

2023

Farm Bill Priorities



Agriculture represents the largest land use and one of the largest industries in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Federal Farm Bill's Conservation Title plays a pivotal role in helping states and farmers implement voluntary conservation practices to address agricultural sources of pollution affecting the quality of their local streams and the Chesapeake Bay. Under Watershed Implementation Plans developed by each state, agriculture is responsible for 85 percent of the remaining nutrient reductions needed for a clean Chesapeake Bay. To maximize the benefits of the Conservation Title and meet our water quality goals, the Chesapeake Bay Commission offers the following recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill.

- ✓ Leverage mandatory conservation program funding and supplemental appropriations.
- ✓ Develop and support a robust workforce of agricultural conservation professionals.
- ✓ Streamline amendments to state CREP agreements.
- ✓ Enhance innovative delivery of RCPP.
- ✓ Simplify processing of invasive catfish harvested from the Chesapeake Bay.

Who We Are

The Chesapeake Bay Commission is a tri-state legislative body created in the 1980s to advise the General Assemblies of Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania and the U.S. Congress on matters of Baywide concern. The Commission's twenty-one members are shared equally among the states. Fifteen are state legislators, three are appointed representatives of the governors, and three are prominent citizens. The Commission is a signatory to the many Chesapeake Bay agreements and serves as a prominent leader in all aspects of the Bay's restoration.

Leverage mandatory conservation program funding and supplemental appropriations.

- By maintaining current funding levels for key programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and supplementing them with initiatives such as the Chesapeake Bay States' Partnerships Initiative (C-SPI) and Climate-Smart Commodities, the progress towards meeting Chesapeake Bay restoration goals would be maximized.
- An average of \$173 million per year currently comes to the Chesapeake watershed through Farm Bill conservation programs. An additional \$73.7 million per year for ten years through supplemental appropriations would fully fund the federal share for agricultural conservation called for in the states' Watershed Implementation Plans.
- Full funding of the federal share will generate significant matching investments. Each federal dollar spent leverages three more from state, local and private partners.



Develop and support a robust workforce of agricultural conservation professionals.

- Full funding of C-SPI at \$73.7 million/year for ten years would be a 40 percent increase over existing Natural Resources Conservation Service funding in the Chesapeake Bay region, requiring a similar increase in technical assistance support.
- A robust, qualified workforce must be ready to fill these new positions over the next five years.
- Development of this workforce would be enhanced through new provisions in the Research & Extension and/or Rural Development Titles to establish:
 - ◆ Experiences at the high school level, such as through FFA, to promote agricultural conservation as a career path.
 - ◆ Programs at community colleges and technical schools that will provide students with the opportunity to earn a certificate and enter the workforce after just two years.
 - ◆ Paid internships at both two-year and four-year institutions to give students in-the-field experience working and talking with farmers. Employers have cited a lack of these skills as a barrier to hiring successful technical assistance providers.



Streamline amendments to state CREP agreements.

- Make clear that beneficial changes to CREP can be incorporated into existing state agreements without re-negotiating the entire agreement.
- Several improvements to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) were made in the 2018 Farm Bill, such as more favorable cost-share provisions, but in order to take advantage of these changes, USDA required states to re-negotiate entire existing CREP agreements. As a result, many states decided to forego the benefits instead of risking the time, expense, and potential loss of other favorable terms.



Enhance innovative delivery of RCPP.

- Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs) under RCPP should be administered as “block grants” as originally envisioned.
- In order to maximize the potential for innovative delivery of conservation outcomes, AFAs should provide partners with flexibility to implement funding in a manner that addresses local needs and leverages the strengths of local partnerships, rather than merely transferring the administrative burden of existing program rules onto partners.



Simplify processing of invasive catfish harvested from the Chesapeake Bay.

- The processing of invasive catfish harvested from the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries must be returned to an FDA-HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) process like other seafood, versus the current USDA-FSIS (Food Safety and Inspection Service) requirements.
- All fish except for catfish are under FDA jurisdiction and subject to periodic inspection of a processing facility for compliance with a HACCP sanitation plan.
- In contrast, catfish are currently under USDA-FSIS inspection which means each piece of meat needs to be inspected by an FSIS inspector on-site and the processing must be physically separate from all other species. This has imposed a huge logistical burden at a prohibitive cost. Making matters worse, processors must pay for any after-hours inspection.
- The bifurcated system assists domestic producers of farmed catfish to minimize foreign competition, but it also inhibits the processing of wild caught catfish, severely impeding the conservation strategy to manage invasive populations by creating a commercial market for their meat.





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