



February 13, 2023

**2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0253: On-Farm Composting Facilities**

BILL: HB0253: On-Farm Composting Facilities - Permit Exemption
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
POSITION: Testimony in Support of House Bill 0253
BILL ANALYSIS: Requiring the Department of the Environment to adopt regulations to establish a permit exemption for on-farm food waste composting on farm-based facilities where the on-farm composting comprises 40,000 square feet or less.

Dear Chair Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to **SUPPORT** this bill to expand the threshold for permit exemptions for on-farm composting facilities established under COMAR 26.04.11.06, if the facilities on-farm compost site uses 40,000 square feet of area (or less).

In order to create a more resilient and sustainable food system it is important to reduce food waste and expand food scrap composting within Maryland. This bill can benefit the environment and farmers by increasing allowances for certain on-farm composting operations. Specifically, expanding the exemption from 5,000 up to 40,000 square feet allows farmers to manage food scraps in the same footprint as they already are allowed to compost manure. The bill also establishes record-keeping requirements and best practices such as timely mixing with carbonaceous materials and incorporation into active composting. These requirements would be in addition to any Soil Conservation, Water Quality, or Nutrient Management Plans the farmers are also required to maintain.

Expanding the permitting exemption allowance supports Maryland farmers while furthering environmental protection goals. In 2022, the Montgomery County Food Council hosted a Symposium that brought together environmental food advocates from across Montgomery County and recommended that the state amend its farm size limits for on-farm composting, while also expanding on-farm food scrap composting opportunities that support farmers with additional income and composting sources. This bill can support environmental protection and small businesses within the state of Maryland.



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We strongly support this bill to establish permit exemptions for on-farm composting facilities at sites where composting comprises less than 40,000 square feet. On-farm composting is vital to the health and safety of our environment and the current system requires small farmers to apply for permits, adding an additional burden onto an already demanding job. Reducing food waste and expanding food scraps composting are key avenues to creating long-term resilience and sustainability within our food system through the promotion of local agriculture. The implementation of permit exemptions will reduce the burden on small-scale farmers, helping to improve small-scale farms throughout the state of Maryland. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports HB0253 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.



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