



Fair Farms[®] Maryland

a campaign for healthy food, land & waterways

Support for House Bill 687 (Delegate Stein) Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices

February 25, 2020

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 687, sponsored by Delegate Stein, that seeks to make adjustments to the Maryland Agriculture Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program.

The Fair Farms campaign of Waterkeepers Chesapeake brings together consumers, farmers, public health professionals, green businesses, and conservationists to advocate for a food system that is equitable, fair to farmers, invests in homegrown healthy foods, and restores our waterways. We are a growing movement of over 35,000 Marylanders and close to 200 partners across the state. These partners include national organizations like Farm Aid, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Family Farm Defenders, and National Family Farm Coalition and local groups like the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility. In addition, we are a member of the Million Acre Challenge whose long-term goal is to reach a transformative tipping point: no fewer than one million acres in Maryland in regenerative production by 2030.

Maryland spends approximately \$30 million per year through the MACS program for conservation measures on farms. The MACS program has already helped make Maryland a leader when it comes to planting cover crops. Our state ranked first nationally when accounting for acreage of cover crops, according to the 2017 Agriculture Census. However, cover crops are not enough. From 2010 to 2018, the state reduced nitrogen pollution from farms by 1.6 million pounds, but will need to reduce an additional 4.6 million pounds to meet 2025 goals for the agriculture sector in the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint.

HB 687 would expand the MACS program to incentivize a wider array of sustainable agriculture practices that are regenerative in nature and promote the long-term health of soil while protecting

the environment. Of the \$30 million per year Maryland spends for soil conservation measures on farms, about 80% of these funds pay for “annual” management practices while payments for more cost effective, longer term practices are drastically reduced. This bill will provide equitable funding for rotational grazing, stream buffers, wetlands and trees. It would reserve funding to address pre-existing water quality concerns. Furthermore, it will eliminate the penalty for producers adding diversity to their cover crop mixes.

Farmers play an important role in the health of our communities and environment, and it’s critical that we aid them in taking steps to farm in soil- and climate-friendly ways. It’s imperative that we provide farmers with cost-share assistance for these regenerative practices. By implementing practices like pastures and forest buffers, farmers are not just protecting the health of the environment, but they are also building up the health of their soil and increasing their bottom line.

HB 687 will enable Maryland to continue our leadership in this space; support farmers as they implement cost-effective, longer-term practices that will safeguard the health of the Bay; and make the MACS program more cost effective and more efficient.

For these reasons, Fair Farms urges the Committee to adopt a favorable report of House Bill 687.

Sincerely,

Shelby Kalm
Fair Farms Campaign Manager
Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Carl Benson, *Climate Stewards of Greater Annapolis*
Gabriel Bustos, *Elemental Education*
Dena Leibman, *Future Harvest*
Bryan Alexander, *Good Dog Farm*
Arjun Makhijani, *Institute for Energy & Environmental Research*
Devora Kimelman-Block, *KOL Foods, LLC*
Carolyn E. Ricketts, *Neighborhood Sun*
Doug Adams, *New Brooklyn Farms*
Andrea Davis-Cetina, *Quarter Acre Farm*
Kathleen Overman, *Sweet Leenie*
Gregory Mason, *The White Oak Tavern*