

December 20, 2011

The Honorable Kevin Kamenetz
Baltimore County Executive
2014 Old Courthouse, Mezzanine
400 Washington Avenue
Towson, MD 21204

RE: Funding for Agricultural Land Preservation

Dear County Executive Kamenetz,

Baltimore County is blessed with a vibrant agricultural economy, excellent soils and abundant local markets. The Baltimore County Government has long recognized the importance of the agricultural economy and has taken many measures to support agriculture including complementary zoning, funding the Baltimore County Center for Maryland Agriculture, and establishing a goal of at least 80,000 acres of preserved agricultural land.

We understand that these are very difficult economic times and the County is faced with making tough choices for funding important services to the citizens of Baltimore County. For this reason approximately \$9.7 million dollars of budgeted appropriations for agricultural preservation easements was reallocated to other county programs. The General Fund reductions in the County's two Land Preservation projects, Agricultural Preservation and Rural Legacy, were as follows:

Agricultural Preservation:

FY11 - \$4,000,000

FY12 - \$1,800,000

Rural Legacy:

FY11 - \$2,610,000

FY12 - \$1,311,000

Total - \$9,721,000

Although we understand the fiscal constraints we are facing, we wish to express our support for continuing funding of land preservation programs, and the need to replace the \$9.7 million as the County's fiscal condition improves.

The undersigned organizations represent the groups that support land conservation and agriculture in the county. We feel that this is the optimum time to preserve additional land in the county. Land prices are low, and the county can preserve significant acres for less money. The County needs jobs and economic stability. Money invested in land preservation stays in the community as farmers use the funds to expand their operations, purchase additional land and hire additional workers. Throughout the country, taxpayers have consistently supported land preservation bond issues. Conserved land protects streams, improves water quality and supports smart growth.

Baltimore County is recognized as a state and national leader in land preservation. Because Baltimore County has done so many things right, we have been amazingly successful in obtaining funding for our land preservation programs. According to this year's proposed Capital Budget, the County has spent \$38 million in County Funds on preservation programs over the past 25 years.

Over that period the County has received \$39.5 million in Maryland Rural Legacy Funds, \$42 million in Maryland Agricultural Preservation Program Funds and \$4 million in Federal Funds for the preservation of our farmland. The dollars that Baltimore County has invested in land preservation have been matched two for one with State and Federal Funding. That's an impressive match by any measure. Those dollars will not be available if the County does not continue to fund land preservation.

We urge you to work to restore the funding that was reallocated from the land preservation programs. Additionally we encourage you to increase the funding for land preservation proposed in the current Capital Budget. The current proposal is for \$5 million for the two year bond authorization period. This was reduced from a \$6 million allocation in the 2008 budget. We would ask that you increase the 2012 bond request to a minimum of \$8 million, with a budget that increases to \$10 million in 2014.

Land preservation programs are extremely beneficial to the county. The money is invested in the county and creates jobs for local residents. Much of the funding comes from federal and state sources. Farms produce local healthy food. And right now the land is available at a reasonable cost. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in more detail in the future.

Sincerely,

Gail Ensor, Chair
Baltimore County Agricultural Land Preservation Board

Ric Bryant, Chair
Baltimore County Land Trust Alliance

Theaux Le Gardeur
Gunpowder Riverkeeper

Charlie Conklin, President
Gunpowder Valley Conservancy

Glen Elseroad, President

Hanover Road Association

Ned Halle, Vice-President
Land Preservation Trust

Scott Corey, President
Long Green Land Trust

James Constable, President
Manor Conservancy

Tony Marchione, Chairman
Maryland Agricultural Resource Council

Mike Pierce, President
North County Preservation

George Kelly, Chair
Piney Run Watershed Rural Legacy Area

Kristen Burger, President
Sparks-Glencoe Community Planning Council

- cc. Mr. Todd Huff, District 3 Councilman
Mr. William Moore, County Planning Board
Mr. Donald I. Mohler, III, Chief of Staff
Mr. Fred Homan, Administrative Officer
Mr. Vincent J. Gardina, Director DEPS
Ms. Andrea Van Arsdale, Director, Office of Planning
Mr. Wallace Lippincott, Agricultural Administrator