

A letter supporting MC 16-12 from the Soil Conservation District- Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012

Good Morning Members of the Montgomery County Land Use and Transportation Committee,  
This message is a follow-up to conversations I had last week with most of you and/or your legislative aides, regarding Bill MC 16-12 and the importance of preserving the rights of small farm operations within the Agricultural Reserve (AR) areas of Montgomery County. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD), like the other agricultural groups in the county and the County Agencies, supports this bill and believe it is necessary to protect the future of farming in the Agricultural Reserve.

Each time a homeowner's association is allowed to chip away at the rights of landowners within the AR to farm, we become a little more like our neighbors across the river in VA. Years ago, Fairfax County made a decision that agriculture was not an important part of their landscape, communities, or open space. They allowed development, residential covenants, and the needs of urban communities to take precedent over agriculture. One of the main benefits our residents have over these VA neighbors to whom we are constantly compared, is our wonderful, unique, and landmark Agricultural Reserve. We need you all to stand up for the AR, and preserve the rights of farmers and their ability to practice agriculture where the county has designated agriculture as the primary use.

Mr. Keith Ohlinger has done everything he can to develop his operation according to all the accepted principles of sound farming. He worked with MSCD to develop a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan for his property and he has invited experts from the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension to his farm to provide guidance on a number of topics. **Mr. Ohlinger is practicing all the things WE, the collective community, say we want from agriculture in the future – locally grown food, organic food, small farms instead of factory farms. He is striving to do all the practices that we know are good for the land – pasture rotation, free range animals, composting, nutrient cycling..** He has even gone to the trouble of growing a wildflower meadow to increase pollinator habitat, a critical best management practice that is advocated by both the USDA and the MD Dept. of Agriculture.

**Mr. Ohlinger is the perfect example of what the future of small scale, local agriculture could be, and it should start here in Montgomery County where we already have the Ag Reserve to promote this very type of operation.** If this bill does not move forward, the Delegation is making a strong statement about what you really want the Ag Reserve to be. **If the “grow local” mantra doesn't start here in our backyards then where is it supposed to happen? In a neighboring county? Pennsylvania? Or anywhere else but here in Montgomery County, where we allow local agriculture to take a back seat to what people want to see when they look out their window in the morning.** If you choose to live in the Ag Reserve you have to live with farming.

Please assist the Agricultural Community in Montgomery County by supporting MC16-12 and protecting agriculture in the Ag Reserve. **Remember, 2/3 of the county is already devoted to suburban development and has regulations in place to limit agriculture, please don't allow the landmark 1/3 of the county that is devoted to agriculture to regulate small local farms out of the county.**

Thanks for your time and consideration on this matter – David

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