

Amendment 12 to Council Bill No. 28 -2023

BY: David Yungmann

Legislative Day 11

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Amendment No. 12

(This Amendment makes the following change to HoCo By Design Chapter 5:

Chapter 5: Economic Prosperity - Amends the fifth paragraph of the subsection titled “Farming by Industry” in the section titled “Sustaining our Agricultural Economy” by adding “demand for” after “Finally, ”; and

Chapter 5: Economic Prosperity - Amends the fifth paragraph of the subsection titled “Farming by Industry” in the section titled “Sustaining our Agricultural Economy” by inserting “for farmers and exposes the public to agriculture” after the phrase “Agrotourism enhances income potential”.

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1 In the *HoCo By Design* General Plan, attached to this Act as Exhibit A, amend the following
2 pages as indicated in this Amendment:

- 3 • Chapter 5: Economic Prosperity: 53.

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5 Correct all page numbers, numbering, and formatting within this Act to accommodate this
6 amendment.

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Farms are becoming smaller in acreage within the County, with the average farm size declining by 7% between 2002 and 2017. In that same time frame, the number of farms that were less than 10 acres increased by 63%. There are many possible explanations for this change, including increases in retirement among farmers and the ability to produce many crops on smaller acreages.

Farming by Industry

The 2017 Census reports these statistics:

- About 39% of farms are involved in crop production, mostly corn, soybeans, and wheat.
- The other 61% of farms are involved in livestock production.
- Sales involving cattle and milk generated most of the value.
- The inventory of sheep and goats has increased, part of a growing trend towards grazing operations.
- About 14% of the farms were involved in “other crop farming.”

The “other crop farming” sector is important because it covers the production of hay, which is crucial for supporting the County’s equine, cattle, and dairy operations. Other crop farming also covers diversified farms such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations that focus on produce and flowers.

Approximately 31% of the farms were involved in “other animal production.” This sector includes farms primarily engaged in raising one or more of the following: bees, horses and other equine, and rabbits and other fur-bearing animals. The equine industry is significant to the County’s economy, but its impact goes beyond the total asset value. These operations are essential for maintaining a critical mass in demand for large animal veterinarians, agricultural services, farm supplies, and farm equipment. Additionally, the Census indicated that there were 30 honey operations in Howard County in 2017.

Direct-to-consumer sales, which includes farmers markets, farm stands, CSA, and pick-your-own farms, generated \$3.5 million in 2017. In 2022, the County had five farmers markets, six CSAs, and two pick-your-own farms. In addition, value-added processing and direct-to-retail sales amounted to \$1.1 million and are two important strategies farmers can use to improve their profitability. Value-added processing includes taking raw or whole food products and creating new products that are then sold at a higher price (for example, taking fruit grown on the farm and processing it into jam). Value-added processing also includes producing a product in a way that enhances its value, such as growing vegetables organically.

Interest in the local farm-to-table experience has increased among both consumers and farmers, a connection that is fostered by the County through the Roving Radish program. The Roving Radish promotes healthy eating habits in the community by selling meal kits with locally-sourced ingredients. The meal kits are available to all County residents and are offered at a discounted price to income-qualifying households. Additionally, the Roving Radish provides a marketplace that has been an outlet for local farms to sell their products.

Finally, [demand for](#) agritourism in Howard County has grown rapidly over the last decade, with 19 farms holding special farm use permits for agritourism uses as of January 2023. Agritourism enhances income potential [for farmers and exposes the public to agriculture](#) by using agriculture and tourism to attract, entertain, and educate visitors. Popular examples in Howard County include petting farms, programs for school children, and seasonal activities, such as pumpkin picking and corn mazes. Also included in this category are farm breweries, wineries, and cideries, which are growing in popularity and demand across the

region. There is also growing interest in farm stays, or overnight accommodations on working farms (regional examples include farmhouses, cottages, tents, and yurts). The County should update the Zoning Regulations to incorporate a definition of farm stays as a special farm use.

Critical Infrastructure

The agricultural industry requires certain infrastructure to serve its basic needs and allow it to diversify and remain profitable. These include transportation, access to new technologies, processing facilities, technical assistance, and funding for business development.

Transportation

Farm equipment can be slower, taller, and wider than residential and commercial vehicles, a circumstance that can prevent farmers from using them safely on local roads. Problems like a lack of clearance under overhanging trees or difficulties with passage at narrow bridges can delay passage for the farm equipment, as well as local traffic, which in turn can cause conflicts between agricultural and other users on the roads.

Internet Access

The County’s farmers are well-connected to the internet, with about 86% having access. The use of cell phones and other mobile devices is increasingly popular as farms shift to integrating new technologies and applications, such as using GPS to increase harvesting efficiency.

Processing, Manufacturing, and Aggregation Facilities

There are few local food processing and manufacturing facilities that support the major commodities (dairy, grain, and beef) produced in the County. Two fluid milk processing plants remain: the Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative and the Dreyer’s ice cream plant, both located in Laurel. Wilkins Rogers, the closest flour mill, located in Baltimore County, closed in 2020.

Some local farms have been growing barley, rye, hops, and aronia for the brewery and distillery industries, as well as cleaning and roasting seeds. As compared to neighboring jurisdictions, County regulations are generally restrictive of on-farm activities involving microbreweries, wineries, distilleries, and cideries. This is evidenced by the recent loss of a Howard County malting facility to Carroll County.

