

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Robert Aderholt
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Sam Farr
Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2016

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Farr:

As Members of Congress with an interest in the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers and streams that feed it, we thank the Subcommittee for its past leadership in the extraordinary effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay. Chesapeake Bay states are investing in a Blueprint to restore this national treasure to its place as one of the most productive estuaries in the world, with important support from federal agencies. To maintain the progress already achieved, we have identified essential programs in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in fiscal year 2017. We urge the Subcommittee to include strong support for these programs in the Agriculture bill this year.

States in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have been working together to restore and protect this national treasure since 1983, when they signed the first Chesapeake Bay Agreement and formed the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Chesapeake Bay Commission.

As a testament to the value of this multistate partnership, last year New York, West Virginia, and Delaware joined the original signatories of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the District of Columbia to sign a new Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Through this partnership, states have committed to restore the water quality in the Bay by 2025 and to coordinate their restoration programs. We must maintain federal investment in the programs below to support state efforts and ensure that the restoration goals are realized. Accordingly, we ask that you impose no cap on Farm Bill funding for the following programs:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The EQIP program provides cost-share assistance to farmers to help them install basic on-farm practices, including those that improve water quality. In all watershed states, demand for this program exceeds supply. Full funding for this program will ensure that Farm Bill conservation programs that derive funding as a percentage of EQIP are also fully funded.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The RCPP streamlines several conservation programs, including the former Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, which has been vital to help farmers in our region meet aggressive regional water quality goals. The RCPP provides targeted conservation funding for natural resource issues and leverages private resources, particularly to areas of critical need such as the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program improves conservation systems by incentivizing agricultural producers to address priority resource issues with higher payments for better performance. CSP, like EQIP, provides resources for the RCPP.

The Chesapeake Bay showed clear but we need to maintain our momentum to return the Bay to its place among the most economically productive estuaries. States have invested significant time and resources into doing their share to clean the Bay. It is essential to continue this progress. We thank you for supporting this essential partnership with Bay states in an extraordinary effort to restore our national treasure for current and future generations.

Sincerely,



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN



ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT



DONALD S. BEYER JR.



JOHN CARNEY



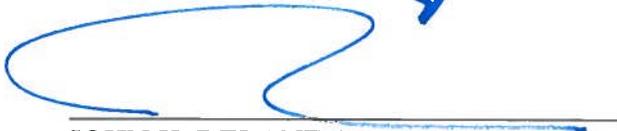
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