

Testimony of **Douglas H. Boucher**

in support of the Renewable Energy Certainty Act

(S.B. 0931/H.B. 1036)

Maryland General Assembly, February 28, 2025

Chair Feldman, Chair Wilson and members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of S.B. 0931. I speak to you as a retired climate scientist and as a long-time District 15 constituent; my wife Charlotte and I have lived for 28 years on the family farm in Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve.

For more than five years, working with Chaberton Energy, we have tried to lease some of our farmland for a community solar project that would provide clean energy to hundreds of families. But we have faced a major obstacle --- Montgomery County's zoning, which makes it extremely difficult to build solar projects in the Ag Reserve. Since this zoning was adopted in February of 2021, there have only been two applications for

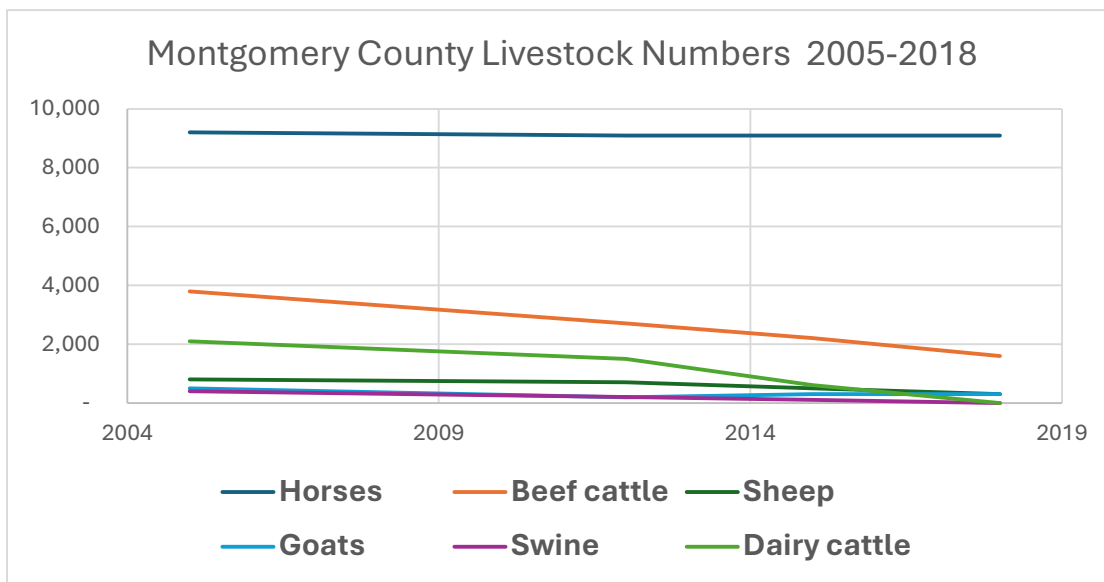
solar projects. At this rate, the goal of the zoning – 1800 acres, or less than 2% of the Ag Reserve – will not be reached till **296 years from now**.

This effective ban on solar in the Ag Reserve is related to a misunderstanding of its land use. The USDA’s Census of Agriculture shows that only 1.2% of Montgomery County farmland is used to produce fruits and vegetables for human consumption. Overwhelmingly, county farmland produces livestock feed (corn, soy, hay and pasture), which makes up 70.2% of the area harvested.

	% of farmland harvested	
	<u>2017</u>	<u>2022</u>
	(%)	(%)
Corn	21%	19%
Soybeans	22%	26%
Hay and other forages	14%	11%
Pastureland	14%	14%
TOTAL	70.7%	70.2%
Vegetables	0.7%	0.6%
Orchards	0.5%	0.5%
Berries	0.1%	0.1%
TOTAL	1.3%	1.2%
Total Farmland (acres)	65,537	69,759

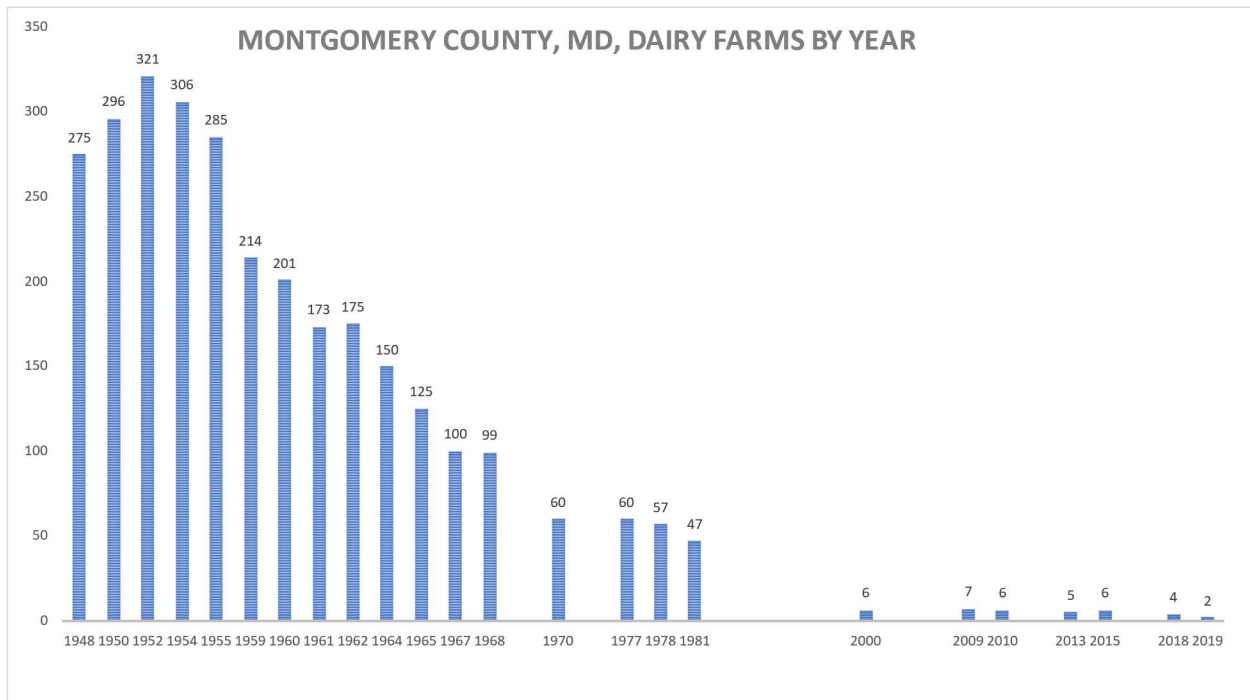
Source: USDA-NASS, 2022 *Census of Agriculture*
County Data section
Tables 1, 25, 26, 28, 31, 32

But doesn't livestock feed go to produce the meat and milk we eat? Not in Montgomery County. The large majority of the county's livestock consists of **horses for recreation** – 9,100 head, versus 1,600 beef cattle and less than 500 each of dairy cattle, sheep, goats and swine.



Source: Montgomery County, MD (2020) *Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory*, Inventory Inputs tab

When I was born in 1950, the county had 296 dairy farms; today only 2 are left.

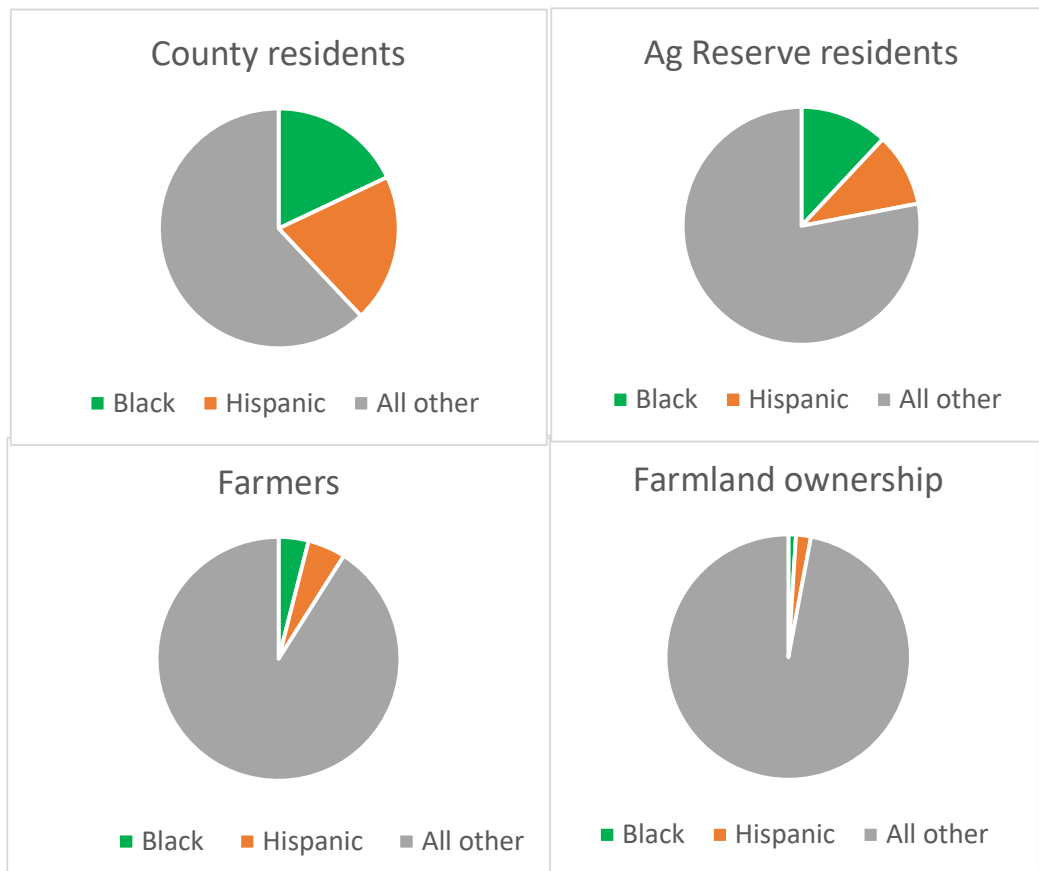


Source: King Barn Dairy MOOseum, Germantown, MD (2022)

I'd like to make one last point, relating to the issue of climate justice.

38% of county residents are Black and/or Hispanic, but they make up only 22% of Ag Reserve residents and just 9% of the county's farmers.

And their farms are much smaller than those of White farmers, so they own just 3% of county farmland.



Source: USDA-NASS 2019. *Census of Agriculture, 2017. Maryland, State and County Data.*
 Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 20, Report AC-17-A-20
 Tables 48 through 54

This inequity is important to take into consideration when deciding whether to continue excluding community solar from the Ag Reserve, in order to benefit farms that produce feed for horses.

In conclusion, I urge you to favorably report S.B. 0931, to support both clean energy and the cause of climate justice.