

DANA M. STEIN  
Legislative District 11  
Baltimore County

Vice Chair  
Environment and Transportation  
Committee

Subcommittees  
Chair, Environment  
Natural Resources,  
Agriculture and Open Space



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 251  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3527 · 301-858-3527  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3527  
Fax 410-841-3509 · 301-858-3509  
Dana.Stein@house.state.md.us

*The Maryland House of Delegates*  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of**

**HB 687 - Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices**

Chairman Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The goal of this bill is to amend the Maryland Agricultural Water-Quality Cost Share Program, commonly called MACS, so that it supports water conservation practices in the most effective manner.

For more than 30 years, the MACS program has supported farmers who voluntarily apply to the State for cost-share assistance with conservation practices. The mainstay of the program has been robust support for cover crops, which are an important conservation practice and have helped us make progress on water quality goals required by the Chesapeake Bay Blueprint.

Fixed Natural Filters

The third phase of the State's Watershed Implementation Plan is the final stage in achieving the Chesapeake Bay Blueprint. The Phase III WIP calls for continued support for cover crops. It also calls for an increase in the State's forest buffers, grass buffers, prescribed grazing, tree planting, and wetland restoration.

According to the Bay Program data these practices – known as fixed natural filter practices -- are also some of the most cost-effective water quality improvements for farming.

This bill:

- Makes sure fixed natural filters are fully eligible for MACS funding, and
- Seeks to encourage additional interest by farmers in installing the practices by putting them on equal financial footing with other practices.

House Bill 687 would also require equal rate payments for mixed-seed cover crops as for single-species. While single-species rye has a high nutrient uptake rate, mixed-species allows reduced nutrient application over time, reducing the potential for nutrient pollution.

Since introduction of this legislation, the Department of Agriculture has communicated an interest in adjusting current formulas for a few of these practices.

While the Department's stated intention is encouraging, the changes they propose do not fully accommodate comprehensive support that would be achieved by this bill and would not provide the same certainty for farmers.

#### Precluding MACS Funding for CAFOs

MACS program funding is sometimes used to fund start-up costs for new or expanding Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

This allowance differs from federal agriculture programs, which prohibit funding for new sources of pollution.

It is also out of alignment with other state environmental programs, such as funding for wastewater upgrades and stormwater management.

House Bill 687 would restrict MACS funding to pollution reductions in keeping with comparable policies.

#### Ensuring Allocated Bay Restoration Funds Are Consistently Used

Under current law, some funding for the MACS program is provided by the Bay Restoration Fund.

Other funding sources include the 2010 Atlantic and Coastal Bay Trust Fund and GO Bonds.

While the 2010 Atlantic and Coastal Bay Trust Fund may be used for cover crops or MACS capital projects, the Bay Restoration Fund is specifically earmarked to fund only cover crops.

That means when a rainy season prevents cover crop plantings, some of the Bay Restoration Fund allocation may go unspent.

This bill originally intended to expand the potential uses of the Bay Restoration Fund to include fixed natural filters to help ensure the funding is put to use.

My amendment to this legislation removes this change, and my understanding is that that removes the opposition of the Farm Bureau. I look forward to working with the Department to ensure that all funding allocated to MACS is made use of in the current funding year going forward through Administrative attention to this matter.