**SB 0932 – Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program - Established
March 7, 2024
Position: Favorable**

I am writing to express my strong **SUPPORT** for the **SB0932** Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program. This bill aims to prioritize grant funding of agricultural pollution control projects or "best management practices" (BMPs) administered by the Department of Agriculture to best serve the state's goals for nutrient pollution reductions.

In both the Coastal Bays and Chesapeake regions of Maryland a failure to reach restoration goals has highlighted a necessity for re-evaluation of nutrient reduction programs, particularly pertaining to the Chesapeake Bay 2025 restoration target. In the Chesapeake region, a recent groundbreaking scientific assessment, called the Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response, or "CESR", contained numerous findings and recommendations. Several of these Chesapeake Bay lessons, detailed below, are equally applicable to the nutrient pollution issues faced in Maryland's Coastal Bays watersheds and highlight a necessity for statewide reform of allocated resources and funding for agricultural BMPs.

One major conclusion drawn out in the CESR report is the current failures of untargeted implementation and funding of BMPs. The report highlights a necessity for strategic implementation of these practices to maximize nutrient (nitrogen and phosphorus) reductions. The failures of these pollution mitigation practices have led to the build-up of excess nutrients entering our waterways.

This bill aims to address the major flaws of "untargeted" restoration efforts found in the CESR report and represents a major milestone in pursuit of effective and cost-effective strategies for addressing Maryland's water quality issues, if fully implemented. This bill aims to achieve these reductions through use of incentive payments to farmers, landowners, and/or their contractors for effective projects which maximize pollution reduction capability, ecosystem resilience, and public health protection.

This legislation will help to address unaccounted for sources of airborne nutrients. According to recent estimates from the Environmental Integrity Project, millions of pounds of airborne nutrients, in the form of ammonia, are being deposited to the land and waters of the Eastern Shore with little-to-no control in place. However, despite the severity of the issue, solutions to this problem are cheap. Proper installation and maintenance of vegetative buffers consisting of trees, shrubs, and grasses can intercept those gaseous emissions, capturing those nutrients before deposition onto the landscape. There are few water pollution control projects or practices with a greater cost-effectiveness value than these.

Additionally, these vegetative buffers reduce on-land nutrient runoff to the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays waters, stabilize soils, and substantially reduce hazardous air pollutants in certain communities, especially in overburdened Eastern Shore communities in Somerset, Wicomico, and western Worcester counties that are often surrounded by high concentrations of ammonia and particulate matter pollution.

This program is especially feasible for implementation given improvements in restoration science methodologies and major advancements in modeling tools.

In conclusion, I urge your **SUPPORT** for **SB0932** Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program. By enacting this legislation, we can take meaningful steps towards the strategic improvement of Maryland's water quality.

Taylor Swanson,
Assateague Coastkeeper, on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust.