

PRESS RELEASE

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**ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR MARYLAND FARMERS IN
PROPOSED COW-SHARE LEGISLATION**

March 13, 2009--Annapolis, MD— An issue that refuses to go away, raw milk, is back in Annapolis with HB1080, a bill sponsored by Delegate J.B. Jennings (R-7). The bill would allow Maryland farmers to participate in cow-share and herd-share arrangements whereby consumers can obtain raw milk from animals they own.

Supporters seek to restore cow-shares, made illegal in 2006 by emergency regulations written by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and passed without hearings or debate.

The contractual arrangements, referred to in English law as agistments, have sparked a rural revival in other states, including Virginia, Ohio, Wisconsin and Indiana.

Cow-shares, or agistments, are boarding arrangements commonly used by horse owners, who pay someone to feed, pasture and care for their animals. To prevent cow owners from drinking the milk of their boarded animals, however, the DHMH emergency regulation declared such an arrangement to be a sale of raw milk, making it illegal.

Maryland residents forced to find fresh milk in other states have supported legislation for the last two years to restore their access to fresh milk in MD. Despite strong bipartisan support, these bills were not allowed out of committee.

Advocates cite the benefits to Maryland's economy and environment, as well as to themselves.

“Once passed, this legislation will restore millions of dollars in commerce and taxes to Maryland rural communities. These consumer dollars currently leave the state to benefit farmers in Pennsylvania and Virginia.” said Liz Reitzig, President of the Maryland Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (MICFA)

“I think it will become obvious at the hearing that it is especially important right now that farmers be able to take advantage of all economic opportunities available to them,” noted Jennings.

The bill goes before the Health and Government Operations committee for a hearing on Tuesday March 17, 1:00pm Room 241, Lowe House Office Building, Annapolis.

The mission of the Maryland Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (MICFA) is to promote and preserve unregulated direct farmer to consumer trade that fosters availability of locally grown and home produced food products. MICFA is one of the 18 state affiliates of the National Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (Nicfa.org) which works on a national level toward the same end. Liz Reitzig, President of MICFA can be reached at 301-807-5063, or by email Liz@micfa.net.