



Maryland Farm Bureau

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January 31, 2024

To: House Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of HB0056 - Procurement - State Department of Education - Control Authority - Local Food Purchasing**

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 Farm Bureau families in Maryland, I am writing in support of HB0056, which seeks to strengthen Farm to School programs across Maryland by improving procurement processes and fostering connections between local farmers, school systems, and the community.

Farm to School programs have proven to be transformative for students, small farmers, and local communities. These programs enable students to gain access to fresh, healthy, and locally sourced foods, which supports their academic success and long-term health. Small farmers benefit from new, stable financial opportunities by selling directly to schools, which helps sustain their businesses and livelihoods. Meanwhile, communities experience positive impacts, including healthier children, increased job opportunities, and a stronger, more resilient local economy.

However, the current procurement processes create significant barriers for small farmers and food producers. Many are unable to participate fully due to the complexity of engaging individually with multiple school systems. This bill addresses these challenges by allowing the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to establish “master contracts” with local farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors, and other local food businesses. These contracts streamline procurement processes, enabling school systems to purchase easily from these agreements while creating more opportunities for small and local producers. Additionally, the bill includes Certified Chesapeake Invasive Species in the procurement scope, with a specific focus on Blue Catfish. This initiative will not only introduce a nutritious food source into school

meals but also contribute to reducing the presence of this invasive species in the Chesapeake Bay, thereby supporting environmental sustainability.

By supporting this legislation, Maryland will enhance the effectiveness of Farm to School programs, provide critical support to small businesses, and promote healthier and more sustainable communities.

Maryland Farm Bureau Supports HB0056

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough", is written over a horizontal line.

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please contact Tyler Hough at though@marylandfb.org with any questions