

February 25, 2020

SUPPORT HB 687/SB597: Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I strongly support HB 687/SB597: Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices. I believe farmers interested in soil- and climate-friendly projects deserve reliable and equitable access to state cost-share assistance.

I grow over 10,000 acres of row crops working with over 60 landowners on the eastern shore of Maryland. I believe strongly that cover crops are essential to soil health, water conservation and the long term viability of productive farmland. In fact, I work closely with the University of Maryland on cover crop research and our studies have shown that cover crop diversity of species is key to improving soil health, sequestering remnant nitrogen after harvest and reducing fertilizer inputs for the following season's crops. I have taken advantage of the State's cover crop program for a number of years and am very thankful for this conservation funding. I am also pleased to see the Maryland Department of Agriculture embrace the planting of multispecies cover crops the past few years.

However, there is room for improvement in how the Department determines the rate of conservation funding. Currently the Department pays a higher rate for planting 100% rye and \$10 less per acre if you plant multispecies cover. This deduction in payment for planting diversity sends the wrong message to farmers as the Department continues to promote soil health throughout Maryland farmland. Planting multispecies cover costs more but has huge conservation benefits for water quality, soil health and reducing costly fertilizer inputs the following season. I am such a strong believer in the importance of multispecies cover that I have some fields where I plant 10 different species of cover crops. This Bill will fix this inequity.

Maryland is a leader nationwide on our cover crop program and we need to continue to promote and evolve as we learn more about soil health. I strongly urge the support of this important bill. Updating the MACS Program is a common-sense step to continue our progress.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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