



Maryland Grain Producers Association
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House Bill 506 – Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act

Committee: Environment and Transportation

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The **Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA)** is proud to serve as the voice of Maryland's grain farmers, who grow corn, wheat, barley, and sorghum across the state. MGPA strongly supports **House Bill 506**, which establishes the **Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program** and the **LEEF Program Fund** to support actions aligned with the program's goals.

The **LEEF Program** is designed to incentivize the voluntary adoption of two key types of farming practices:

1. **Environmental conservation practices**, including those focused on the Chesapeake Bay and climate-related issues.
2. **Community best practices**, which include leadership, mentorship, and good neighbor practices that demonstrate engagement with local communities.

This program aligns perfectly with MGPA's philosophy that voluntary, incentivized participation is the most effective way forward for conservation efforts in agriculture. MGPA believes that a one-size-fits-all approach to farming is ineffective—what works on one farm may not work on another, and conservation strategies can vary by geography. The LEEF Program will offer a flexible suite of practices that farmers can choose from to meet various tiers of certification, ensuring that each farmer has the tools and options to succeed.

The **Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)** has engaged in a comprehensive stakeholder process, gathering input and feedback from farmers, conservationists, extension agents, and government agencies, among others. This process will continue as the LEEF program is developed further, including defining specific practices, incentive payment rates, and the recognition mechanisms that will encourage more farmers to participate.

Maryland farmers are already leaders in conservation and community engagement. They implement more conservation practices per acre—both regulated and voluntary—than any other state in the nation. Furthermore, Maryland farmers have served as Presidents of prominent national organizations, including the **National Corn Growers Association**, **U.S. Wheat Associates**, the **National Association of Conservation Districts**, and the **U.S. Grains Council**. The LEEF Program would recognize the important work farmers are already doing while encouraging even greater efforts.

Importantly, this voluntary program will allow MDA to set it up based on available funding, rather than imposing mandatory practices without the financial support necessary to make them viable. This flexible approach reduces the risk of placing financial burdens on farmers while still promoting positive change.

MGPA looks forward to continuing to collaborate with MDA in the development and implementation of the LEEF Program and its efforts to support Maryland's farmers in their commitment to conservation and leadership.

Thank you,

Lindsay Thompson

Executive Director