

Hello all and thank you for your support of Maryland farmers. My name is Emma Jagoz, owner and farmer of Moon Valley Farm. Moon Valley is a 70 acre certified organic farm and food hub located in Frederick County, serving a year-round Community-Supported Agriculture program, restaurants, Food as Medicine programs and school systems throughout Maryland, DC and Northern Virginia.

At Moon Valley Farm, we grow specialty and staple vegetables on our farm and we strengthen and diversify our offerings by collaborating with over 50 other farmers in the region to include fruit, gourmet mushrooms, grains, beans, eggs, honey and more for our customers.

Collaborating with other farmers has been excellent for both our customers AND for our partner farms. We're offering a year-round all local "one stop shop" - and in turn, our partner farms are getting very steady sales.

As an organic farmer and the organic seat on the Maryland Ag Commission, I'm a huge advocate of organic farming. However, as a farmer, I know firsthand how challenging - if impossible - it is to acquire or retain this certification on different types of farm operations.

In fact, we collaborate with many conventional farmers in our food hub. Growing marketable, certified organic fruit is next to impossible in the Mid-Atlantic with our heat and humidity levels – and the practices employed on "conventional" operations vary WIDELY. We prioritize establishing partnerships with conventional farmers who employ Integrated-Pest Management practices – or who only employ sprays when crop quality is at risk – and those who plant buffer zones and cover crops.

Our customers value our organic practices - but every time we survey our customers, LOCAL is more important to them than organic because they understand that organic is expensive for producers. Our customers care about the environment first at the end of the day.

Local is a huge draw because of the massively reduced CARBON FOOTPRINT of their food – but as environmentalists, these consumers ALSO want farmers to employ Bay-friendly practices – and that's where LEEF comes in.

Our customers are craving a label that will differentiate those conventional farmers who are employing IPM-practices, cover crops and reduced spray schedules, from those who aren't.

I support the LEEF program and if funded, I would pursue our food hub to be comprised of entirely LEEF-certified farms – farms that prioritize conservation practices, farms that are reducing their inputs and improving their soil health; farms that are heavily involved in their communities to educate the next generation of farmers, to advocate for land preservation, to educate consumers about seasonal and local food production.

LEEF certification would allow our food hub to be branded as “Chesapeake Bay friendly” – farms of all different types and stripes that all prioritize clean water agricultural practices and community engagement.

Please consider the complexities of agriculture across the state of Maryland and vote in support of the Chesapeake Bay Legacy bill and the creation of the LEEF program. Thank you for your time — and be sure to buy local for your family this year.