

LEEF testimony

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Karl Shlagel and I am a farmer from Charles County Maryland here to speak on SB 428 and specifically LEEF.

As a state we've gone to a lot of time and effort to celebrate certain Farming milestones. As you drive by farms you might see signs such as "Century Farm", "Preserved Farm", and "Hall of Fame".

Shouldn't we also be celebrating the valuable work that Maryland Farmers are doing in conservation, research, and building resilient food systems?

The LEEF program would give us as farmers a way to actively market ourselves for the good work we are doing for the greater community. It would effectively give us a social responsibility score that was backed up by Maryland Department of Agriculture. The LEEF designation will convey information; no different than the Certified Organic label. That message is valuable in a region where consumers want to know that their hard-earned dollars directly affect causes they care about. Our love for the Chesapeake Bay being one we can all agree upon.

Furthermore, this is an opportunity for both industry and community to invest back into farms that have invested their time, money, and resources putting practices into place. Farms and Farmers that receive the accreditation could and should be prioritized for incentives that provide an economic return; to allow them to continue investing in practices that provide benefits beyond just their backyard. We should be investing in those that have already shown a desire and ability to implement conservation on their farms.

Maryland Farmers have done an impactful job working to protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed. It's not said enough. It's not acknowledged enough. In fact, quite the opposite. We are constantly told we are not doing enough. Meanwhile Maryland farmers lead the nation in conservation tillage practices and cover crops. LEEF would recognize farmers for all they have done, while encouraging them to continue on that journey. It would provide the tools to take those next steps

This will be a way for farms to highlight the fact that we are doing the work. To acknowledge, we have shifted the way we farm and live with the land. The way we have embraced technology and growing practices to protect the Bay. To show the work we are doing with food resiliency and feeding our communities.

Please support this bill.
Thank you.