



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

DATE: February 5, 2025

BILL NUMBER: SB 240/HB 262

SHORT TITLE: Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and
Young Farmers

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

This legislation alters the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission by eliminating certain seats and adding seats that will provide broader representation across the industry. The bill also establishes a Committee on Young Farmers.

The 31-member Maryland Agricultural Commission (The Ag Commission) serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Agriculture, comprised of Governor-appointed members in industry-specific seats to bring key voices to the table and advance the industry through the initiatives of the Department.

Over the past 63 years the Ag Commission has kept its finger on the pulse of agriculture in Maryland and carried out its charge through the establishment of standing committees focused on key issues of the time, including budgets, legislation, pollution, livestock and wetlands. These committees empowered the Commission to leverage the expertise of its appointed members and make policy recommendations regulating pesticides, poultry and livestock inspection, farmland assessment, and dozens of other State and Federal legislative proposals to ensure that the voice of the farmer was prioritized.

The 2024 Strategic Plan for the Maryland Agricultural Commission outlined a framework for the Commission to consider as it works to advance Maryland agriculture. Working committees were established and The Commission moved to adopt the Young Farmers Advisory Board as a standing Committee on Young Farmers with leadership from a newly established Young Farmer seat.

Members of the Commission voted in support of the strategic plan to make the following alterations to the membership:

- Expand the Agritourism seat to Value Added Agriculture
- Amend the Horse Breeding seat to represent the entire Equine industry
- Clarify the horticulture seat to focus on fruit production which will be a sister seat to the vegetable producer,
- Modify the Nursery seat to Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse
- Remove duplicative Poultry, Dairy, Nursery, and Related Agricultural Service seats, and the longstanding Tobacco Grower seat,
- Addition of seats for Controlled Environmental Agriculture, Urban & Small Farm Sector, Historically Underserved Farmers, Young Farmer, Veteran Farmers, and New & Beginning Farmers

MDA would like to offer a technical amendment. Currently the statute for MALPF requires that one member from the Young Farmers Advisory Board serve on its Board of Directors. The amendment would specify that a representative of the Young Farmers Committee from The Ag Commission will serve on the Board.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration and request a favorable report on HB 262.

If you have additional questions, please contact Rachel Jones, Director of Government Relations, at rachel.jones2@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.