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| **Agricultural Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting Minutes** | | |
| Date & Time | August 28, 2025; 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM | | |
| Location | Adams County Soil Conservation District, Gettysburg, PA | | |
| Members Attending | Mark Rohrbach, Amanda Cather, Barb Glenn, Bill Powers, Bill Fink, Marty Young, Will Carlisle, Kevin Craun, Greg Mitchell, Jerry Ours, Bob Waring, Amanda Barber; Jen Nelson (staff) | | |
| Meeting Leader | Bill Fink, AAC Chair | [Link to Agenda](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/AAC-Agenda-20250828-for-CBP-Calendar.docx) |

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| **Action Item** | **Owner** | **Due Date** |
| Solicit interest from AAC members to participate on Technical, Communications and Governance Subcommittees | JN | NA |
| Draft comments for Revised Draft Watershed Agreement and circulate to AAC Members for their review | JN | 9/1/25 |
| Share AAC Members’ contact information | JN | NA |
| Distribute CAST Issues Tracker Documentation to AAC Members | JN | NA |

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| **Tabled Item to Discuss Later** | **Follow up?** |
| None | NA |

# Welcome, Introductions and Housekeeping

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am. The group went around the room for introductions, and reviewed [Rules for the Meeting](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/Agricultural-Advisory-Committee-%E2%80%93-Rules-of-the-Meeting-1.docx).

Secretary Russell Redding (PA) and Secretary Kevin Atticks (MD) welcomed the members to the Agricultural Advisory Committee, describing the background leading to the Committee’s formation and the importance of the members’ role in providing input that will support the agricultural community in reaching Chesapeake Bay goals. Secretary Redding noted “two co-equal goals” for the Chesapeake Bay, including both clean water and economically viable farms. Secretary Atticks joined Secretary Redding in thanking the members for their agreement to serve on the committee, adding that “The trajectory of Chesapeake Bay conservation changes today” because of the representation that the AAC adds to the Partnership.

# Public Comment

Pat Thompson (EnergyWorks) welcomed AAC members to Gettysburg and thanked the members and partners that attended a tour of the Gettysburg Nutrient and Energy Recovery Facility on August 27 and looks forward to working with the AAC.

# Recap of Pre-Meeting Webinars and Available Resources

Jen Nelson gave [a presentation](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/Recap-of-Pre-Meeting-Webinars-and-Available-Resources.pptx) summarizing two webinars that were held for AAC members ahead of the meeting to provide background information on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model. The first webinar, presented by Tom Butler and Eric Hughes (CBPO), went over the process to introduce (or update) a new BMP into the model. A second webinar, presented by Auston Smith, discussed how the Bay Program receives data from state partners to provide credit for BMP implementation.

Member questions and comments:

* Farmers aren’t getting credit for practices that aren’t cost-shared. If a practice isn’t being tracked and reported, it isn’t included in the model.
* Conservation districts have been instrumental in collecting and reporting data. New York has a protocol to document all conservation practices when they visit a farm, not just the practice that they are there to review.
* Is there potential to share data collected by (or with) service providers/groups?
* Members expressed concern about redundant data/double-counting of BMPs
* Questioned the extent to which data about BMPs isn’t included in the model if “it doesn’t meet the specs”
* Is there potential to tweak conservation programs to focus on outcomes rather than criteria/guidelines (ex. % cover vs. planting date for cover crops)

# Accounting for Agricultural Nutrients in the Model- Current Methods and Data Sources

Tom Butler (CBPO) [provided an overview of the assumptions](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/AAC_input_data_8.25.pptx) used in the generation and application of agricultural nutrients in the Chesapeake Bay Model. Key points included:

* There are multiple models used as part of a decision support system that tracks land use and management decisions to resulting changes in water quality. The primary use of the Chesapeake Bay Model is to represent anthropogenic changes in load, and set and track reduction goals.
* The Partnership draws on multiple data sources, including Census of Agriculture, satellite imagery and literature values, to describe acres, crop yields and nutrients applied to ag land.
* Assumptions include that nutrient are applied according to expected crop yields, that inorganic nutrients are available for distribution across the entire watershed, and farmers will not sacrifice potential yields.
* Consistency in trends is a higher priority than accuracy of values used in the model. It is challenging to introduce a new source of data if it differs significantly from the current data source, even if it is more accurate, without disrupting the states’ efforts to meet current goals.

