

Senate Bill 311
Agriculture – Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program –
Expansion
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
January 23, 2024

Position: Support with Amendment

Senate Bill 311 creates the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Operating Fund and mandates \$1 million for the fund for the operating costs associated with qualifying farms providing local, Maryland products to food assistance organizations.

The Maryland Food Bank would not be able to feed the 1 in 3 Marylanders who are at risk of food insecurity without a strong local food system, and the foundation of our food system is the farms and farmers located throughout the state. Local farms and our relationships with farmers are extremely valuable (and have been particularly beneficial since the start of our Farm to Food Bank Program in 2010) and necessary to ensure that food insecure Marylanders and their families are able to regularly access nutritious produce and other agricultural products. Through our Farm to Food Bank Program, we contract grow with, glean from, and accept donations from local farms whose products go directly into food insecure communities through our network of 330 partner organizations and 1,100 distribution sites all across the state.

The Maryland Food Bank is very supportive of efforts that strengthen the local food system, and for SB 311 specifically we applaud the establishment of this Fund which will provide much needed opportunities for financial support for farms, including those that help support the work of the Maryland Food Bank by providing local products we can distribute to food insecure communities all across the state. As this is such needed investment in our local farm partners, the Maryland Food Bank believes this funding opportunity should benefit as many farms throughout the state as feasible under the MFARM program. Strengthening our local food system and ensuring that our partners, including local farms, have the resources they need to continue their operations and support the Maryland Food Bank is a top priority of ours.

SB 311 helps achieve this as a solid first step, yet we'd ask that as many of our local farms be eligible for funding like this as possible. Many of our farm partners may be smaller, less resourced, or have very little financial flexibility, and maximizing access to grant funding such as this for their and as many farms as possible under the MFARM program access is paramount in ensuring equity in our local food system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report after amendment on SB 311.