



September 15, 2021

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The agricultural producers of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have been national leaders in implementing the conservation practices that, over the past 30 years, have reduced nutrient and sediment pollutant loads by half, while human and livestock populations have grown, and crop yields have increased. This progress places the Chesapeake in the forefront of national and international large-scale ecosystem restoration efforts and demonstrates the strength of the federal-state-farmer partnership at its core.

As the Farm Bureau organizations for the six watershed states, we collectively represent more than 100,000 farm families, and it has been our honor to help lead these efforts along with our state conservation agencies and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

We are now at a critical stage in the Chesapeake Bay cleanup, as we approach the Total Maximum Daily Load 2025 deadline. The agriculture sector has been a leader, and many farmers have fundamentally changed the way they farm to achieve water quality progress. Unfortunately, another 50 million pounds of nitrogen must be reduced, and more than 80 percent must come from agriculture and forestry — a nine-fold increase in historic rates for agricultural conservation practices.

Farmers have been extraordinarily receptive to voluntary cost-share programs designed to achieve these restoration goals. What we lack is the necessary capacity, both human and financial. Adequate funding and USDA's involvement is pivotal.

We are asking you to establish a Chesapeake Bay Resilient Farms Initiative (CRFI), similar to the Mississippi River Basin Initiative you previously created. In their May, 2021 fact sheet and proposal, the Chesapeake Bay Commission estimated a need of approximately \$737 million over the next 10 years.

This funding would primarily target those sub-watersheds known to have the greatest influence on the Chesapeake Bay and offer the most cost-effective solutions.

We stand ready to work with you and our congressional delegations to find funding that would then flow through proven conservation programs administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service such as Conservation Technical Assistance, Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program, to put these practices on the ground.

Sincerely,

Richard "Rick" Ebert
President, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

Wayne Stafford
President, Maryland Farm Bureau

David M. Fisher
President, New York Farm Bureau

Charles A. Wilfong
President, West Virginia Farm Bureau

Wayne F. Pryor
President, Virginia Farm Bureau

Richard Wilkins
President, Delaware Farm Bureau