



DELMARVA POULTRY INDUSTRY, INC.

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Date: February 25, 2020
To: Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee
From: Holly Porter, Executive Director
Re: HB 687 – Agricultural – Cost Sharing Program – Fixed Natural Filter Practices – **Oppose**

Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc. (DPI), the 1,700-member trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, processing companies and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and Delaware opposes HB 687 and urges an unfavorable committee report.

HB 687 defines fixed natural filter practices, prohibits the state cost-sharing funds from being used if it does not match USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) requirements of a resource concern, and requires additional cost-share funds for fixed natural filter practices in addition to utilizing Bay Restoration Funds for these practices.

DPI has several concerns about this bill as written. Currently, new chicken farmers utilize the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program (MACS) for cost-share in building manure storage sheds as well as for composting units. These are required for a chicken farmer to receive a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permit from the Maryland Department of the Environment, which is required before birds are placed in the houses by the processing company that the grower is contracting with. However, according to the current regulations for NRCS, a resource concern does not occur until there is a problem – meaning until chickens are placed on the farm and producing litter. This would mean that beginning farmers would not be able to utilize this cost-share program for a proven and praised best management practice, which would cost them tens of thousands of additional dollars.

Our members also have concerns with taking limited funds from one of the country's leading programs for conservation – cover crops – and using them for other best management practices. If the cover crop funds were to decrease, the state would likely see less acres in cover crop, which may jeopardize agriculture and the state of Maryland in reaching its Chesapeake Bay goals.

DPI has a Vegetative Environmental Buffers program that offers technical assistance to our grower-members in planting trees, shrubs and grasses on farms. We believe that offering more cost-share to projects like the fixed natural filter practices could benefit our members, however not at the cost of tried and true best management practices, such as cover crop and manure or composting storage. We would hope that supporters of this bill would look to find other resources to help increase use of these practices without negative impact to others.

We urge an unfavorable vote on HB 687.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at porter@dpichicken.com or 302-222-4069 or Nick Manis, Manis Canning & Associates, 410-263-7882.