farms in 2022. In addition, the University of Maryland College Park has begun purchasing products from Certified Local Farm Enterprises.

In 2023, MDA will continue to aggressively promote the program to state institutions and producers to increase participation. It is estimated the State of Maryland procures approximately \$175 million of food for hospitals and universities according to a [2015 John Hopkins University](#) study. DPSCS procures approximately \$25 million annually on food. (Source: [eMMA](#)).

The Maryland Department of Agriculture supports this legislation and thanks you for your consideration of a favorable report.

If you have additional questions, please contact Steve Connelly, Deputy Secretary, at steve.connelly@maryland.gov or (410) 841-5881.