



**Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation Position Statement
House Bill 972 – Maryland Fair and Agricultural Education Promise Fund –
Establishment (Charles J. Otto Agricultural Education Promise Act)**

Date: March 25, 2026

Favorable

Submitted to: Education, Energy & Environment Committee

Submitted by: Susanne Richards, Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation
P.O. Box 536, Havre de Grace, MD 21078 – www.maefonline.com

Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation strongly supports HB972 and appreciates the opportunity to carry on the legacy of Del. Charles J. Otto.

In 15 years in the House of Delegates, Del. Otto represented his district, the Eastern Shore, rural Maryland and our state's agricultural community with distinction.

Many of you were friends with him. Like you, I counted Del. Otto as a friend: We met in the late 1990s when he served on the Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board and thanks to our mutual careers in agriculture, continued to cross paths over the following decades. His friendship, knowledge, humor and statesmanship were an asset to all of us.

Del. Otto's legacy of service began before his first election. At Washington High School in Princess Anne, he was a member of the FFA chapter and ultimately served as the State FFA Vice President in 1982-83.

Maryland FFA is a key component of the ideal agricultural education experience, bringing personal, leadership and career development opportunities to members to augment their classroom instruction and supervised agricultural experiences (SAE). There is no doubt that the leadership skills he learned in Maryland FFA served him for the rest of his life. You will see, in the Maryland FFA officers and members who testify on behalf of this bill, both poise and passion that comes from their experiences in FFA.

MAEF has been a proud partner with Maryland FFA Agriculture for more than two decades. In addition to working with FFA, MAEF staff provide professional development opportunities for agriculture teachers by working with the Maryland Agriculture Teachers Association, mentoring and assistance for new agriculture educators setting up their first classrooms, representation at the Maryland State

Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Division and Program Advisory Committees, and helped link industry needs with the newly updated program standards. MAEF also supports agricultural career exploration in our middle schools, public libraries and communities and brings our four Mobile Science Labs to approximately 125 elementary schools each year, introducing hands-on science within the context of agriculture to students. We work with the Maryland Envirothon, LEAD Maryland, Future Harvest, the Outdoor Learning Partnership, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Farm Bureau, the University of Maryland, Maryland 4-H, our commodity groups and many others to provide leadership and programming from the youngest learners to post-secondary levels.

Agriculture and our resource-based industries in Maryland account for more than \$30.2 billion in economic activity, 108,461 supported jobs and more than \$1.1 billion in State and Local tax revenue. (Equine adds even more.) While this is impressive, agriculture's contributions to our economy, environment and quality of life are equally impressive:

- Stewards and preserves productive open spaces.
- Strengthens our rural economy through entrepreneurship.
- Contributes significantly to Maryland's tax base through property taxes.
- Provides a reliable local supply of food.
- Supports habitat for Maryland wildlife while actively managing lands for improved water quality and mitigation of invasive species and nuisance weeds.

Successfully stewarding agriculture's long-term sustainability requires essential supports, including a workforce pipeline, appropriate policies and a commitment from state leadership.

Your support for HB972 builds upon Del. Otto's legacy of support for Maryland agriculture and its future. Thank you for your favorable consideration.