

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 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 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 promoting 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, the Chesapeake Executive Council directs the Principals' Staff Committee to:

Endeavor 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.

Review federal agricultural conservation programs to ensure they offer the flexibility and capacity needed to incentivize farmers to install practices 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:

Governor of Maryland
Governor of Delaware
Governor of New York
Governor of Pennsylvania
Governor of Virginia
Governor of West Virginia
Mayor of the District of Columbia
Chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Commission
Environmental Protection Agency Administrator