



Welcome back to **The Hotline!** Every Friday during session, we'll keep you informed about crucial hearings and bills affecting Maryland's agriculture. Stay tuned to find out how you can help us ***strengthen and grow agriculture in Maryland!***

WHAT WE'RE WORKING ON

MDFB Testifies in House of Delegates: Maryland Farm Bureau was represented by our **Young Farmers & Ranchers Chair, Greg Dell**, during a **House Committee on Environment and Transportation** hearing on the state of Maryland agriculture. Watch Greg's opening statement [here!](#)

Did you hear? Philip Gruber of [Lancaster Farming](#) reports that, "**Property tax increases and solar development are top issues** putting pressure on Maryland's ag industry. Representatives from the state's farm organizations raised their concerns Jan. 17 during the House Environment and Transportation Committee's annual state of agriculture hearing."

Don't forget: Our **Day in Annapolis** is on **February 7th**. Have you registered yet? You can do so by clicking [here!](#)

WHAT WE'RE MONITORING

SB 0094/HB 0187: Correctional Services - Inmate Employment - Agricultural Work Sponsored by Delegate Pasteur | House Hearing: 1/23/24 at 1:00 PM

This bill repeals the authority of the Division of Corrections to arrange for inmates not being used by the State Highway Administration to be employed in agricultural work.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: **Oppose**

We oppose SB0187/HB0094 as it goes against our policy supporting inmates' involvement with agricultural work. This bill would repeal the ability for inmates to be involved in any agricultural work programs.

SB 0235/HB 0057: Prescription Drug Monitoring Program - Dispensers - Veterinarians Sponsored by Senator Beidle | Senate Hearing: 1/24/24 at 1:30 PM

Altering the definition of "dispenser" for purposes of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program to include certain licensed veterinarians when dispensing controlled substances for animals. Does not include any requirements to disclose monitoring data to veterinarians.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: Oppose

We oppose SB0235/HB0057 for the extra monitoring steps it puts on veterinarians. The majority of other states exempt veterinarians from this monitoring program. These extra steps make it difficult for rural practitioners to comply with the mandate, impacting the sustainability of their practices. Rural practitioners who cannot keep up with the mandate will have a higher likelihood of being driven out of the industry, worsening our veterinary care shortage.

SB0193/HB0357: Agriculture - Confinement of Egg-Laying Hens in Commercial Egg Production - Prohibitions

Sponsored by Senator Lewis Young | Senate Hearing: 1/23/24 at 1:00 PM

Prohibiting farms from knowingly confining egg-laying hens in an enclosure, subject to certain exceptions. Also prohibits businesses or farmers from selling shell eggs or egg products under certain circumstances, and mandating certification verifying that shell eggs and egg products are produced in a certain manner before sale.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: Oppose

We strongly oppose SB0193/HB0357 for its negative impact on shell egg producers and mandating their costly conversion to cage-free systems. The economic viability of going cage free and the biosecurity concerns of HPAI will lead this bill to render more harm than good. With the strenuous standards in this bill, it is a threat to the viability of egg layer operations in Maryland. MDFB policy states that "*We strongly oppose any ban of the use of cages in layer operations.*"

SB 0196: Soil Conservation Districts - Small Ponds - Plan Review

Fees Sponsored by Senator Gallion | Senate Hearing: 1/23/24 at 1:00 PM

Authorizing a soil conservation district to recommend a fee system to cover the cost of reviewing plans for small ponds; establishing that any fees collected shall be supplemental to county and state funds.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: Support

We support SB0196 to help our local conservation districts. Soil health is important to all farmers and reviewing plans for small ponds will ensure the system's efficiency to provide reliable information to the farmer. Funds collected under the Act could support the budget and provide pathways for more financial support to the agricultural community. The fees in this bill are not the responsibility of the farmer, but that of the party that constructed the pond.

SB 290: Certified Local Farm and Fish Program - Annual Waiver Reports – Alterations Sponsored by Senator Feldman | Senate Hearing: 1/23/24 at 1:00 PM

Altering the annual deadline, from July 31 to December 31, for the Office for the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program to submit to the Board of Public Works (BPW) a report of waivers requested and waivers granted under the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program; and altering the annual deadline, from October 1 to February 1, for the BPW to submit to standing committees a copy of a record of information regarding any waivers requested under the Program.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: Support

Maryland Farm Bureau supports SB290. This bill aims to streamline the waiver process for state agencies and universities, and make it more efficient by streamlining the reporting deadlines.

SB 0278/HB 0234: Department of Agriculture - Licensing, Registration, Fees and Penalties, and Regulation

Sponsored by Senator Feldman | Senate Hearing: 1/23/24 at 1:00 PM | House Hearing: 2/7/24 at 2:30 PM

Altering and establishing renewal and reinstatement processes for horse establishment licenses; establishing certain duties and administrative penalties with respect to beekeeping activities; altering the administrative penalty structure for certain violations related to nutrient management plans; and altering the renewal process and fee structure for the registration of weights and measures.

Maryland Farm Bureau's Position: No Position

We do not take a position on this bill as it stands. It's worth noting for awareness of possible changes to the nutrient management program.

WHAT THEY'RE WORKING ON

Governor Moore Releases FY 2025 Budget Proposal: "This budget makes our values very clear in both what we invest and how we invest," says Governor Moore. [More info](#) from Department of Budget and Management.

Minority Response: "Following Gov. Wes Moore revealing his \$63.1 billion state budget proposal on Wednesday, **Del. Nino Mangione**, R-Baltimore County, told [FOX45 News](#) he is going to introduce legislation to protect Maryland taxpayers from increases in fees and taxes."

Committee Update: As you saw earlier, Greg Dell participated in a **House Environment and Transportation Committee** hearing on the state of agriculture. He was also joined by many of our ag stakeholder partners, watch their statements and the full hearing by clicking [here](#).

WHAT WE'RE MESSAGING ON

At the House Committee Hearing, the issue of **solar siting on agricultural land** was the most discussed. Here are the facts:

- **MDFB supports alternative energy** sources, *including solar*.
 - Many of our farmers even utilize solar panels on their operations, on buildings and less fruitful soil.
- However, given the nationwide trend of [available farmland disappearing](#), **we oppose solar facilities being built on useful farmland**.
 - Specifically, on coveted and finite **class 1 and 2 agricultural soils**.
- **There are no guarantees** that farmland can be returned to agricultural use after the solar energy contracts expire.
- Our state [preserves thousands of acres](#) of family-owned farmland so their operations can continue into the future.
 - Let's not undo the work of this essential program by covering the ground that feeds our state. We believe there is a **mutually beneficial** way to reach our energy goals while preserving precious farmland.
- We encourage **publicly owned lands, brownfields, rooftops, parking lots and urban areas** to be utilized to assist with the clean energy goals **in lieu of farmland**.

Thank you for reading **The Hotline!** For questions about policy, contact MDFB's Director of Government Relations, Tyler Hough, at though@marylandfb.org. For questions relating to this publication, contact our Director of Communications, Jeb Burchick, at jburchick@marylandfb.org.

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MARYLAND FARM BUREAU®, INC. is a 501(c)(5) federation that serves as the united voice of Maryland farm families. Our organizational strength comes from the active participation of over 9,500 individual and family members who belong to the state's 23 local county Farm Bureau organizations. Since 1915, Maryland Farm Bureau has been committed to protecting and growing agriculture and preserving rural life. Maryland Farm Bureau is a proud member of the American Farm Bureau® Federation. For more information, visit www.mdfarmbureau.com