Key points from discussion:

* Data scarcity is a challenge to incorporate data on biologicals, yield increased due to improved genetics, nutrient enhancements
* CAST Issues Tracker was created to track issues flagged with CAST. Multiple areas of concern were identified, including inorganic fertilizer, crop yields and pasture and hay lands, and the Ag Modeling Team is charged with working through those issues.
* Additional data sources to consider included FSA, and using aerial imagery to predict yields. Bay Program recognizes that Ag Census is an imperfect data source (lower response rates, etc.) and supplements with additional data sources like LULC.
* If AAC can get to a place where they endorse the Model, that would be powerful to the ag community
* Making Changes to the Model:
  + Decisions are made as a partnership. An individual state can propose to introduce a new data source and all of the states need to agree to adopt it for the new data source to be incorporated.
  + If a state doesn’t believe that a certain data point is accurately represented (example- poultry population), they can bring that point up with the Ag Modeling Team for review.
  + Data is currently being “locked in” for Phase 7. It’s timely for the AAC to weigh in. Members that have interest in knowing what assumptions are being used currently can look at the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST). (Chesapeake Bay Program has asked for an extension to finalize the details in the Phase 7 Model through January 1, 2027.)
  + Eric Hughes noted the importance for the AAC to work with the Ag Modeling Team to address concerns, not in a silo.
* Other Considerations
  + What is the right scale to apply fertilizer sales? It may be appropriate on a regional basis in places like Delmarva, and state by state or county by county elsewhere.
  + Model is not currently tracking stored soil N (for example, from legume cover crops).
  + States rely on LGU recommendations to determine crop nutrient need; Assumption in the model is 110% of crop need is applied- this assumption affects the viability of the manure transfer program
  + Bay Program should consider adopting criteria for model output that triggers red flags regarding results that don’t align with real world agriculture.

# Welcome Remarks from Leila Duman and Marty Qually

Leila Duman (MD DNR) welcomed the new members of the AAC on behalf of Principals’ Staff Committee Chair, Secretary Josh Kurtz.

Marty Qually, Adams County Commissioner and Chair of the Local Governments Advisory Committee, welcomed the group to Adams County and offered his support as a fellow advisory committee member.

# Shaping Chesapeake Bay Policy- Vision for the AAC & Group Discussion

Bill Fink, AAC Chair, presented [a draft document](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/documents/Agricultural-Advisory-Committee-Shaping-Chesapeake-Bay-Policy.docx) for the AAC’s consideration, outlining potential priorities for the Committee and connections to the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. Two policy priorities outlined in the document include 1) Targeted Tier 1 BMPs in Priority Watersheds and 2) Support for Innovative Manure Conversion & Transport Technologies.

Member questions and comments:

* The Bay Model can help to identify those watersheds that have the highest impact. Alternatively, we don’t want to concentrate resources too much- we still want to make sure that funding resources are spread around.
* How do we increase the number of people that we work with? Under the current conservation delivery model, “We work with the people who work with us.”
* One potential strategy is to start upstream to focus on delisting streams and work your way downstream.

The group decided to form three subcommittees to take a deeper dive into key topics and report back to the AAC with recommendations on the following topics:

* Technical Subcommittee (Ruth Cassilly expressed interest in serving in the meeting chat online)
  + Phase 1: Sticky Issues
    - Work with AMT
    - Exchanging information between entities
    - Would include soil health
  + Phase 2: Soil Health/Nutrient Management/Technology
    - Work with Ag Workgroup
    - New technologies
    - Profit-driven approach vs Yield-driven approach
* Communications
  + Both internal and external messaging
  + Outreach & Education
* Governance
  + Including protocol for when members are approached with asks to ensure that the AAC is presenting as a unified group

# Draft Bay Agreement- Discussion on AAC Comments

AAC members reviewed the Draft Revised Chesapeake Bay Agreement and outlined [a set of suggested language changes](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/Revised-CBW-Agreement-For-Public-Feedback-2025.06.30-2.docx) for the Beyond 2025 Committee to include in the new Agreement. Many of the suggested changes underscored the role of agriculture in the Bay Restoration effort, and that language in the agreement should include the agricultural sector. Specifically, language in the Agreement should support economically viable farms and forests. The group expressed their appreciation for preserved agricultural lands as a standalone outcome, while also desiring increased specificity to ensure that preserved agricultural lands remain working lands. AAC members also recognized the importance of agricultural literacy alongside of environmental literacy for the success of the Chesapeake Restoration Effort.