



February 3, 2025

To: Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee.  
From: J. Kelly Lewis, Chairman Maryland Agricultural Commission  
Re: House Bill 262 – Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers

I am the Nursery representative on the Maryland Agricultural Commission, and I am very pleased to serve as Chairman of the Commission. Professionally I am the General Manager and Partner at Ruppert Nurseries. We are a 900 acre farm in Montgomery County Maryland. I appreciate the opportunity to voice support on my own personal behalf for House Bill 262.

The Commission is charged with advising the Secretary of Agriculture and has a long history of promoting Maryland agricultural industries and reviewing legislation for its impact on the future of Maryland agriculture. Also, since its inception in 1961, the Commission has a history of adjusting to the ever-changing world of agriculture in the state of Maryland. Currently the Commission has 31 Governor-appointed members who represent the incredibly wide range of agricultural industries within the state.

In March of 2024 a draft of the Commission strategic plan was introduced and modified at each Commission meeting until it was unanimously adopted in June of 2024. This plan made nomenclature changes to Commission seats to better match the current state of agriculture in the state. Expanding Agritourism to include Value Added Agriculture, pairing the Horse Breeding industry with the entire Equine industry, matching Fruit Production with Vegetable producers, and expanding Nursery to include Landscape and Greenhouse. Also duplicated seats were removed to ensure equal representation of all industries and the long vacant Tobacco grower seat was removed. New seats were added to include industries like Urban and Small Farmers, historically underserved Farmers, Veteran Farmers and New and Beginning Farmers.

We believe the adoption of House Bill 262 will allow the Commission to focus on and impact the key priorities that impact Maryland Agriculture. Our new committee structure allows Commission members to focus on the priorities that best match their experience and expertise in a smaller more nimble group. Ideas and strategies are then presented to and adopted by the full Commission.

Also proposed is the Adoption of the Young Farmers Board into the Maryland Agricultural Commission ensuring the connection of the next generation of Farmers with the current generation and giving the future of Maryland Agriculture a voice that will help shape our Agriculture for these future Farmers.

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Thank you for your consideration of the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Kelly Lewis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J. Kelly Lewis  
General Manager/Partner  
Ruppert Nurseries Inc.