

Public Hearing on Land Preservation Tax Credit

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Good afternoon, I am Brock Herzberg with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, where I serve in the Governmental Relations Department. The Virginia Farm Bureau is a member organization with over 37,000 farm members, from farms of all sizes, from 88 counties across the state. Our mission is to “advance the agricultural, economic, political, and social interests of county Farm Bureaus and their members”. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments concerning the Land Preservation Credit.

Keeping land in working viable agriculture conditions is a concern for our organization. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, since 1978, Virginia has lost an average of 34,775 acres of land from farming per year. A recent survey conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation at the National Young Farmer Conference stated the number one concern of young farmers throughout the country was the availability of farmland.

The Land Preservation Credit is one tool in the toolbox that Farm Bureau members feel is essential in keeping agricultural lands affordable and obtainable. There is increasing pressure from development and skyrocketing property taxes enticing landowners to sell their land. By allowing for the credit, it is a way to help offset these obstacles to farming. This program has allowed all types of farmers throughout the Commonwealth to stay in business. Because of the way farm businesses are structured, farmers cannot utilize tax deductions so the ability to sell these credits is a major incentive to preserving farmland.

Although there have been some advantages taken where this program is concerned, we feel the benefits to the farming community and Virginia as a whole, outweigh the costs. Ideas such as stricter guidelines for appraisers could be a way to hold the program to a higher level of accountability. Our membership is very cautious and to have some standards would help them as they approach this very important decision. The program is too valuable for the Commonwealth of Virginia to lose.

Once again, we appreciate the time you are taking to look into this important tool being utilized in Virginia. We would like to offer any assistance and input where the committee sees fit.

Thank you.