Support Senate Bill 278/ House Bill 576: Maryland Farms and Families Act

On behalf of Future Harvest CASA’s 700 members, I support this bill as it is not only important for providing low-income access to healthy, local food – but it also helps farmers’ bottom line (see below). This is a win-win piece of legislation that we fully support.

This bill would provide state funding to expand the Maryland Market Money program (MMM). MMM provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to $5/market visit, for purchases made using federal food assistance at participating farmers markets throughout Maryland. The program matches the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC); and Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) benefits.

Maryland Market Money is a program that ties Maryland together. MMM connects food-insecure Marylanders with quality, fresh, nutritious foods produced by Maryland farmers. The same program dollar simultaneously supports local farmers and low-income Maryland residents.

The Maryland Farms and Families Act would:

- Generate revenue for farmers and agricultural producers
  - Since 2013-2015, the MMM program generated $1,148,150 for over 400 farmers selling through Maryland farmers markets.
  - Every $1 of MMM results in $2.30 for farmers. $350,000 in state funds (70% of the requested annual state investment) would yield $800,000/year in farmer profit

- Channel federal dollars into the local Maryland economy
  - MMM incentivizes low-income Marylanders to utilize their federal food assistance directly with local farmers rather than chain stores owned by out-of-state entities
These federal funds therefore stay in Maryland, supporting our local agricultural economy.

- **Provides critical nutrition assistance**
  - 1 in 8 Marylanders lacks reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.
  - Low-income populations are at particular risk of poor nutrition, specifically fruit and vegetable consumption.
  - Federal nutrition benefits allotments are insufficient for affording an adequate diet. MMM increases the purchasing power of low-income households to access quality food.

- **Enable expansion into farmers markets statewide, particularly in rural and food desert communities**
  - State funds would support capacity building for farmers markets that do not currently have infrastructure to operate MMM.
  - This state investment would enable farmers markets throughout the state—particularly those in rural and food desert areas—to participate in and benefit from the program.

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