



House Bill 1511: Natural Resources –  
Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund –  
Establishment  
Urging an Unfavorable Report

The University of Maryland Extension (UME) supports farms across the state and our faculty and staff have seen firsthand that wildlife damage is a serious problem for farmers statewide. However, House Bill 1511 requires that “The damage amount is determined by an Extension agent of the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.” UME agents would be required to investigate every farmer claim submitted to the program proposed in HB 1511, including making many field visits for damage verification and loss estimates. This is not part of the mission of Extension, to assess crop damage from wildlife or from other acts of nature, nor is there funding attached to the bill to pay for faculty and staff to do this work.

According to the 2022 USDA Agricultural Census, Maryland has 12,550 farms with over 1.4 million acres in field crops. Assuming all farmers have deer damage and 10% of them submit reimbursement requests to the fund, the county Extension agents would need to conduct roughly 1,255 farm visits during the crop production season, their busiest time of year. An average farm visit takes about four hours, depending on travel time, ease of access to a field, and the location of the damaged area in the field. The Extension agents estimate this level of support for the program would require them to spend four to eight weeks per year conducting this work full-time, which is not currently part of their job responsibilities. The Extension agents would need to significantly reduce research, education programming, and consulting services for farmers on disease, pest, and weed management problems for crops during the growing season to accommodate the Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund work. The Extension agents conduct much of their regular consulting work by telephone, text, and email for efficiency, only making field visits if absolutely necessary to solve a problem.

In addition, the UME statewide wildlife Extension agent would need to allocate time to coordinate this statewide effort. Additional administrative support would be needed to manage field visit assignments, information flow, and recordkeeping associated with the estimated 1,255 inspections for the program.

Based on 1,255 inspections, it is estimated that the cost to fulfill the requirements of the program is \$2,659,228 over five years. This encompasses the salaries, benefits, travel, and supplies necessary to conduct the program for a small fraction of Maryland farms. No funds have been included in UME’s proposed operating or capital budget in anticipation of this legislation. The program would take away from the UME’s ability to serve the farming community during the most active time of the year, the growing season. Certified crop insurance adjusters conduct this work regularly and would be a better option to provide this service.

Given the lack of funding and scope of the work in this bill, we must respectfully urge an unfavorable report on HB1511.

Darren Jarboe, Ph.D., M.B.A.  
Assistant Director and Program Leader  
University of Maryland Extension  
[301-405-6935](tel:301-405-6935)  
[jarboe@umd.edu](mailto:jarboe@umd.edu)