



## HOUSE BILL 243

### Milk Products – Pilot Farmstead Cheese Program - Permits

February 17, 2009

#### **POSITION: Support**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

On behalf of the 3,000 members of the *Restaurant Association of Maryland*, we strongly support House Bill 243, which would expand the Farmstead Cheese Program by repealing the statewide limitation that allows only five dairy farmers to participate.

We originally supported legislation in 2007 that established a pilot study for farmstead cheese production at a dairy farm in Talbot County. At the time, Maryland chefs were only beginning to discover the marketing advantages of promoting local and sustainable products. Today, many chefs are not only buying local, sustainable food products, but they are also promoting their use of such products by identifying the local suppliers directly on the menu.

Fresh cheeses made with raw milk are becoming increasingly popular because of their fresh taste and creamy texture. Restaurant customers with discerning taste have come to appreciate the differences in quality. We believe that the existing pilot program provided an excellent opportunity to study the issue and further promote our local agricultural bounty. Statewide expansion of the program will make it easier for our restaurants to continue promoting local flavors and supporting local farmers.

For these reasons, we support HB 243 and request a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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