



CHESAPEAKE BAY  
FOUNDATION

*Saving a National Treasure*

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USDA Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative

# Clean Water, Resilient Farms

The best strategy to meet the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint's 2025 clean water goals is to **provide Chesapeake Bay Watershed states, particularly Pennsylvania, more financial and technical help for farmers to implement conservation practices** that improve water quality. Many of these practices reduce greenhouse gases and also bolster the region's resilience to climate change. **USDA should target assistance** to basins within the watershed that are most effective at reducing nitrogen pollution. The agency should also focus on conservation practices that have climate change benefits. A restored Bay is worth \$130 billion annually in economic, public health, and environmental benefits.

## The Problem

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Collectively, the Bay states, especially Pennsylvania, are behind schedule to meet their Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint targets by 2025. The Blueprint provides science-based, enforceable limits on the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment pollution that can enter the Chesapeake in order to remove the Bay from the federal "dirty waters" list. More than 80 percent of the remaining pollution reductions will need to come from agriculture for the states to meet the 2025 deadline.

The agricultural funding need between now and 2025 in Pennsylvania alone is roughly \$3 billion. To make matters worse, Pennsylvania historically has not gotten its fair share of federal conservation dollars.

- Pennsylvania gets less than half of the USDA conservation technical assistance (CTA) at about \$163 per farm, compared with the national average of \$374 per farm, based on 2017 CTA funding levels and the 2017 Census of Agriculture figures.
- A 2017 report by the U.S. Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) suggested Pennsylvania is being shortchanged roughly \$20 million each year just by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) because the money is being allocated based more on historical funding amounts than conservation needs.

In addition, the region is facing new challenges from climate change. Extreme weather, sea-level rise, and warming waters have hit the 64,000-square-mile watershed and its farmers hard. Intense rains increase nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment pollution from the region's farms and streets into the Bay and its tributaries, making it even more difficult for states to meet their Blueprint targets. Weather extremes like hot summers and droughts can cause heat stress in major crops and livestock.

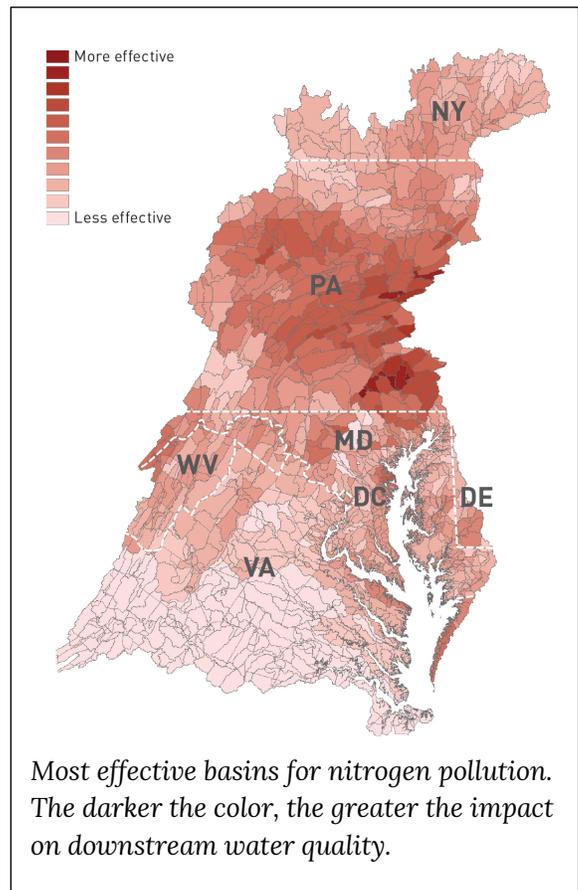
## The Solution

**Using existing authority in the Farm Bill, USDA should establish the Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative and target additional technical and financial resources in the most cost-effective way possible by focusing on basins within the watershed where best management practices are most effective at improving water quality.** The U.S. EPA Chesapeake Bay Program refers to them as “most effective basins.”<sup>1</sup>

Many practices, like rotational grazing of livestock and planting streamside forested buffers, that cost-effectively reduce nutrients and sediment to local waters and the Bay are also highly effective at reducing greenhouse gases and making farms more resilient to the effects of climate change. Providing farmers both technical and financial assistance for these practices in these most effective basins is the fastest, most efficient, way USDA can help them make progress toward both goals.

We must act immediately, given how little time the Bay jurisdictions have left to meet the 2025 Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint targets. **The Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative should include additional sources of funding over and above any money that the federal government already plans to spend on agricultural conservation practices in the watershed.** These funds could come from a boost of funding to the region as suggested by the *Billion for the Bay Initiative* or increases to USDA Title II Conservation Programs. In the *Billion for the Bay Initiative*, the governors of the six Chesapeake Bay states, along with the mayor of Washington, D.C., and the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, have proposed that Congress deliver a new infusion of funding that is necessary for the Bay jurisdictions to meet their pollution limits by 2025. They outlined their proposal in a letter to Congressional leadership on May 13, 2021. If adopted, a significant portion of these dollars should go to the USDA Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative. Congress is also considering increasing funding to existing USDA Title II Conservation Programs via the budget resolution process and if successful, USDA should use a portion of these additional funds for the Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative.

Agricultural conservation practices not only improve water quality in the Bay, but they reduce greenhouse gas emissions and are part of the solution to providing climate resiliency in the region. Providing funding to ensure the success of the Chesapeake Bay Blueprint will restore the Bay, strengthen the region’s natural infrastructure, and boost its economy.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/effectivenessrationale.pdf>