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FARM BILL: CBF SUPPORTS CLEAN WATERS AND PROFITABLE FARMS

Pennsylvania farmers rely on the federal Farm Bill conservation programs to help conserve soil and nutrients, and to meet state requirements. The 2008 Farm Bill provided significant financial and technical assistance for voluntary conservation projects that improve the health of our rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay.

The Farm Bill contributes more than any other legislation to water quality improvement in the nation. Oddly enough, the water quality pieces are also among the smallest components.

Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate just passed Farm Bills that we hope will soon be reconciled and signed into law. Conservation programs must be a priority, but aren't receiving the same media and public attention as nutrition programs and crop insurance.

Conservation programs comprise only 5.7% of the total Farm Bill cost. Cutting their funds will not make a significant difference in the overall budget. It would, however, cause great harm to farmers working to protect soil and water. Available funds in recent years have not met the need. For every three farmers applying to USDA for assistance, only one has been able to sign a contract due to limited funds.

Strong conservation programs with adequate funding are essential to reach the goals outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint (www.cbf.org/blueprint). From 2010 to 2012, they have helped farmers throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Pennsylvania establish many practices that significantly reduce nutrient and sediment loads, including:

- 52,718 acres of nutrient management
- 25,830 acres of cover crops
- 18,324 acres of residue and tillage management
- 6,606 acres of prescribed grazing
- 60 acres of livestock heavy use area protection
- 3,730 animal units under feed management
- 2,327 acres of riparian forest buffer
- 10,744 acres of permanent grasses and legumes.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Farm Bill priorities:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides financial and technical assistance to establish a variety of conservation practices to improve water quality. In 2012, 807 Pennsylvania farms received \$23.8 million to improve manure management, transition to organic production, improve grazing, and establish filter strips and a variety of other practices needed on the farm. Funding must be maintained for this essential program for farms trying to better manage nutrients and sediment, especially because demand far exceeds available funds each year.
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** conserves and improves soil, water, and wildlife resources through annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to farmers in exchange for establishing grasses and trees, on land that has been in crop production. CRP includes a program – the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) – that enables farmers to restore riparian forested buffers and other partial field conservation practices with high potential impact. CRP had an acreage cap of 32 million acres in 2012. The program must be reauthorized with an acreage cap of no less than 25 million acres by fiscal

year 2018. We also support removing the five-year *early out* provision that is currently contained in the House-passed Farm Bill. Approximately 25,000 acres of forested riparian buffers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Pennsylvania are enrolled in CREP, making this a significant water quality improvement program.

The Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint includes planting and/or restoring over 174,000 acres of forested riparian buffers. Without a strong, effective Conservation Reserve Program, this goal is virtually unattainable.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** is a newly proposed program that replaces various regional programs, including the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, which provided a vital \$238 million to the region and around \$60 million to Pennsylvania farmers from 2009 through 2012. Pennsylvania farmers used this funding to meet regulatory requirements and to protect local rivers and streams.

CBF strongly recommends that the new Farm Bill include funding levels comparable to the Senate version of the RCPP, which authorizes \$101 million annually for up to six geographic areas, or an annual average of \$16.8 million per area, one of which will be the Chesapeake Bay. The House version of the RCPP provides only \$60 million annually for up to eight geographic areas, with an annual average of \$7.7 million per area.

CBF and many partners have used Farm Bill programs to link forested buffers to whole farm conservation in Lancaster, Chester, and Bradford Counties. RCPP would likely support initiatives such as this in these and other watersheds with water quality concerns.

- **The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** is a comprehensive working lands program that provides technical and financial assistance to farmers to actively manage and maintain existing conservation systems and to implement additional conservation activities on land in agricultural production. The Senate bill cut this program from previous levels, but less than the House version. The annual acreage enrollment must be maintained at the Senate-passed farm bill level of 10.348 million acres per year. In 2012, 104 Pennsylvania farms received \$924,000 in financial assistance for these conservation practices.

These conservation programs are worth the investment.

- Every dollar invested in clean water programs on farms generates \$1.56 in new economic activity;
- the Chesapeake Bay is worth \$1 trillion due to fishing, tourism, property values, and shipping activities;
- Pennsylvania's fishing and boating industry is worth over \$3 billion annually;
- clean water can increase the value of homes near the water by up to 25 percent.

Pennsylvanians deserve clean water, healthy communities, and strong and vibrant economies for today and for generations to come. The conservation programs in the Farm Bill can help Pennsylvania realize these goals.



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure