



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: March 24, 2021

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 344

SHORT TITLE: Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - State Cost-Sharing Funds

MDA POSITION: Support

EXPLANATION:

This legislation will allow the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to provide up to 100% State funding assistance (currently limited to 87.5%) for the implementation of certain high priority conservation practices that improve water quality and provide other environmental benefits.

The bill was amended in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee to add a sunset date to the bill. SB 344 will take effect July 1, 2021 and terminate June 30, 2026.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The State of Maryland is obligated to meet the Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan ("WIP") goals approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by 2025, and much of the necessary reductions are anticipated to come from the agricultural sector. MDA's ability to provide additional funding assistance will be an important incentive for farmers to install these practices, helping the State reach its WIP goals.

Maryland farmers have committed to do their part to help the State meet the Bay goals approved by EPA. However, some conservation practices result in lost crop production and new maintenance requirements, which is difficult for many Maryland farmers who work on slim profit margins. For this reason, additional funding assistance may be needed to advance the adoption of these practices.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at cassie.shirk@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.