



February 14, 2025

**Testimony in Support of HB0907
Property Tax Credit - Urban Agricultural Property – Alterations**

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cristina Berthelot, and I serve as the External Relations and Development Coordinator for the Maryland Market Money program within the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. Our mission is to support farms, farmers, and the future of agriculture by strengthening local food systems, and expanding food access for all Marylanders, particularly those facing economic barriers to fresh, locally grown food.

I want to thank Delegate Roberson for sponsoring this important bill. Urban agriculture is a lifeline for many communities across Maryland, increasing access to fresh, healthy, nutrient-dense, and culturally appropriate food in areas where grocery stores are scarce. Urban farms not only sell their products directly to consumers but also play a critical role in food assistance efforts—donating or selling produce to food banks, community fridges, and other hunger relief organizations. They are key partners in addressing food insecurity while also creating jobs, training opportunities, and spaces for community engagement.

By reducing financial burdens on urban farmers, HB0907 ensures they can continue this essential work. Many of these farms serve Maryland Market Money participants, who rely on farmers markets and farm stands to access fresh food using federal nutrition benefits. Expanding this tax credit will help sustain and grow urban farms, increasing food security across the state.

In addition to food access, urban farms serve as incubators for beginning farmers, offering hands-on experience and a pathway into agriculture without the prohibitive costs of large-scale farmland. SMADC is committed to supporting these emerging farmers through initiatives like Maryland FarmLINK, which provides resources, technical assistance, and mentorship. Expanding this tax credit would directly benefit beginning farmers by reducing operational costs and making urban farming a more viable and sustainable career path.

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Urban farms also contribute to environmental sustainability by maximizing land use efficiency and utilizing innovative growing methods such as controlled environment agriculture, hydroponics, and small-scale, high-yield production. These techniques reduce food miles, strengthen local food resilience, and align with Maryland's broader sustainability goals.

While the original legislation allowing jurisdictions to offer an urban agriculture property tax credit was a step in the right direction, barriers remain that prevent many urban farmers from receiving this essential support. Several urban farms are ineligible due to restrictions like parcel size and location in Priority Funding Areas. These limitations disproportionately impact urban growers, who often farm on repurposed lots or use innovative methods instead of expansive rural landscapes. By removing these restrictions, HB0907 ensures that more urban farms qualify for this tax credit—supporting the farmers already doing the critical work of increasing food access in Maryland's most food-insecure communities.

Additionally, the original bill was designed for soil-based farming, overlooking the growing field of Controlled Environmental Agriculture (CEA). Many innovative urban farmers are using hydroponics, aquaponics, and other sustainable methods to produce fresh, locally grown food in urban settings. These farmers should also be eligible for this tax credit, as they are an essential part of our urban food system.

By passing HB0907, Maryland can further support urban farmers who are working tirelessly to ensure that all Marylanders—regardless of income or zip code—have access to fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food. Expanding this tax credit will not only help sustain and grow urban agriculture but also reinforce our state's commitment to food justice, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

I appreciate your time and consideration and urge the Committee to give HB0907 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

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