

Chapter 235

(House Bill 1228)

AN ACT concerning

Department of Commerce – Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve Study**MC 15–25**

FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Commerce, in coordination with certain county agencies and organizations, to study economic development in and the tourist and visitor economy of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and, on or before a certain date, report its findings to the members of the Montgomery County Delegation to the General Assembly; and generally relating to the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve.

Preamble

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

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

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

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

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

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, in coordination with the Montgomery County Planning Board, the Montgomery County Office of Agricultural Services, the University of Maryland Extension – Montgomery County, and Visit Montgomery, shall study economic development in and the tourist and visitor economy of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve to develop:

(1) a deeper understanding of the tourist and visitor ~~sector~~ of impact on the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve due to these ~~sectors~~ impacts being not as well understood as the agricultural ~~sector~~ impact 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, the Montgomery County Planning Board, the Montgomery County Office of Agricultural Services, the University of Maryland Extension – Montgomery County, and Visit Montgomery shall:

(1) examine how tourists and visitors view the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, including why they visit, where they come from, and what attractions they find most compelling and why;

(2) (i) identify the small businesses, recreation sites, and historic sites that are located in the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve; and

(ii) 1. analyze how tourism and visitors contribute to these operations and their success;

2. assess and evaluate the barriers that may deter visitors from coming to the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve; and

3. develop an overall assessment of economic development and the economic impact of tourism in the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve; and

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

(c) In meeting the requirements of subsections (a) and (b) of this section, the Department of Commerce, the Montgomery County Planning Board, the Montgomery County Office of Agricultural Services, the University of Maryland Extension – Montgomery County, and Visit Montgomery shall, if data is available or the action required is necessary:

(1) work with relevant local organizations to gather information on visitor volume at the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve and other key attractions in the area 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.

~~(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)~~ (d) The Department of Commerce:

(1) shall coordinate the preparation of, synthesize, and analyze the data made available for the study required under subsection (a) of this section; and

(2) may consult with government agencies, academic institutions, and stakeholders to complete the study required under this section.

~~(d)~~ ~~(1)~~ (e) On or before June 30, 2026, the Department of Commerce shall report the findings of the study required under subsection (a) of 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:~~

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Approved by the Governor, April 22, 2025.