

# Chesapeake Executive Council

## *Directive in Support of Agricultural Technical Assistance and Conservation Practice Implementation*



*WHEREAS*, farmers have been and will continue to be critical to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and the thousands of miles of local streams and rivers within its watershed; and

*WHEREAS*, agricultural lands compose nearly 30 percent of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, with more than 83,000 farms creating more than \$10 billion of agricultural production annually; and

*WHEREAS*, productive, economically robust agriculture is central to sustaining the economies and food-production of all six watershed states; and

*WHEREAS*, population growth will challenge the region's farmers to become even more productive to meet food demands and stay competitive in the global commodity markets while protecting local water quality; and

*WHEREAS*, since the beginning of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, farmers working with agricultural conservation professionals have planted cover crops, practiced no-till crop management, established and maintained streamside buffers, including forest buffers, and performed a litany of other conservation measures at an unprecedented scale; and

*WHEREAS*, these agricultural conservation professionals— both public and private – connect the dots between policy, financial and technical assistance, program compliance, practice verification and much more, to assure both positive environmental and economic outcomes; and

*WHEREAS*, every watershed state will rely on the agricultural community, as well as other communities and sectors, to continue to make significant reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment to restore local water quality and reach the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL); and

*WHEREAS*, the Environmental Protection Agency expects jurisdictions' Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans to identify financing, technical assistance and other actions needed to be taken to fill gaps in programmatic capacity for all sectors, including agriculture; and

*WHEREAS*, to restore the watershed there is a need for expanded, dedicated funding for conservation practices on agricultural lands, and technical expertise to implement these practices; and

*WHEREAS*, the federal Farm Bill is the single most important piece of federal legislation delivering financial and technical assistance for conservation on private lands, while also promoting farm viability; and

*WHEREAS*, programs within the Farm Bill's conservation title, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program, provide valuable financial and technical support to Chesapeake Bay watershed farmers as they do their part to meet the Bay TMDL; and

*WHEREAS*, some states in the watershed operate their own robust programs designed to supplement and complement the Farm Bill by providing incentives and technical assistance to farmers to implement conservation practices.

*THEREFORE, AS OF AUGUST 7, 2018*, that the Chesapeake Executive Council directs the Principals' Staff Committee to:

Strive to provide stable and sufficient technical assistance in order to help farmers implement the conservation practices necessary to meet the Bay TMDL goals.

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

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.

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.

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 technology training forums and education loan assistance programs.

Report on progress made toward this directive at the 2019 Chesapeake Executive Council meeting.

Signed:

For the Chesapeake Bay Commission

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For the State of Delaware

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For the District of Columbia

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For the State of Maryland

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For the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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For the State of New York

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For the Commonwealth of Virginia

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For the State of West Virginia

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For the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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