



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION III**

Four Penn Center
1600 John F. Kennedy Boulevard
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-2852

Russell C. Redding, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Matthew Lohr, Secretary
Agriculture and Forestry, Virginia

Kevin M. Atticks, Secretary
Maryland Department of Agriculture

Michael T. Scuse, Secretary
Delaware Department of Agriculture

Richard Ball, Commissioner
New York Department of Agriculture & Markets

Kent A. Leonhardt, Commissioner
West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Dear Honorable Agriculture Secretaries and Commissioners:

Thank you for your July 28, 2023, letter requesting that the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership create an Agriculture Advisory Committee. I am grateful for your engagement with the partnership and the open dialogue between EPA Region 3 and each of your agencies. I agree that we are faced with a pivotal moment in addressing the ongoing conservation challenges in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We can point to many successes in restoring the Bay and its watershed since the start of the Chesapeake Bay Program 40 years ago, including preserving critical lands, improving public access to waterways, and restoring oyster beds in key tributaries. Other efforts are lagging, however, including progress in achieving our cornerstone goal to reduce nutrient pollution and improve water quality.

An engaged agricultural sector is indeed critical to the future success of Bay restoration efforts. Agriculture presents the greatest opportunity to scale up conservation practices that will support sustainable farms and reduce pollution to local streams and the Bay. Since the first day of my tenure as Regional Administrator, my colleagues at EPA and I have been proactively working across many sectors to get restoration efforts back on track and to accelerate progress. My top priority has been to get out into the field and build strong relationships with the agricultural community, particularly in Pennsylvania, where we are collaborating with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Plain Sect leadership, and local partners like conservation districts. Last month, those conversations resulted in a \$2 million joint commitment with The Hershey Company to fund conservation practices on Pennsylvania dairy farms. We have pursued similar engagement across the Bay watershed. Discussions at agricultural roundtables, on farms, and in these collaborative meetings have provided critical opportunities for EPA to listen and learn how we can work effectively together to support conservation efforts on farms. With strong leadership at the state and federal levels, an unprecedented infusion of state and federal funding, engaged local partners, and committed farmers willing to adopt conservation practices, we have momentum to achieve significant, sustained progress on water quality.

Agricultural partners have long contributed technical expertise and leadership on the development and implementation of Chesapeake Bay Program partnership policies, programs, and research. The Agriculture Workgroup of the Water Quality Goal Implementation Team has been an important forum for discussion and information exchange between federal and state agencies, technical experts, agri-business, and others on key issues related to agricultural production systems and water quality, recently leading to development of recommendations to address concerns with fertilizer data utilized in the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool model. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), as well, has historically included members from agricultural

organizations or stakeholders. This past spring, leadership at USDA and EPA announced the establishment of a new federal Task Force on Crediting Chesapeake Bay Conservation Investments, which will work over the next year to identify improvements to more fully credit farmers' conservation efforts in cooperation with the Bay States and the agricultural community.

It is vital that Chesapeake Bay Program have close lines of communication with those who have knowledge of farming operations so that we are effectively supporting farmers as they make a difference on the ground. I appreciate your suggestion to form a new agriculture-focused advisory committee. The Science and Technical Advisory Committee, the Local Government Advisory Committee, and the SAC were established at the onset of the Partnership nearly 40 years ago. Each has provided invaluable counsel, insight, and support to the work of the partnership.

As the Chair of the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC), I will offer your recommendation for the partnership to create an Agriculture Advisory Committee to the PSC for discussion and deliberation. The agenda for the upcoming September 26th, 2023, PSC meeting reflects this commitment.

Thank you for your continued leadership and engagement with the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or have your staff contact David Campbell, Acting Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office, at 215-814-2196.

Sincerely,

Adam Ortiz
Regional Administrator

Cc: Mid-Atlantic Environmental State Secretaries

