

CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION



August 25, 2021

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The agricultural producers of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have been national leaders in implementing conservation practices that benefit the productivity and profitability of their operations while contributing to the environmental health of our waterways. As the Secretaries of Agriculture for the six watershed states, it has been our honor to help lead these efforts along with our strongest partner, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

We are now at a critical crossroads. The Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load 2025 deadline is just four years away and there is still much to be done, with the ag sector slated for 80 percent of the remaining nitrogen reductions. We know we have a receptive audience for voluntary cost-share programs designed to achieve these restoration goals. What we lack is the necessary capacity, both human and financial.

Hence, we are asking you to establish a Chesapeake Bay Resilient Farms Initiative (CRFI), similar to the Mississippi River Basin Initiative you previously created. We estimate a need of approximately \$737 million over the next 10 years. This funding would primarily target those sub-watersheds - particularly the Susquehanna River - known to have the greatest influence on the Chesapeake Bay and offer the most cost-effective solutions. This is particularly true in Pennsylvania, where agriculture is heavily concentrated and the rural nature of the Susquehanna River watershed means agriculture is the dominant source of excess nutrients in the Commonwealth's waters.

Importantly, we are seeking CRFI funding from new sources. We seek to work with you and our congressional delegations to find new funding that would then flow through proven conservation programs administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service such as Conservation Technical Assistance, Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

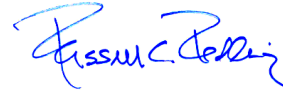
We respectfully request a meeting with you to further discuss this opportunity in more detail. Our point of contact is Maryland Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Hans Schmidt who can coordinate scheduling among our offices. Please reach out to him at hans.schmidt@maryland.gov or 443-758-4022.

In the meantime, additional information is provided in the attached fact sheet. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Joseph Bartenfelder, Secretary
Maryland Dep't of Agriculture



Russell C. Redding, Secretary
Pennsylvania Dep't of Agriculture



Richard Ball, Commissioner
New York Dep't of Agriculture & Markets



Bettina Ring, Secretary
Agriculture and Forestry, Virginia



Kent Leonhardt, Commissioner
West Virginia Dep't of Agriculture



Michael T. Scuse, Secretary
Delaware Department of Agriculture