



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure

March 19, 2018

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The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and over 250,000 members and supporters of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, I write to thank you for your support of the Title II Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative in the 2008 Farm Bill, and your continued provision of critical support for Bay farmers through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in the 2014 Farm Bill. Since 1983, the federal government has been an important partner in the effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay. Thanks to farmer partners keeping soil on their land and reducing runoff, **Bay states are making history!** The Farm Bill deserves a lot of the credit. As the House Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee prepares to markup a Farm Bill, we urge to the Committee to incorporate the provisions of the **Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017** to ensure the RCPP program performs as intended in our region.

In 2014, Congress established the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in an effort to both prioritize conservation resources and create a mechanism to attract and leverage new private sector partners and resources. The stand-alone Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program – unique for its commitment to target resources to priority lands, was rescinded in this process, but the new RCPP program specifically promised “to accomplish the functions of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program.” Unfortunately, implementation of the RCPP has not lived up to this goal. Overall the number of partnerships and allocated federal resources for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have been lower than anticipated. According to USDA statistics, the first four installments of funding (from FY2014 – FY2017) for water quality improvement total \$51.7 million over roughly four years, which equates to around \$13 million annually. Furthermore, USDA does not report statistics on program impact on the critical resource concern of the region: Water quality. By contrast, the former Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program invested an average of \$50 million annually which was targeted in priority watersheds on best management practices with water quality benefits. Because these investments leverage at least 1:1 in additional investment, this decline in funding represents a significant loss for the region.

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The **Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017** thoughtfully addresses these issues. In particular, it addresses loopholes in the Critical Conservation Area (CCA) section of the program to ensure that CCA partnerships are consistent with national, regional and state priorities, and generate outcomes that actually address critical resource concerns. It also addresses the administrative challenges faced by Chesapeake Bay Watershed stakeholders who have participated in the RCPP since its inception, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Helping partners – farmers and local stakeholders – achieve both productive farms and healthy rivers and streams in our region is perhaps the top priority if we are going to successfully restore water quality in local rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay. By incorporating the provisions of the **Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017** in the next Farm Bill, the Committee can ensure the program accomplishes this goal.

Very truly yours,

William C. Baker
President

cc: House Chesapeake Bay Task Force co-Chairs, Representatives Rob Wittman, Andy Harris, Bobby Scott, John Sarbanes and members.