Chesapeake Executive Council (CEC) *Directive in Support of Agricultural Technical Assistance and Conservation Practice Implementation*

Summarized Jurisdictional Feedback to Guide April 18, 2019 AgWG Discussion

	Directive Commitment	**Action Lead (drafted by Management Board)**	**Jurisdictional Thoughts (AgWG Discussion Guidance)**
1	Technical Assistance Strive to provide stable and sufficient technical assistance in order to help farmers implement the conservation practices necessary to meet Bay TMDL goals.	- Jurisdictions identify TA needs and gaps through WIP Development - Ag Workgroup for gaps analysis - Ag workgroup to convene USDA, CBC, EPA, and jurisdictions to identify where programs will meet gaps	Identification of Gaps: • States are engaging in a gaps analysis as part of WIP III development • Gaps analysis and TA needs will be addressed every two years during milestone evaluations with EPA • Support for aggregated analysis of identified gaps across states to identify common needs and opportunities across watershed. **(WHO would do this?)** Addressing Gaps: • Increase farmer collaboration with SWCDs, TSPs, NRCS, and Extension (increase implementation and verification BUT requires increased capacity for work with more farmers and on a more frequent/recurring basis • Increased and stable funding!- allows for better continuity in farmer engagement; higher recruitment/buy-in into programs; incentivizes private contractors to invest in labor and equipment to provide practice implementation in a dependable manner. • Help in aligning EPA and NRCS priorities as best as possible within Chesapeake Watershed; all the way down to project ranking sheets associated with USDA programs.
2	Technical Assistance Diversify and expand the network of public, private and nonprofit providers of technical and financial assistance to ensure that	Ag Workgroup for recommendation. Examples of areas to explore include: USDA – Contribution Agreements NFWF – Through RFP process for SWG and INSR	EPA – 319 and CBIG also areas to explore Increased and stable funding!

	on-farm support is available to meet the agricultural sector load reductions.		Seek opportunities to "train up" staff on agricultural engineering practices and principles. • NGOs with specialized staff (e.g., Stroud, CBF, Nature Conservancy, Farmland Trusts) • Existing structure within civil and environmental engineering firms NRCS Technical Service Providers (TSPs): • Look closely at alternative to NRCS TSPs (possibly independent of NRCS) • Certifying/qualifying structure that trains consultants on a quicker turn around than NRCS Conservation Planners and TSPs. What are the options for a private network or providers? • Work with USDA to streamline the TSP certification/re-certification process as well as the funding to make it worth their while to provide TA with farmers. Service Provider Quality Assurance: • Develop a payment process to streamline approval and dispersal of money directly to service providers with oversight by a qualified administrator. • Payment dispersed once service attains established level of quality. • Over sight by qualified administrator with experience in the work being done. Advises service providers to assure high level of service is provided to farmer clients.
3	Technical Assistance 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.	To Ag Workgroup for recommendations	EPA should be an arbiter for these Fed-Fed and Fed-State agreements. Federal Agency Partner Roles: • Work to resolve federal inability/unwillingness to align with state's data needs. EPA as facilitator in discussion among feds with development of proposal for AgWG review.

			• Great programs like NRCS SWAT require 100% work on NRCS priorities for only 50% funding. Is there a more equitable approach. • Look to align NRCS priorities with state priorities much closer than is currently • USGS and NRCS obtain jurisdictional comment for improving the existing agreement and methods to improve double counting protections. Develop a list of priority practices • Analysis showing most cost-effective practices to ensure available funding channeled to maximize nutrient reduction. • Provide guidance to agencies, programs and SWCD's on how practices should be selected for participation. • Look at developing a merit system based on nutrient reductions generated per dollars spent. Then based on those numbers identify where the best value is for allocating money to the entities that have achieved the most cost-effective use of the funds.
4	Technical Assistance 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.	To Ag Workgroup for recommendations. Example of a potential path forward may include: 1. CBP Convene listening sessions with farmers, stakeholders, etc. to determine areas where flexibility and capacity are needed. 2. USDA – collect information on what specific needs farmers have through the outreach they are planning under their 3-year plan for the Chesapeake Bay	Every state is different: • Should this not be up to the states? • How is this different then the WIP III process? • States have already engaged in extensive WIP outreach. • State offices (NRCS, FSA, and state partners) should have this information. • Need for commitment from USDA to be responsive to state requests for flexibility. State requests for additional program flexibility have been declined in the past. Installing practices that do not achieve maximum reductions is not efficient use of funding • Inefficient use of funding means MORE acres will be needed to make reduction goals.

			Interest in how other states (i.e., with their own funds or applications of EPA funds like CBIG and not just riding on NRCS funds) are providing FA and TA in innovative: • What has been effective? • What are lessons learned?
5	Workforce Development 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.	Ag Workgroup for recommendations. Example of action – Convene a meeting with Land Grant universities to explore what they are doing with certification, identify skills needed for that certification program to be acceptable to the TA providers.	PA has a staff person directly devoted to this and is piloting several initiatives. Additionally, the Pa Farm Bill, if approved by legislator, will provide dedicated funding. Penn State has or is in the process of developing a certificate program with students graduating certified in Nutrient Management Planning. Scott Sheely is the contact. Interest in presentation to the AgWG Land Grant Universities (LGUs): • Interest in prioritizing this to take advantage of LGUs in the AgWG. • Signal to LGU leadership that major players like EPA, CBP, and multi-jurisdictional groups like the AgWG still rely and expect them to serve the Land Grant Mission (i.e., engage, listen, perform applied (on-farm) research based on the priority questions from stakeholders, summarize, outreach, and repeat). • Faculty and extension associates are still performing the true Land Grant Mission, but not being supported with staff, facilities, or in many cases similar faculty positions when they retire. Requires funding! Workforce Development: • Cornell has a Dairy Fellows Program, an Ag Sciences major, and Dr. Ketterings has developed CCA preparation paths for undergrads. An Ag Engineering / Tech pathway (or maybe more broadly Conservation Engineering?) linked to career opportunities with Districts could be a growth area, these study paths have been replaced with civil and biomedical engineering/tech tracks at colleges, given the greater potential of their job markets. Not sure how to address that.

			• VT has incorporated the entire DCR Nutrient Management Training School into the 2-year ag program as a Fall semester course. This course along with the other Crop and Soil classes the students already are offered allows students to meet the education requirement for nutrient management certification. Most students also have ag experience which meets the experience requirement for certification. Professors involved with this pilot were very pleased with the outcome and the course will be in the regular schedule of classes offered for upcoming semesters. • Why are less experienced people coming into the service area for Ag? • Connecting certified planners with farmers without plans has been a challenge (influenced by regulatory and funding frameworks) Putting forth effort to get more people certified is fine, ONLY if there is also some mechanism in place to identify farmers that need plans.
6	Evaluation Report on progress made toward this directive at the 2019 Chesapeake Executive Council meeting.	Management Board	General: • Avoid setting up something additional or redundant to what states are currently working toward via Phase 3 WIP development and implementation. • More commitment from EPA/CBPO staff