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Date: February 14, 2025  
To: Members of the House Committee on Health and Government Operations  
From: Grayson Middleton, Government Affairs Manager  
Re: SB0898 – Vegetative Buffers and Restrictions on Fertilizer Application – **Oppose**

Delmarva Chicken Association (DCA) the 1,600-member trade association representing the meat-chicken growers, companies, and allied business members on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and Delaware opposes SB 898 and urges an unfavorable committee report.

SB 898 establishes cost-share funding for fixed natural tidal buffers and provides bonus payments for landowners who enroll and maintain land in a qualified buffer zone. The bill also extends the current nutrient application setback from 25ft to 100ft.

More than 95% of the grain grown on the Eastern Shore is converted to chicken feed. Therefore, the grain and poultry industries on Delmarva are inextricably linked. Any factors affecting the production of grain will invariably have some impact on the production of chicken. In addition, many of the chicken farmers we represent also grow grain.

DCA supports the generous voluntary cost-share incentives and bonuses as outlined in the bill. Maryland farmers frequently take advantage of similar programs, and as a community, we have reduced our nutrient runoff by 2.7 million pounds of nitrogen and 3,160 pounds of phosphorous through voluntary participation in Maryland's cover crop program in 2023 alone. However, given the fiscal note on this legislation, we are not confident that the state will have the resources to fund these new programs. What's left is essentially a land grab.

Extending the current 25ft nutrient application setback from 25ft to 100ft will take an estimated 2,665 acres of agricultural land out of production. Proponents of the bill have argued that farmers can still plant crops within the setback, albeit without utilizing fertilizer. This is a misleading characterization. Without the ability to alter the nutrient content of the soil through nutrient application, these lands would quickly become depleted and unutilized by farmers.

While we do not argue the effectiveness of such a measure, it fails to recognize both the necessity of agriculture in our state and the strides we have made in reducing our nutrient run-off. The U.S. Geological Survey [recently estimated](#) that meeting the nutrient reduction goals for the bay would require taking approximately 44% of the region's 8.2 million acres of farmland out of production. While we do not necessarily dispute that figure, it is a non-starter. Food production is not an option; it is the foundation of human health and civilization. We must eventually recognize that taking more and more agricultural lands out of production is not only harmful to our farmer citizens but is an unsustainable approach to addressing environmental challenges.

As such, we urge an **unfavorable** vote on SB 898.



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Should you have any additional questions, please contact me at [middleton@dcachicken.com](mailto:middleton@dcachicken.com) or 410-490-3329.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Grayson S. Middleton".

Grayson Middleton

Government Affairs Manager