

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB898— Nutrient Management - Tidal Buffer - Vegetative Buffers  
and Restrictions on Fertilizer Application

Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee Hearing:  
February, 18 at 1:00pm

To Chair Feldman and members of the Committee,

My name is Shannon Hamm, and I am a life long Marylander, now living in Stevensville MD. As you know this is vulnerable slice of Maryland with critical habitat designations on Maryland's Eastern Shore. I offer the following testimony in support of SB898, which seeks to prevent water pollution from agricultural fertilizer use that would otherwise be permitted 100 feet from Maryland tidal water, increase land voluntarily enrolled in conservation to further increase nutrient reductions, create the state's first incentive program that provides value to tenant farmers — the growing future for on-farm conservation. Having spent the past 40 years working for USDA, I not only appreciate the Chesapeake Bay as the world's largest estuary, but as well as someone who understands the value of agriculture to our region. We have to find that balance to support the amenities of the Bay and economic impacts from agriculture. This bill's effort is in service of accelerating Bay restoration efforts that bolster progress while including incentives for the farming industry more comprehensively than ever before. Please take a moment to find those nexus and help create bridges for the future for both.

This bill is a direct response to recent scientific reports, including the Bay Program's *Comprehensive Evaluation of the System Response*, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension's *Riparian Buffer Management Fact Sheet*, and the Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology's *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Economic Incentives to Enhance Riparian Buffer Adoption and Environmental Benefits for Water Quality and Carbon Sequestration*, which all cite riparian buffer adoption as one of the most cost efficient practices to maximize pollution reductions. Several of these reports offer evidence that Maryland's incentive programs must be strategically targeted to maximize results and investments, and that incentives must be paired with creative policies to increase participation to ensure its adoption and success. The key points that SB898 addresses in its recommendations include:

1. Increasing the nutrient application setback on farms bordering tidal waters to 100 feet to reduce nutrient pollution and address the nutrient mass imbalance outlined in the Bay programs CESR report;
2. Increasing incentives for voluntary land enrollment in forest and grass buffers within the 100 foot setbacks;
3. Establish incentives for leased land operators who farm land enrolled in conservation within the 100 foot buffer.

In a time where Maryland's budget faces shortfalls and distinct challenges, it has never been more important to target state investments in conservation that achieve the greatest results,

while committing to minimize the impact to Maryland's fragile and small farmlands (to less than half of one percent). The time is now to act on this piece of legislation, as environmental and economic forces press against our agricultural industry and I am grateful to Senator Love for bringing this important legislation forward, and I urge this committee for a favorable report on SB898.