



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 257 - NATURAL RESOURCES - FOOD FORESTS AND FORAGING PROGRAM - ESTABLISHMENT

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

JANUARY 29, 2025

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Food forests—whether cultivated or wild—are areas that have food-bearing trees and plants, such as nut trees and berry bushes. A food forest combines the same layers found in a natural forest: root crops, ground covers, herbs, perennials, shrubs, vines, small trees, mid-size trees, and canopy trees.¹ These layers create a rich, thriving, and resilient ecosystem that provides nutritious food for humans and wildlife.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has already piloted a Food Forest concept by planting its Edible Trail in White Marsh Park near Centreville and behind the City of Brunswick Food Bank in Frederick County.² However, it is currently illegal to forage on state land.

This bill will:

- Direct the Department of Natural Resources to establish designated food forests on state property. These can either be cultivated food forests or areas where wild food grows that can be foraged.
- Establish a foraging permit system. Similar to a hunting permit, a foraging permit would allow individuals to forage within designated food forest areas. Fees would be charged for foraging permits, with waivers for individuals demonstrating financial need.
- Require revenue from permit fees to be designated to plant and maintain food forests.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 257.

¹ <https://www.foodforestcollective.org/about-community-food-forests>

² <https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2024/11/04/food-forests-bring-fruit-harvests-and-deeper-connections-to-land/>