

SB473 FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher West

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 18th, 2025

The Maryland State Senate Education Energy and the Environment & Budget and Taxation
Committees

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman & Guy Guzzone
2 & 3 West Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Senate Bill 473: *Agriculture - Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism
Grant Program - Expansion***

Dear Chairs Feldman and Guzzone, and members of the Committees,

In my district, there is an organization known as First Fruits Farm. The organization is a non-profit, Christian ministry dedicated to providing fresh, nutritious food for the hungry through volunteer service and community partnerships. Everything that First Fruits Farm grows is DONATED to feed children and adults who are struggling with hunger. During the past 25 years, First Fruits Farm has harvested and distributed just under 25 million pounds of fresh produce to feed low-income families in central Maryland.

The main partner of First Fruits Farm is the Maryland Food Bank, but other beneficiaries of the food grown by the Bernsteins include shelters, schools, churches and community food distribution centers. The incredible generosity of the Bernsteins has truly and dramatically transformed the lives of thousands of food-insecure families throughout the state. Stephen Mather was the founder of the National Park System. Following his death, plaques were mounted in our national parks stating, "There will never come an end to the good he has done". I truly believe that the same can be said about the Bernsteins – There will never come an end to the good they have done on behalf of so many thousands of needy families in central Maryland.

At this stage, the programs of First Fruits Farm have grown so extensive that they have outrun the ability of Rick and Carol Bernstein to pay for them with their personal resources. They need some financial assistance.

The purpose of Senate Bill 473 is to establish *the Maryland Food and Agriculture Resiliency Operating Fund*. The fund will be a non-lapsing fund with \$1 million deposited into it by the State each year. As written, the Fund will provide annual grants to qualifying non-profit farms and community gardens which operate on at least 250 acres of land that is conserved within a land conservation program, which grow between two to three million pounds of produce annually and which exclusively donate said produce to Maryland food banks and other charitable

food providers at no cost. I call your attention to the fact that the Secretary of Agriculture is represented at this hearing.

I appreciate each Committees' consideration of Senate Bill 473 and would be happy to answer any questions the Committees may have.

SB 473 - Maryland Food Bank - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Wallerstedt

Position: FWA

Senate Bill 473
Agriculture – Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program –
Expansion
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 18, 2025

Position: Support with Amendment

Senate Bill 473 creates the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Operating Fund and mandates \$1 million for the fund for the operating costs associated with qualifying farms providing local, Maryland products to food assistance organizations.

The Maryland Food Bank would not be able to feed the 1 in 3 Marylanders who are at risk of food insecurity without a strong local food system, and the foundation of our food system is the farms and farmers located throughout the state. Local farms and our relationships with farmers are extremely valuable (and have been particularly beneficial since the start of our Farm to Food Bank Program in 2010) and necessary to ensure that food insecure Marylanders and their families are able to regularly access nutritious produce and other agricultural products. Through our Farm to Food Bank Program, we contract grow with, glean from, and accept donations from local farms whose products go directly into food insecure communities through our network of almost 800 partner organizations and 1,200 distribution sites all across the state.

The Maryland Food Bank is very supportive of efforts that strengthen the local food system, and for SB 473 specifically we applaud the establishment of this Fund which will provide much needed opportunities for financial support for farms, including those that help support the work of the Maryland Food Bank by providing local products we can distribute to food insecure communities statewide. As this is such needed investment in our local farm partners, the Maryland Food Bank believes this funding opportunity should benefit as many farms throughout the state as feasible under the MFARM program. Strengthening our local food system and ensuring that our partners, including local farms, have the resources they need to continue their operations and support the Maryland Food Bank is a top priority of ours.

SB 473 helps achieve this as a solid first step, yet we'd ask that as many of our local farms be eligible for funding like this as possible. Many of our farm partners may be smaller, less resourced, or have very little financial flexibility, and maximizing access to grant funding such as this for their and as many farms as possible under the MFARM program access is paramount in ensuring equity in our local food system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report after amendment on SB 473.