



February XX, 2022

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr., Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Andy Harris, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Harris:

The undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition request continued support for clean water in the Chesapeake Bay watershed through fully funding the conservation programs of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). The 83,000 farms in the six-state Chesapeake region are critical to the economy, responsible for more than \$10 billion of agricultural production each year. After forests, agriculture is the largest land use in the watershed.

The 2018 Farm Bill, which we strongly supported, should, if fully implemented and funded, ensure that well-run, responsible farms in the Chesapeake region remain economically viable. The Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill is also critical to maintain and restore clean water in the rivers and streams throughout the Chesapeake region, and for the Bay itself. These programs are essential for regulated agricultural operations to meet federal requirements under the Clean Water Act and help farmers meet state regulations that address both farm health and water quality.

We urge you to maintain full funding for mandatory agricultural conservation programs in Fiscal Year 2023. The 2018 Farm Bill made a number of improvements to key programs and should accelerate our path toward clean water in our region, but only if these conservation programs are at least fully funded. With the support of much of the conservation community and clean water advocates, the 2018 Farm Bill maintained level funding for the Conservation Title.

Two-thirds of the 18 million people in the Chesapeake region acquire the water they drink directly from the rivers and streams that flow through the cities, towns, and farms throughout our six state and D.C. 64,000 square mile watershed. The Farm Bill's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a key piece of the puzzle for protecting and restoring clean water

in our region, which is essential for human health and for a robust regional economy. We urge you to provide full funding in FY23 at \$300 million for the RCPP. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed is one of the Critical Conservation Areas under the RCPP, and this program is vital for our region's farms and waterways.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is also a key conservation program for our region's farmers, and we urge you to provide full funding for FY23 at \$2.025 billion. Historically, EQIP has been the primary financial assistance program for conservation in the Chesapeake Bay region. EQIP funding is critical for implementation of a Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative by NRCS in coordination with the six Chesapeake Bay states.

All six Chesapeake Bay watershed states have participated in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and this program is the key to restoring riparian buffers that are critical for water quality and wildlife habitat. The 2018 Farm Bill codified CREP and we urge you to ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture fully enrolls CREP acres based on the provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill. These measures could include adjusting for match requirements, support for maintenance of riparian forest buffers and other actions deemed necessary.

As these Farm Bill programs are implemented, it's vital that limited conservation dollars go to the areas of greatest need and impact in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This includes South Central Pennsylvania where many farmers are working to take important steps for clean water but need financial and technical assistance. These types of high priority areas have tremendous downstream impacts.

In addition, we urge you to provide robust funding for Conservation Technical Assistance, which provides on the ground technical assistance to help farmers who are enrolling in conservation programs. This funding is particularly important given the eroding amount of technical assistance to farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, even as the need for this help has increased.

In order to follow a common-sense path to maintain economically viable well-run farms and to have healthy local water and a restored Chesapeake Bay, which is critical for our regional economy, we request full funding for all conservation programs in the Farm Bill for Fiscal Year 2023.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important request to maintain funding for these programs which are critical to both our agricultural community and for clean water throughout the mid-Atlantic region. Please contact Peter J. Marx at 410-905-2515 or peter@choosecleanwater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,