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#2: January 29, 2021

Dates to Remember:

February 3, 2021 - Legislative Update Webinar from Annapolis
This is free to all Farm Bureau members but [registration is required](#).

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Welcome to the second Hotline of the 2021 Maryland General Assembly session. This week we testified on several bills and focused on reviewing several hundred newly introduced bills. We are also proud to announce that Maryland Farm Bureau (MDFB) has finalized a lobbying contract with Cornerstone Government Affairs Group to use their services during the legislative session. The lead lobbyist from Cornerstone that will be assisting our Government Relations team is Mac Middleton. Most will remember Senator Middleton as the long-serving and distinguished Senator from Charles county. He is also a farmer and a true advocate for Maryland Agriculture. We are very lucky and excited to be working with Mac and the Cornerstone team this year.

We have another busy week coming up with several bill hearings and reviewing many more introduced bills. The House bill introduction deadline is February 5th and the Senate bill introduction deadline is February 8th so the legislators will be scrambling to introduce their final bills with the limited time left. Just a reminder, if you are interested in signing up to testify on a bill or submit written testimony, you will need to do this 2 days in advance of the bill hearing and between the hours of 10 AM and 3 PM. If you want to learn how to sign up for bill hearings to either submit written testimony or to testify orally, [watch this video tutorial found in this link](#). After watching this video, if you have issues, then reach out to Colby for additional assistance. We will not be able to sign you up this year because of the new system.

Here are next week's priority bills:

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

HB 497: Property Tax Credit - Urban Agricultural Property - Repeal of Repayment Requirement

Delegate Boyce, W&M at 1:30 PM in 130 HOB

This bill repeals a requirement that the owner of an urban agriculture property repay all property taxes that would have been imposed if the property tax credits had not been granted if the property ceases to be used for urban agricultural purposes. It applies to taxable years beginning after June 30, 2021.

Because of this claw-back clause, this tax credit program has very seldom been used as willing and qualified projects have been scared off due to the repayment mandate if they don't succeed. These projects are already risky and are tied to keeping expenses low as profit margins are low in food sales. If the farm isn't successful and has to close, they would not only lose their investment, but would be required to pay back any back taxes to boot. This repayment clause was put into the bill initially to deter land developers for using the tax credit while they worked to get the necessary permits to develop the property. There are other ways to prevent this from happening. This repayment requirement shouldn't be one of them.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support and encourage urban farming/agriculture.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 497

HB 577: Health and Welfare of H-2 Visa and Migrant Workers - COVID-19 Pandemic - Regulations (Healthy Farmworkers Act)

Delegate Stewart, ECM at 1:30 PM in 230 HOB

This bill would require the Secretary of Labor to adopt regulations, on or before October 1, 2021, relating to housing, accommodations, safety, health, rights, and welfare of H-2A and H-2B visa and migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This bill would put in state law requirements over and above the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the US Department of Labor. These restrictions would be almost impossible for a farm to adhere to and would most likely put them out of business due to not being allowed H-2A seasonal workers. In addition, MD Department of Labor doesn't have the manpower to inspect these operations in time to meet the limited timelines farmers have to apply for and receive H-2A visa workers. H-2A housing is already inspected annually.

The farm worker housing requirements to meet the COVID pandemic have already been created by CDC and are being adhered to by farmers in Maryland. This legislation is a solution looking for a problem and is not needed.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES HB 577

SB 76: Climate Crisis and Education Act

Senator Kramer, B&T at 1:00 PM in 3 West Miller

This bill establishes a Climate Crisis Initiative in the Department of the Environment for to establish a greenhouse gas reduction target of 60% from 2006 levels by 2030 and net-zero by 2045; establishes a Climate Crisis Council to develop a plan to reach the reduction targets and submit it to the General Assembly by December 31, 2022; requires a greenhouse gas pollution fee on all fossil fuels brought into the State for combustion in the State with \$340 million of those fees to be used to pay for the Kirwan education recommendations.

This bill goes over and above what the Maryland Commission on Climate Change is recommending. The negative economic impacts to Maryland citizens will be substantial. To make matters worse, the fees that would be collect through the proposed fuel tax wouldn't be used to cover the cost of transitioning to zero emission vehicles, but instead to pay for new Pre-K through 12 education program that has nothing to do with Climate Change.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We oppose the creation of a state carbon and/or Greenhouse Gas reduction tax/fee.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES SB 76

SB 407: Electricity – Net Energy Metering – Limit
Senator Kramer, FIN at 1:00 PM in 3 East Miller

This bill increases the state's net metering cap from 1,500 megawatts to 3,000 megawatts.

By increasing the net metering cap, this allows more opportunities for small-scale electric generating to exist. Projects like rooftop solar, on-farm solar, community solar and anaerobic manure digestion. The state has an in-state solar carve out of 14.5% of the energy used in Maryland. This far exceeds 1,500 megawatt net metering cap. Therefore if not raised, the state would be forced to install large-scale commercial solar to meet the 14.5% carve out.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support the use of on-farm wind and solar energy production to provide electric energy for the farm and to be sold to the energy grid.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 407

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

HB 472: Agriculture - Use of Glyphosate - Prohibition
Delegate Young, E&T at 1:30 PM in 250 HOB

This bill would ban the use of glyphosate (Round-Up) by anyone in the State on or after October 1, 2022.

There are multiple reasons on why this bill would be devastating to farmers in Maryland not to mention the impossibility of controlling noxious weeds and meeting the state's 2025 water quality goals. Not only has "real" science proved that Round-Up is one of the safest herbicides available, but the alternatives can be more toxic.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We urge keeping all federally labeled crop protection products legal in the state, counties, and municipalities.

Furthermore, we believe the use of pesticides should be regulated by available facts, not on emotional issues.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES HB 472

HB 508: COVID-19 Claim - Civil Immunity
Delegate Attar, JUD at 1:30 PM in 100 HOB

This bill would make it that if a business, government, non-profit, school or healthcare facility was abiding by federal, state, local statutes, rules, regulations, executive orders and agency orders related to COVID-19, they would be immune from civil liability for a COVID-19 claim, unless there is gross negligence or intentional wrongdoing.

Maryland agriculture is made up of thousands of small farm businesses. Many of these farms have moved into a direct to the consumer type of agriculture operation. One of the many concerns that farmers face during this COVID-19 pandemic is the possibility of being sued even if they were following all the guidelines. This bill would help address this concern and help small businesses feel more comfortable to open back up.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 508

SB 412: Consumer Protection - Right to Repair
Senator Hester, FIN at 1:00 PM in 3 East Miller

This bill requires an original equipment manufacturer, on fair and reasonable terms, to make available to an independent repair provider or owner of digital electronic equipment any documentation, parts, tools, or updates to information or embedded software. It also requires, as it applies to equipment that contains a security-related function, any documentation, tools, parts, or updates needed to reset the lock or function when disabled.

We will be offering an amendment to add some language to remove the Right-to-Tamper concerns by equipment dealers, but will continue to support the farmer's Right-to Repair.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support legislation requiring agricultural equipment manufacturers to make available the necessary documents, software, and information to allow independent shops and individuals to repair equipment.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 412 WITH AMENDMENT

Thursday, February 4, 2021

HB 569: Electricity - Net Energy Metering - Limit
Delegate Clippinger, ECM at 1:30 PM in 230 HOB

See bill summary for SB 407 that's being heard on Tuesday.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 569

HB 584: Public Utilities – Net Energy Metering
Delegate Watson, ECM at 1:30 PM in 230 HOB

This bill increases the maximum generation capacity of an electric generating system used by an eligible customer-generator for net metering to 5 megawatts. It also prohibits the Public Service Commission from prohibiting the construction or operation of multiple net metered solar generating facilities located on contiguous lots that are owned by a local government solely because the capacity of the combined net metering systems exceeds the 5 megawatt limit.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We oppose any additional increases to the solar carve out in the RPS unless projects are two megawatts or smaller.

FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Friday, February 5, 2021

HB 581: Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency
(Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)
Delegate D.E Davis, ECM at 11:00 AM in 230 HOB

This bill would require an essential employer to give a written statement regarding hazard pay paid to their essential workers for each pay period; require an essential employer to take actions related to occupational safety and health during an emergency; authorize an essential worker to refuse to fulfill a work responsibilities if the working conditions don't meet the requirements in this bill; prohibits an essential employer from retaliating or taking other adverse action against an essential worker or other worker if they refuse to work;

This bill would put in state law, requirements over and above the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the US Department of Labor. These restrictions would be almost impossible for a farm to adhere to and would most likely put them out of business. In addition, MD Department of Labor doesn't have the manpower to inspect these operations in time to meet the limited timelines farmers have to apply for and receive H-2A visa workers. H-2A housing is already inspected annually.

The farm worker housing requirements to meet COVID pandemic have already been created by CDC and are being adhered to in Maryland.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU OPPOSES HB 581

Maryland Farm Bureau members are urged to contact their legislators and members of the relevant committees in support of Farm Bureau's positions on the bills listed above. To contact legislators and follow important bills, visit Maryland Farm Bureau's [action center](#) and select "key legislation".

Committees & Room Numbers:

Senate: Budget & Taxation (B&T), 3 West Miller; Education, Health & Environmental Affairs (EHEA), 2 West Miller; Finance (FIN), 3 East Miller; Judicial Proceedings (JPR), 2

East Miller

House: Appropriations (APP), 120 HOB; Economic Matters (ECM), 230 HOB; Environment & Transportation (E&T), 250 HOB; Health & Government Operations (HGO), 240 HOB; Judiciary (JUD), 100 HOB; Ways & Means (W&M) 130 HOB

In Other Ag News

Maryland Value Added Producer Matching Grants Now Available From MARBIDCO

MARBIDCO has announced a grant funding opportunity to encourage Maryland's agricultural producers to engage in value-added activities and pursue financial support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Value Added Producer Grants Program (USDA-VAPG). The USDA-VAPG is a highly competitive nationwide grants program with approximately \$33 million available for distribution in 2021. These federal grant funds, which can range up to as much as \$250,000, can be used for planning (up to \$75,000) or working capital expenses (up to \$250,000) in accordance with USDA regulations. Eligible purposes include feasibility studies or business plans, working capital for producing and marketing value-added agricultural products, and for farm-based renewable energy projects. [Apply today.](#)

MFB Scholarships



The Maryland Farm Bureau is awarding five \$2,000 scholarships for the 2021-2022 academic year. Applicants must be current high school seniors with plans to start college autumn semester 2020, or may be current full-time college students at any accredited community college or four-year institution. Applicants or their parents/guardians must be members, in good standing, of the Maryland Farm Bureau to be eligible to apply. Applications are due March 15, 2021. [Apply today!](#)

2021 Virtual Fusion Conference

Save the Date for this year's FUSION Conference which will take place virtually beginning on the evening of Thursday, March 11th and conclude the evening of Saturday, March 13th. More details about the virtual event will be released soon so stay tuned for that information.

BGE Energizing Small Business Grants Program

BGE is pledging \$15 million to assist Maryland's small businesses with COVID-19 relief and recovery. Eligible businesses located in BGE's service area can apply for a \$20,000 BGE Energizing Small Business Grant. This grant program is part of BGE's comprehensive Customer Relief and Energy Infrastructure Investment Plan, designed to help the state's economic recovery from the pandemic. [More here.](#)

Grainger Key Message: Waste Reduction

Greener tomorrows start today. Cut the amount of waste you generate with our exclusive Grainger discounts on waste reduction supplies and save yourself some green, too.



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