



FOOD SERVICES

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Maryland General Assembly
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 31, 2025

Dear Delegate Pena-Melnyk and Committee Members,

I am writing to you in support of HB 56 Procurement of Local Foods. This bill will allow MSDE to have the ability to procure local foods which will be a benefit for the smaller school districts who do not have the operational funds to retain a procurement officer. There are many factors that hinder farm to school purchases with one major hurdle...the procurement process. Allowing MSDE to procure local food contracts will cut out much of the red tape and get more locally sourced foods in our schools. This not only is a benefit to our students to have more nutritionally dense foods but will also benefit our local farmers and waterman economically.

The strain in our food system was quite evident during the pandemic when the supply chain was disrupted. It is obvious that the state of Maryland and the United States as a whole is not food resilient. Increasing our purchases of locally sourced food for the school system will allow our farmers to increase their table crop production. In the state of Maryland currently only 4% of our farmers grow produce. We need to create a more resilient Maryland and to give our farmers contracts to grow food they know there is a market to support. The other piece of this is we need to make it easier to procure from local processors of Blue Catfish. A market creation is necessary to help eradicate this invasive but delicious and nutritious protein.

The farm/local foods to school experience needs to be less cumbersome for the food service departments and the farmers. It is our responsibility to provide the best supply of food we can to our students. I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 177 to support our farmers and our students. There is no fiscal note tied to this request and it will resolve some of the burden of farm to school programs in particular small school districts.

Please feel free to reach out if you would like more information of how this request will benefit the school system, farmers and students.

Sincerely,
AB Brewster

Beth Brewster
Supervisor of Food Services