

Agriculture Workgroup

Response to Chesapeake Executive Council

Directive in Support of Agricultural Technical Assistance and Conservation Practice Implementation



Background Context: At the August 2018 meeting, representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Chesapeake Executive Council (CEC) signed a [Directive in Support of Agricultural Technical Assistance and Conservation Practice Implementation](#) in sum directing the CBP Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) to engage in five specific commitments to further efforts to maintain and increase technical assistance (TA) and conservation practice implementation. These five commitments filtered through the CBP framework to arrive at the Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG) in late 2018 per direction of the CBP Management Board (MB), as the sector specialists within the CBP. Over the last several months the AgWG membership has discussed the five commitment and have come upon a preliminary response to the directive in the time available.

Directive Commitment #1

Strive to provide stable and sufficient technical assistance in order to help farmers implement the conservation practices necessary to meet Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) goals.

Identifying Gaps in TA:

- TA gaps have been addressed in Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) development and will continue to be addressed in upcoming two-year milestones reviews.
- AgWG supports aggregated analysis of gaps across states to identify common needs and opportunities within watershed.

Addressing Gaps in TA:

- Increase farmer collaboration with soil and water conservation districts (SWCD), Technical Service Providers (TSP), USDA-NRCS, and Land Grant University Extension Programs
- Increase and stabilize funding
- Ensure alignment of EPA and USDA-NRCS priorities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed

Next Steps: AgWG contribution of synthesis/aggregation of common needs across watershed in fall of 2019, after WIP finalization.

Directive Commitment #2

Diversify and expand the network of public, private and nonprofit providers of technical and financial assistance to ensure that on-farm support is available to meet the agricultural sector load reductions.

- Increase and stabilize funding
- Provide focused training on ag engineering practices and principles
 - For NGOs with specialized staff (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Nature Conservancy, Farmland Trusts)
 - Within existing structure of civil and environmental engineering firms

- Quality assurance for private sector service providers
- USDA-NRCS TSP
 - Streamline training or find alternatives
- Further funding support:
 - e.g., EPA 319 Program and Chesapeake Bay State Implementation Grants (CBIG)
 - USDA-NRCS Innovation Conservation Grants (CIG)
 - Contribution Agreements National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF): Small Watershed Grants (SWG) and Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants (INSRG)

Next Steps: Continue conversation about training technicians in the field to seek solutions fit for jurisdictional needs within the CBP AgWG; Increased collaboration between AgWG and NFWF

Directive Commitment #3

Expand technical assistance capacity through the use of cooperative agreements and other tools that combine federal, state, local and private resources to target priority agricultural resource concerns.

The Role of Federal Agency Partners:

- Ensure alignment of EPA and USDA-NRCS priorities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed
- EPA facilitate development of proposal with federal partners regarding better alignment with state data needs
 - Bring to AgWG for review.
- Ensure alignment of USDA-NRCS priorities closely with state priorities.
- Tracking & Reporting:
 - USGS and NRCS obtain jurisdictional comments for improving their existing agreement and methods to improve best management practice (BMP) double counting protections.

Next Steps: Initiate conversations at a higher level than CBP AgWG regarding federal-state agreements and BMP tracking, reporting, and verification issues.

Directive Commitment #4

Enhance and coordinate critical agricultural conservation programs to ensure they offer the flexibility and capacity needed to incentivize farmers to install practices, including riparian forest buffers, to help meet the goals of the Bay TMDL.

- Extensive state-wide outreach and listening sessions regarding conservation programs occurred during Phase III WIP development and are on-going.
- Increase communication within the AgWG:
 - How are CBW jurisdictions providing incentivizing implementation?
 - What has been effective?
 - What are lessons learned?
- Efficient use of funding:

- Focus on practices to maximum nutrient and sediment reductions (i.e. focus on priority practices determined in state Phase III WIPs).
- Flexibility: Request commitment from USDA to be responsive to state requests for flexibility.

Next Steps: Continue conversation and communication in the AgWG related to state strategies for providing assistance.

Directive Commitment #5

Enhance the job climate for government technical assistance professionals by exploring how to make training and certification more streamlined and accessible, along with the development of two-year certification programs, innovative training forums and education loan assistance programs.

Several states have initiatives in progress to broaden the reach of training opportunities.

- Possible synthesis by AgWG

Putting Training to Use:

- Certified professionals need to be better linked to farmers needing and/or requiring assistance via education and outreach

Land Grant Universities need increased and reliable support

- CBP and partners rely on their work
- Requires funding

Next Steps: Continue conversation and invite states to talk to the AgWG about what they are currently initiating to provide technical training for the growing job market.