

## PRESS RELEASE

RELEASE DATE: February 17, 2009

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RE: Legislation introduced to restore Maryland agriculture

Annapolis, MD--General Assembly. Delegate J.B. Jennings, (R-7) has introduced bill HB 1080, on dairy animal ownership, to restore Maryland farmers and citizens' right to engage in contractual agreements called agistments. Agistments are arrangements for pasturing and managing a horse or livestock animal and have existed for centuries. Dairy agistments are when farmers pasture, feed and milk a cow for the owners who might not have the land themselves. Horse boarding is a common agistment practice. Agistments have been compared to time-share arrangements. In many states cow owners benefit from their animals' milk production in this way.

"I sponsored this legislation so that Maryland consumers can obtain fresh milk in Maryland and support Maryland farmers. It is especially important right now that farmers be able take advantage of all economic opportunities available to them. I hope to see Maryland dairy farms thrive once this legislation passes and the right of farmers and consumers to engage in agistment agreements for dairy animals is restored," says Jennings.

In 2006, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, under the directions of Ted Elkin, deputy Director, Office of Food Protection and Consumer Health Services, redefined dairy agistments as a sale of raw milk, thereby criminalizing cow shares in Maryland and sending thousands of Maryland consumers to other states for fresh milk. Fresh milk advocates say Jennings' bill would return these revenues to Maryland agriculture. Farmers support HB1080, because during this time of economic crisis in Maryland, when many are looking to the government for economic support, it would create substantial business in Maryland.

The Maryland Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (MICFA), a statewide group that supports Jennings' bill, cites the restoration of consumer rights and the benefits to Maryland farmers. Advocates also claim that many people who are allergic to industrial milk and milk products can digest fresh milk and cheeses with ease. Other benefits, they say, include autistic children who have improved on raw milk, elimination of recurring ear and sinus infections and colds—particularly in children, relief from severe arthritis symptoms, increase in bone mass for osteoporosis sufferers, overall enhanced immunity, and delicious rich flavor. Supporters of a similar bill last year included sponsor Del. Nic Kipke (D-31), fifteen bipartisan co-sponsors, the Maryland Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (MICFA), the Weston A. Price Foundation—a 12,000 member international consumer advocacy group, and the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association. Farm and consumer advocacy groups from neighboring states also support the bill.

Liz Reitzig, President of MICFA, said, this bill would "encourage local food and local retail sales, generate taxes, and the earned dollar would be encouraged to stay in the community and the state. This revenue comes from sunshine on grass harvested by cows, a free harvest of energy. Using a minimum of transportation and fuel, this local milk production conserves precious energy and operating expenses."