



Maryland Farm Bureau

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February 11, 2026

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of HB429 On-Farm Organics & Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Programs**

On behalf of the nearly 7,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I respectfully submit this written testimony in support of HB429 On-Farm Organics & Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Programs. This legislation establishes three coordinated grant programs that will strengthen Maryland's agricultural economy, expand food waste reduction efforts, and advance science-based composting and soil health practices across the state. HB 429 creates the On-Farm Organics Diversion and Recycling Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture to support farmers, urban farmers, agricultural producers, soil conservation districts, and nonprofit partners in developing and implementing on-farm organics recycling, compost use, wasted food prevention, and food rescue activities. It also creates the Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Program and the County Wasted Food Reduction Block Grant Program within the Maryland Department of the Environment, providing essential funding for infrastructure, education, and technical assistance that reduce, rescue, and divert wasted food at the state and county level. These programs prioritize projects that provide direct, meaningful, and assured community benefits; reduce and rescue wasted food; and promote compost that meets Maryland's "general use" standard and the U.S. Composting Council's Seal of Testing Assurance, ensuring high-quality, minimally contaminated materials that protect farm soils and public trust.

This legislation aligns with long-standing agricultural policy principles supporting value-added on-farm enterprises, soil conservation, and responsible nutrient management. The Maryland Farm Bureau policy book affirms farmers' right to produce mulch and compost from both on-farm and off-farm sources and recognizes the importance of science-based best management practices that protect the environment while sustaining agricultural viability. HB 429 advances these goals by enabling farmers to invest in clean, source-separated composting systems, on-farm processing improvements, and workforce capacity tied directly to soil health and food waste reduction outcomes. Furthermore, MDFB supports urban farming, infrastructure grants for urban agriculture, and programs that strengthen Maryland's food systems through increased local sourcing and food rescue. HB 429's inclusion of urban farmers and agricultural producers, alongside its emphasis on food rescue and community-based benefits, reinforces those priorities and strengthens the connection between Maryland agriculture and the communities it serves.

The county block grants established under the bill will help ensure that local governments can invest in practical, shovel-ready solutions such as community drop-off sites, rural composting pads, and educational programs that support farmers and residents alike. These investments complement existing conservation programs and allow counties to collaborate with soil conservation districts and agricultural stakeholders to maximize waste diversion while improving soil structure, nutrient retention, and water quality. The bill also includes straightforward application processes and mechanisms to support



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applicants with limited resources or language barriers, making the program usable for small and mid-sized farm operations that often lack access to competitive grant funds. Taken together, HB 429 offers voluntary, incentive-based tools that expand opportunity without imposing new regulatory burdens, ensuring that farmers retain flexibility while gaining access to the resources necessary to enhance economic resilience.

House Bill 429 supports Maryland farmers, reinforces science-driven conservation principles, strengthens local food systems, and provides counties with targeted, flexible funding to reduce wasted food while expanding the supply of high-quality compost. These outcomes directly benefit both agricultural producers and Maryland communities. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 429.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Hough". The signature is written over a horizontal line that extends to the left and then curves upwards and to the right.

Tyler Hough

Director of Government Relations

Please reach out to Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions