Testimony

Support House Bill 3

Health – Milk Products – Raw Milk – Consumer Owned Livestock

January 27, 2014

Future Harvest: A Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (CASA) respectfully requests a favorable report from the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Future Harvest – Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (CASA), which supports over 1700 farmers, landowners and stakeholders in the Chesapeake watershed, the majority of them in Maryland, strongly supports HB 3’s goal to provide dairy farmers new economic opportunities.

The Maryland Dairy Industry Oversight and Advisory Council 2010 and 2012 reports do a good job of documenting the continued decline in the number of dairy farms in the state. A 20 year trend that shows no sign of changing if we continue to rely on outdated dairy regulations and policies. Unfortunately, the recommendations contained in their report are woefully inadequate and miss the mark.

Additional state subsidies through the Maryland Dairy Farmer Emergency Trust Fund is not the answer. It is a bad use of public funds to invest in a failing, broken system without making concurrent substantive changes.

Promoting flavored milk in schools to increase consumption is not the answer. Their own report acknowledges that Maryland is a milk deficit state. We already consume more milk in the state than we produce.

Allowing Milk Haulers to transport even larger volumes of milk on Maryland roads is not the answer. It will only facilitate the import of more out-of-state milk instead of enhancing local production.
What Future Harvest – CASA is hearing from its farmer members is that they want more economic opportunities to sell directly to consumers who are seeking out raw milk. This is not THE answer to the dairy industry problems, but it is most definitely PART of the answer. Legalizing the sale of raw milk cow shares provides an additional revenue stream to help dairy farmers struggling with profitability. Consumer demand for raw milk is real. It is a premium product that commands premium prices. Moreover, the margins for the farmer are significant. There is no processor or distributor to share the proceeds with. Direct-to-consumer sales has made a huge difference for Maryland vegetable, fruit and livestock farmers. Even vineyards, distillers and breweries are expanding tasting rooms to capture this essential direct-to-consumer revenue stream. There is absolutely no reason to deny dairy farmers access to this business model.

Regarding the purported health risks associated with raw milk consumption, all I will say is that Maryland is in the minority of states on this one. Only 17 states outlaw the consumption of raw milk. There are no ongoing health crisis associated with raw milk in the other 33 states where it is legal in one form or another.

As President of Future Harvest – CASA and a farmer, the economic viability of Maryland’s sustainable farms is of paramount concern. I can personally attest to the endless challenges facing farmers trying to earn a living from the land. The hours are endless, the weather is always unpredictable and the financial rewards can be meager. The burgeoning interest in local foods is providing exciting new opportunities for our farmers as families across the state demand access to local, sustainably grown food. HB 3 can allow dairy farmers to take advantage of those opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration,

William Morrow

President, Future Harvest – Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture.