



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Agriculture | Maryland's Leading
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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

DATE: January 24, 2025

BILL NUMBER: HB 9

SHORT TITLE: Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) has programs and reporting requirements that address the goals in this legislation. MDA is a co-vice chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) and works closely with the Maryland Department of Emergency Management which houses FSRC.

The MDA programs which overlap with the goals of FSRC include the following:

Agriculture and Seafood Marketing Office: the mission of the Marketing Office is to increase market share for Maryland agricultural and seafood products and identify business opportunities for farmers, niche food processors and seafood companies. The Marketing Office routinely does this through multiple channels: wholesale, direct market, institutional and international. This is reported through the Office's MFRs annually. The Office develops an annual marketing plan for Maryland agriculture and seafood products. Seafood's marketing plan is developed and approved by the Seafood Marketing Advisory Commission. Agriculture marketing plan is primarily funded through federal funds which include strategies submitted to a review committee for the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant for final approval.

The Certified Local Farm and Fish Program (CLFF) encourages state agencies, including public four-year universities, to achieve an overall goal of purchasing 20% of their food from Certified Local Farm and Fish Directory per Agriculture Article, §2-103; State Finance and Procurement Article, §14-701 14-707. The purpose of the program is to increase economic opportunity and participation of qualified Maryland farms in State government procurement. State agencies and universities shall report on purchasing from providers listed in the Certified Local Farm and Fish Directory. In accordance with §2-1257 of the State Government Article on Program Implementation and Participation, 2023 Chapter 576 states that the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) shall submit a consolidated report to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment and the House Health and Government Operations Committee by December 31 of every year.

The CLFF report does not require reporting on local food procurement from Maryland public schools, which receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Childhood Nutrition Programs. The Jane Lawton Farm to School program per Agriculture Article § 10-1601 mandates a local food in school meals report. Due to limited state resources to create such a report, MDA leverages the information from the USDA Farm to School Census. USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the USDA Farm to School Program to support and promote the use of local foods in Child Nutrition Programs. The USDA Farm to School Census is conducted periodically to assess the farm to school activities in the state.

With the establishment of a Value Added Agricultural (VAA) Specialist in 2023, MDA has developed programming and initiatives to support and grow expanding access to value-added opportunities for Maryland farms. Offering services through various regulatory frameworks, MDA also collaborates with fellow State Agencies and industry partners to identify and improve regulatory hurdles for local farms and businesses.

MDA has an USDA cooperative agreement for \$3.8 million dollars to implement the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program. The purpose of the program is to build resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, provide more and better markets to small farms and food businesses, support the development of value-added products for consumers, encourage fair prices and fair wages, and establish new and safe job opportunities. There was over \$18 million in requested funding from 50 projects. A competitive grant and review process was created. Twenty-five projects are currently under review from USDA for final approval.

The MDA thanks the Committee for your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 9.

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