June 20, 2019

Mr. William Northey

Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation

U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave., SW

Washington DC 20250

Re: Current Moratorium of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Dear Under Secretary Northey,

We are writing to express our relief regarding the re-opening of enrollments in the Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP), pending the release of the new 2018 Farm Bill regulations that will direct the programs into the future. These programs are critical to the improvement of water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

As you are aware, riparian forest buffers are a top priority conservation practice to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. To achieve their clean water mandate, Chesapeake Bay watershed states are calling for an estimated 100,000 acres of new riparian forest buffers on agricultural land from 2019 – 2025. Most of these acres will be implemented through the CRP/CREP program.

The moratorium established in the summer of 2018 prevented producers from enrolling new acres into these programs. Thankfully, the programs have been opened soon enough that we may have not lost the opportunity for re-enrollments of existing buffers that would have expired had the hold lasts any longer. However, most damaging over the long term may be is the perception of inconsistent availability of the program, which could negatively impact landowners’ willingness to participate in the future. There are still lingering questions regarding how yet-to-be released 2018 Farm Bill regulations for CRP will impact agreements and contracts into the future.

The Chesapeake Bay Program Agriculture Workgroup’s mission is to provide expertise and leadership on development and implementation of policies, programs, and research to reduce pollutant loads delivered from agricultural lands and animal operations to upstream waters and the Chesapeake Bay. Our membership includes a diverse array of stakeholder voices representing all jurisdictions within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, many of whom have expressed serious concern regarding the impact of this enrollment delay on the success of their state Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs).

The CRP/CREP programs are highly valued and critical to improving health and functioning of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. We appreciate your agency’s decision to reopen CRP/CREP enrollment while awaiting the new 2018 Farm Bill regulations and hope that an extended freeze on the program can be avoided in the future. Please don’t hesitate to contact me at [jason.keppler@maryland.gov](mailto:jason.keppler@maryland.gov) jason.keppler@maryland.govor Matt Monroe, Vice-Chair, at [mmonroe@wvda.us](mailto:mmonroe@wvda.us), if you have any questions or would like to discuss these concerns in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Jason Keppler

Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program Agriculture Workgroup

Cc: Matt Monroe, Vice-Chair