

HOUSE BILL 1228

L1, C8

5lr1227

By: **Montgomery County Delegation**

Introduced and read first time: February 7, 2025

Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Department of Commerce – Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve Study**

3 **MC 15–25**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Commerce to study the tourist and visitor
5 economy of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and, on or before a certain
6 date, report its findings to the members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the
7 General Assembly; and generally relating to the Montgomery County Agricultural
8 Reserve.

9 Preamble

10 WHEREAS, There has been a consensus for decades in Montgomery County in
11 support of preserving the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, a large segment of
12 which is located in western Montgomery County; and

13 WHEREAS, The Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve was founded with the
14 principal goal of preserving open space and land for agriculture; and

15 WHEREAS, Farming remains the foundation of the Montgomery County
16 Agricultural Reserve and Montgomery County has established a Department of Agriculture
17 to help promote, support, and preserve farming and farmland; and

18 WHEREAS, The farming economy is a key focus of Montgomery County and its
19 Department of Agriculture and the farming economy is monitored and studied
20 continuously; and

21 WHEREAS, Outside of farming, a significant part of the land in the Montgomery
22 County Agricultural Reserve exists in the form of woodlands, open spaces, parks, historic
23 sites, and recreation areas of various kinds; and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



WHEREAS, Small nonprofit organizations and businesses are a major part of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and these organizations and businesses are reliant on tourists and visitors, both locally and from throughout the Washington metropolitan area, to support their operations; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That:

(a) The Department of Commerce shall study the tourist and visitor economy of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve to develop:

(1) a deeper understanding of the tourist and visitor sector of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve due to these sectors being not as well understood as the agricultural sector of the reserve; and

(2) policies and recommendations to help the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve thrive.

(b) In conducting the study required under subsection (a) of this section, the Department of Commerce shall:

(1) (i) establish a geofence around the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and other key attractions in the area; and

(ii) use geolocation technology to gather information on visitor volume and how those visitors interact with other parts of the regional economy;

(2) engage with visitors, including by surveying visitors, to gather information about visitor behavior and attitudes;

(3) consider whether in-depth interviews with residents, businesses, and other stakeholders are necessary; and

(4) review existing data models to gather information on the upstream and downstream impacts of visitation to the region.

(c) The Department of Commerce may consult with government agencies, academic institutions, and stakeholders to complete the study required under this section.

(d) (1) On or before June 30, 2026, the Department of Commerce shall report the findings of the study required under this section, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, to the members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly.

(2) In considering the data and its findings, the Department shall:

1 (i) examine how tourists and visitors view the Montgomery County
2 Agricultural Reserve, including why they visit, where they came from, and what attractions
3 they found most compelling and why;

4 (ii) 1. identify the small businesses, recreation sites, and historic
5 sites that are located in the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve; and

6 2. A. analyze how tourism and visitors contribute to
7 these operations and their success;

8 B. assess and evaluate the barriers that may deter visitors
9 from coming to the reserve; and

10 C. develop an overall assessment of the economic impact of
11 tourism in the reserve; and

12 (iii) make recommendations regarding policies and programs that
13 can help promote and preserve the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and better
14 support the small businesses, recreation sites, and historic sites that depend on the visitor
15 and tourist economy.

16 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July
17 1, 2025.