

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Chris Miller, and I am submitting testimony in support of House Bill 1071 on behalf of Lone Oak Farm, a working agricultural operation located in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Lone Oak Farm is an active farm that produces grain crops on-site and also partners with other local farms to source agricultural products. These crops are processed through our on-farm agricultural facilities, including our farm malt house, brewery (Lone Oak Farm Brewing Company), and distillery (Fallen Oak Distilling). In addition to production agriculture, we conduct agritourism activities that support the financial sustainability of farming operations and help connect the public to local agriculture.

My family and I live on the farm, and our businesses are locally owned and family operated, not private equity backed corporations. The decisions we make directly affect our ability to keep farmland in agriculture for the next generation. The activities we have developed are not separate from agriculture; they are what allow us to remain a working farm and preserve open space in Montgomery County.

We appreciate the State's goals of environmental protection and water quality, and farmers depend on healthy soil and clean water more than anyone. Lone Oak Farm is committed to responsible stewardship of our land and natural resources.

However, the current regulatory framework often applies stormwater standards developed for urban and commercial land development directly to agricultural operations, even when the land remains in agricultural use. This creates significant challenges and unintended consequences for farms without necessarily improving environmental outcomes. In practice, agricultural activities — including modern value-added agriculture — are frequently treated as “land development,” which creates regulatory confusion and barriers for farmers.

House Bill 1071 provides important clarity and balance by recognizing the unique characteristics of agricultural land while maintaining environmental protections.

Recognition of Modern Agricultural Operations

Agriculture has evolved significantly, and farms increasingly rely on value-added processing, on-farm manufacturing, storage, agritourism, and direct-to-consumer sales to remain economically viable. These activities should be clearly recognized as agricultural and accessory agricultural uses when they are directly tied to farm production.

Facilities such as malt houses, breweries, distilleries using farm-grown products, and associated agricultural business spaces should not automatically be treated as commercial land development when they are integral to agricultural operations. The provisions in HB1071 directing the State to define agriculture and accessory uses as distinct from commercial development are an important step toward providing that clarity.

Role of Soil Conservation Districts

Soil Conservation Districts have decades of experience working with agricultural operations and are best positioned to guide stormwater compliance on farmland. HB1071 appropriately requires that local stormwater programs enforce regulations on agricultural land with the advice and consent of the local Soil Conservation District. This provision is critical to ensuring that enforcement decisions are informed by agricultural expertise and practical on-the-ground knowledge.

Flexibility for Agricultural Landscapes

Agricultural properties function very differently from urban or suburban development. Farms frequently utilize grass or reinforced turf areas for seasonal or intermittent parking associated with agricultural operations and agritourism. Treating these areas as permanently impervious surfaces can create unintended incentives to install asphalt, which increases runoff and environmental impact. Allowing flexibility in enforcement, as contemplated in HB1071, supports more environmentally appropriate solutions.

Recognition of Agricultural Land as a Stormwater Resource

Agricultural properties typically contain large pervious areas, including cropland, pasture, and conservation areas, which naturally infiltrate and treat stormwater. Policies that recognize these characteristics can produce better environmental outcomes while reducing unnecessary costs.

Supporting the Economic Viability of Family Farms

Agriculture in Maryland faces increasing economic pressure, and farms must diversify to remain viable. Regulations that unintentionally treat farms as commercial development projects can discourage reinvestment in agricultural operations and accelerate farmland loss. Modern agricultural operations like ours — where crops are grown, processed, and sold locally — represent the future of sustainable agriculture in Maryland.

HB1071 does not remove environmental protections. Rather, it ensures that stormwater regulations are applied appropriately to agricultural landscapes with the benefit of agricultural expertise and reasonable flexibility.

In closing, Lone Oak Farm is committed to soil health, water quality protection, and responsible land stewardship. We believe House Bill 1071 will help preserve working farms, protect rural economies, and maintain agricultural land for future generations while still achieving environmental protection goals.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input and welcome continued collaboration with the State of Maryland on solutions that protect both the environment and the long-term viability of farming.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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