



AGRICULTURAL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES COST-SHARE PROGRAM

The latest agricultural funding needs assessment from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) identifies close to \$125 million in the Chesapeake Bay for Agricultural BMP Cost-Share Program over the next two fiscal years. Virginia has now released the third phase of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Program (WIP). The agriculture and forestry industries will be expected to play a large part in achieving these reductions. These new targets will require increased funding for the agricultural community to keep up pace and reach our goals for nutrient reductions. In addition, Soil and Water Conservation Districts will need increased technical assistance funding to provide staff to disperse the cost-share funds. These two funding mechanisms go hand-in-hand to ensure these conservation measures are properly installed on agriculture land.

- The introduced budget allows for nearly \$88 million for Agricultural BMPs for farmers to install conservation practice infrastructure on their farms over the biennium and over \$11 million per year in technical assistance and operations for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to ensure that these practices are properly and effectively maintained. Both amounts fall far short of accomplishing the goals contained in the WIP and the Council supports budget amendments to provide increased funding to both BMP and technical assistance funding.
- The Council supports meeting agriculture nutrient reductions within the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) through utilization of voluntary Resource Management Plans (RMPs). RMPs must be supported by adequate, consistent, and dedicated funding for cost-share programs and technical assistance for implementation.

Funding for agricultural BMPs is more imperative now than it has ever been before. This is an issue of not only conservation, but also of economic viability for Virginia's agribusiness industry. As our industry works to meet new water quality milestones, we ask for the full support of the Commonwealth to assist us in reaching these goals.