



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

February 23, 2020

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I have been a grass based dairy farmer in Kent County for over 20 years and am extremely supportive of HB687/SB597: Agriculture-Cost-Sharing Program-Fixed Natural Filter Practices.

The increased investment in long-term regenerative practices such as planting buffers, diversifying cover crops, establishing pastures and supporting grazing infrastructure will have a significant impact on improving soil health and water quality, reducing run off, preventing erosion, and enhancing farm viability. These practices incorporate the five basic principles that every farmer should follow to establish natural filters to maximize water retention during a drought and absorption during heavy rains:

1. **Keep soil covered at all times**
2. **Minimize soil disturbance**
3. **Increase crop species diversity**
4. **Keep living roots in the soil as long as possible**
5. **Integrate proper livestock through managed grazing**

Agricultural cost-share programs are critical to small scale and beginning farmers who are establishing grazing operations. The infrastructure- seed, fencing and water lines and troughs- are key components of this farming system but can be cost prohibitive. We were fortunate to qualify for Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds from the USDA when we started our operation in 1997. As we were heavily leveraged in the early years, I do not know how we would have accomplished our goal of operating a successful dairy grazing operation without that cost share support. Funding for cost share projects should be allocated to a diverse range of types of farms as well as size of farms to encourage and build a resilient agriculture sector. In addition, it is critical to do everything possible to get young people back on the land. The average age of America's farmers is increasing every year and is currently 58 years old.

By supporting this bill, small scale and beginning farmers will be able to stay on the land, permanent best management practices such as grazing and buffers will be adopted and water quality will be improved.

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I strongly urge a favorable report on this important bill. While Maryland farmers are among the best in the nation, more can be done to make permanent changes in agricultural practices that are more cost effective and beneficial to the soil than conventional cover crops.

Updating the MACS Program is a common-sense step to continue our progress.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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