Agriculture Workgroup Prioritization Document: 2025-2026

**Background:** The role of the Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG) has evolved over time, with changes in what the group discusses and produces being influenced by broader Chesapeake Bay Program partnership activities (namely, CB model development). The CBP is now entering a new period of change, with the Beyond 2025 effort shifting program-wide structure and function and a newly formed Agricultural Advisory Committee informing the partnership's leadership bodies on high-level, agricultural policy issues. These changes, and the desire expressed by several AgWG members to reevaluate how workgroup time is spent, were the impetus for this effort to identify the group's priorities for the coming two years.

At its October 2024 meeting, the AgWG began the process of identifying priority areas of focus through 2026. Between October 2024 and February of 2025, presentations were given to the group focused on high-level topics geared toward big-picture ideas that would potentially influence how the AgWG chooses to spend its time. These topics included: AgWG history and context within partnership structure; the STAC CESR report; Beyond 2025; and CBP Advisory Committees. Throughout this process, the AgWG leadership team has solicited input from workgroup members and meeting participants regarding interest in having these and other topics explored by the workgroup. The AgWG leadership team has received many ideas and thanks the workgroup participants for their engagement in this process.

**Purpose:** We now seek to compile what we've heard into a digestible format that identifies priority topics for the workgroup for the coming 18 months. This will formalize the interests of the AgWG and support agenda-building, project development, and a "workplan" to advance those interests.

On the following pages, we synthesize 5 months of discussions and feedback, identifying a purpose statement for our group to fulfil and two core pillars that support our group's effort to fulfil it. Each pillar has associated objectives: these have been extracted from our discussions and are what the workgroup feels it can and should pursue in the coming years. We have also captured possible actions to take to achieve those objectives, which have been assigned to the action categories "learning", "leading", and "improving.

While not a significant departure from the long-term, foundational purpose of our group, it *is* a marked change to how we conceptualize our approach to fulfilling our purpose. We found significant overlap between the prioritization discussions held in 2018-19 and those had over the last few months but felt we needed to re-center around the AgWG's "why?". This document outlines a strategy for how we can do that.

**Our request:** Please take time to review this draft. Specifically, we would like to know whether we've accurately captured the topics of interest for the group to pursue that were identified during our planning discussions. Further, if you have ideas for action items that fall under the objectives listed in this document, we encourage you to propose them.

**Pillar: Implementation**

One of the ways in which the partnership can advance toward achieving its ag-sector pollution reduction targets is through the implementation of pollution-reducing Best Management Practices. A tremendous amount of work has been done to this point to install practices, and this work must continue. The Ag Workgroup can explore innovative implementation strategies, bringing a variety of stakeholders to the table – including those who are most impacted by our decisions – to ultimately decide how the partnership can most efficiently and effectively address the remaining ag nonpoint-source pollutant load.

*Objectives:*

1) Accelerate BMP implementation.

Significant resources have been devoted to implementing conservation practices throughout the watershed. As we have not historically met our nutrient and sediment pollution reduction targets on assigned timelines, we must focus on accelerating BMP implementation. Therefore, the AgWG can and should discuss strategies for accelerating implementation.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Explore innovative engagement strategies employed within and beyond the CBW | Explore alternative implementation incentivization strategies, such as pay-for-performance | Enhance partnership support of on-the-ground implementation efforts to which we can provide value |
| | | Better integrate social science and associated strategies into discussions |

2) Enhance cross-partner communication/idea-sharing.

CBP partners are doing excellent work to reduce ag nonpoint-source pollution. One of the key roles of the AgWG is to serve as a forum for information exchange, reducing redundancy in effort and building coalitions to help advance projects more efficiently. Further, enhanced communication among workgroup members will help us collectively avoid "reinventing the wheel" by building on successes experienced and avoiding pitfalls found by others.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Spotlight “success stories”, including legislation, policies, and programs championed by partners | Discuss cutting-edge research, technology, and programs | Develop and regularly implement consistent method for hearing updates from AgWG members |
| Better understand implementation challenges and barriers faced by partners | | |

3) Expand AgWG reach through external communication and education.

Workgroup members have identified an opportunity for the group to expand its reach through better connecting with external parties. There are many ways in which the AgWG could do this; however, in recent years, we have not dedicated time to external outreach. Enhancing external connections will ultimately bring additional Bay stewards into the fold and expand the input we receive from producers/those most impacted by our decisions.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Understand how similar partnerships engage stakeholders | Develop/test innovative outreach strategies | Use AgWG website as a repository for watershed-wide ag information |
| | Visualize implementation through mapping (to the extent possible given data privacy concerns) | |

4) Track and understand agricultural industry trends.

Understanding trends in agriculture from industry professionals can inform the workgroup's efforts and ensure that we remain focused on salient ag issues and priorities.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Hear directly from industry representatives about industry direction and challenges | Pursue private-public partnerships to support implementation efforts | Determine priorities proactively, understanding what is “on the horizon” for our ag stakeholders |

5) Target BMP implementation.

Current BMP implementation patterns across the landscape are effective but may not be the most cost-effective or efficient strategy. Identifying high-load areas in the watershed, and then targeting resources/prioritizing implementation in those areas, could be a valuable strategy to pursue.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Coordinate with CESR authors to further understand impact of mass imbalance on efforts to achieve pollution reduction targets | Explore tiered approach to implementation, an opportunity of interest to the partnership (and one flagged in CESR report) | Advise on how to potentially reconsider allocating resources and implementation efforts |
| | In collaboration with STAC, spearhead partnership effort | |

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| | to assess state of mass (im)balance in the watershed | |

6) Understand and evaluate ag-sector WIP progress.

The AgWG is responsible for assisting the jurisdictions in progressing toward their ag-sector WIP targets. There are several ways in which this can be done. Fundamentally, the workgroup must understand a) what ag-sector WIP targets exist across the jurisdictions, and b) the steps the jurisdictions plan to take to meet those targets. This may help the group further refine where it chooses to allocate time.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Annual (?) updates from representatives of the jurisdictions on progress made toward ag-sector targets, highlighting priority BMPs and strategies for expanding implementation in the coming year | Serve as model for collaboration between CBP workgroup and partners involved in WIP implementation | Develop stronger support framework for jurisdictions in meeting ag-sector WIP targets and specific projects |

**Pillar: Crediting and Verification**

Progress toward pollution reduction targets is made by implementing Best Management Practices, but that impact is tracked, and our progress is ultimately measured, by the calculated "credit" that is assigned to each of those practices. *What receives* credit and *how much* credit is assigned are both significant variables in the progress equation and helps us determine how much work has been done, and how much remains. The Ag Workgroup can address these questions – what receives credit and how much credit is assigned – for ag-sector BMPs to compliment the work being done on the ground to put more beneficial practices in place.

*Objectives:*

1) Establish credit for BMPs not currently incorporated into the CBP's suite of modeling tools.

Not all ag BMPs are currently creditable in the Bay Program's suite of modeling tools. To credit new BMPs, the AgWG must initiate the process of determining nutrient and sediment reduction efficiencies, among other metrics, for the practice. This has traditionally been done through the expert panel process.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Remain aware of implementation trends (particular BMPs growing in popularity, etc.) | Develop Expert Panels & Expert Panel Establishment Groups<br>- Agroforestry (alley cropping/silvopasture)<br>- Biochar | NRCS/CBP BMP crosswalk to determine BMPs not currently receiving credit<br>Solicit priority BMPs to credit from partners |
| | | Better account for practices *on the ground* and not incorporated into CBP modeling tools by pursuing 1619 data sharing agreements |

2) Evaluate BMPs currently receiving credit in the CBP's suite of modeling tools.

The partnership strives to model real-world processes and outcomes as accurately as possible. The AgWG is responsible for evaluating agricultural BMPs that currently receive credit in our modeling tools to ensure that their impacts are modeled "correctly" in accordance with the best available science. All ag BMPs should be periodically evaluated for this reason.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Discuss latest research on CBP-credited BMPs | Develop standardized protocol for BMP revision | Revisit definitions and credit durations<br>Specific BMPs to consider:<br>- Stream exclusion/pasture fence<br>- Liquid manure incorporation<br>- Dairy precision feeding |

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| | | - Ag drainage management |

3) Develop methods for verifying BMPs not implemented through traditional channels (traditional channels being cost-share, etc.).

BMPs can be implemented without being counted for progress toward CBP goals. Some BMPs are implemented without the involvement of external parties. Partners have expressed interest in determining methods for locating and crediting these practices.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Hear from ag stakeholders and TA providers about BMPs that may be implemented but not tracked | Compile assessment of BMPs implemented through unconventional means | Propose revisions to CBP reporting and verification protocols to expand creditable BMPs |

4) Leverage technology to enhance BMP verification.

There are many possible ways to verify the presence of BMPs on the landscape. The partnership is interested in taking advantage of cutting-edge technology to make BMP verification as efficient, comprehensive, and accurate as possible.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Host presentations on novel technologies that could be applied to BMP verification | Outline novel methods to enhance CBP verification efforts | Update existing verification guidance to reflect latest science |
| | List BMPs suitable for remote sensing (and other technology)- based verification | |

5) Enhance understanding of, and explore crediting options for, BMP co-benefits (benefits beyond N, P, S reduction).

When we think about which BMPs we prioritize and incentivize, we often (understandably) do so focusing on those with the greatest potential to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution. Partners have expressed an interest in considering, in addition to the water quality benefits of practices, other benefits of BMPs. The 'co-benefits' that we consider can be discussed by the AgWG. AgWG members have also stressed the importance of considering sustainability in the work that we do. Our group can enhance our focus on sustainability, particularly in considering strategies for expanding the adoption of conservation practices among producers.

| Actions | | |
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| Learning | Leading | Improving |

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| Explore the ways in which BMPs provide value to the environment and to those implementing them beyond reducing nutrient and sediment pollution | Develop list of criteria to use to more comprehensively quantify the value of CBP BMPs | Determine BMPs to incentivize using more holistic evaluation criteria |
| Review existing or conduct new BMP ROI assessment Invite farmers to share insights into the intersection between profitability and environmental stewardship | Establish soil health as a partnership priority | Weave elements of sustainability – particularly as applicable to the viability of agricultural operations – into AgWG discussions. |

6) Emphasize focus on water quality monitoring data.

The Bay Program's suite of modeling tools helps us track progress toward meeting our pollution reduction targets and serve as a critical planning tool. Several partners have recognized that in addition to considering modeling data, the partnership should more closely consider monitoring data in our evaluations of progress toward achieving our goals. The extent to which monitoring data is considered for accountability is a broader discussion not appropriate for the AgWG, but there are several approaches this group can take to assess ag-sector loads and BMP impact through enhanced focus on monitoring data.

| Actions | | |
|---|---|---|
| Learning | Leading | Improving |
| Review results of monitoring studies to better understand impact of BMPs | Explore cost-effective monitoring tools/systems | Develop support mechanism for existing local/small ag watershed monitoring network |