



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture Legislative Comment Date: February 7, 2025

BILL NUMBER: HB 42/SB 134
SHORT TITLE: **Solid Waste Disposal Surcharge and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Fund and Grant Programs - Established**
MDA POSITION: Support

SB 134 establishes the *On-Farm Organics Diversion and Recycling Grant Program* at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), in addition to establishing grant programs at MDE. The grant program established at MDA aims to award grants to eligible entities to assist with the costs of developing and implementing on-farm composting and compost use projects, food waste prevention, and food rescue projects. MDA supports this legislation.

On-farm composting is an area of growing interest with farmers and provides both agronomic and environmental benefits. Compost can reduce chemical nutrient inputs requirements for crops, thus reducing input costs for the farm. Well managed compost provides a carbon-rich material that can increase organic matter levels and improve soil health. The diversion of food waste for on-farm composting will address state environmental goals for food waste reduction and diversion, while creating a circular economy model. Additionally, grants under the Program can enable training, education, and projects to reduce or redistribute food waste to support local communities.

The establishment of the *On-Farm Organics Diversion and Recycling Grant Program* at MDA would be a novel grant program at MDA and would expand available assistance to farms. Funding will be required for program administration and grant management; however, MDA is long experienced at delivering financial assistance directly to farms and farm businesses. We anticipate integrating the program into MDA's existing Office of Resource Conservation would have minimal operational impact. MDA requests your consideration of a favorable report for SB 134.

If you have additional questions, please contact Rachel Jones, MDA Director of Government Relations at Rachel.Jones2@maryland.gov or (667) 408-0134.