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The Honorable Chair Feldman  
The Honorable Vice Chair Kagan  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Senate of Maryland

February 11, 2025

SB0317: Natural Resources - Food Forests and Foraging Program - Establishment

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The purpose of this bill is to establish and maintain food forests on state lands and to regulate foraging within these food forests. The bill requires the creation of foraging permits with a fee waiver process for those with financial needs. The revenue from the permits will provide funds for the Food Forests and Foraging Special Fund. This fund will be used to maintain the established food forests on state lands.

Food forests and foraging programs provide the community with a sustainable means of gathering nutritiously dense foods while at the same time furnishing an opportunity to be out in nature. A Food Forest and Foraging Program created and administered by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources is an innovative way to increase community access to diverse food sources while enhancing food security.

There are many benefits to food foraging. Studies have shown that foraged and naturally grown foods expand a community's affordable, nutrient-dense dietary alternatives<sup>1</sup>. A food foraging program enhances community well-being by making healthy foods more accessible and affordable to lower income individuals. In addition, food foraging is a sustainable way to increase biodiversity in the ecosystem, which can provide resilience in the face of climate change. Once established, food forests are naturally regenerative, low maintenance, and can enhance wildlife habitat. Finally, foraging allows individuals to spend less money for more nutritious food, create less garbage, and lower our carbon footprint.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10647252/>

KAREN LEWIS YOUNG  
*Legislative District 3*  
Frederick County

Budget and Taxation Committee



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The DNR estimates that establishing food forests will cost approximately \$10,000 per acre. However, this is an initial expense estimate only. It is expected that the fee structure for the permits will be able to cover the ongoing costs of maintaining this program through the Special Fund.

Establishing foraging programs on state lands will add foraging to the list of ways to access healthy foods in a way that benefits both the community and the environment.

I urge the Committee to give Senate Bill 317 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young".

Senator Karen Lewis Young