March 4, 2019

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr., Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

The undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition request continued support for clean water in the Chesapeake Bay watershed through fully funding the conservation programs of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). There are 83,000 farms in the six-state Chesapeake region and they are critical to the economy - responsible for more than $10 billion of agricultural production each year. After forests, agriculture is the largest land use in the watershed.

The 2018 Farm Bill, which we strongly supported, should, if fully implemented and funded, ensure that well run, responsible farms in the Chesapeake region remain economically viable. The Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill is also critical to maintain and restore clean water to the rivers and streams throughout the Chesapeake region, and for the Bay itself. These programs are essential for regulated agricultural operations to meet federal requirements under the Clean Water Act and help farmers meet state regulations that address both farm health and water quality.

We urge you to maintain full funding for mandatory agricultural conservation programs in Fiscal Year 2020. The 2018 Farm Bill made a number of improvements to key programs, and should accelerate our path toward clean water in our region, but only if these conservation programs are funded as Congress intended. With the support of much of the conservation community and clean water advocates, the 2018 Farm Bill maintained level funding for the Conservation Title.

Two-thirds of the 18 million people in the Chesapeake region get the water they drink directly from the rivers and streams that flow through the cities, towns and farms throughout our six state, 64,000 square mile watershed. Protecting and restoring clean water is essential for human health and for a robust regional economy. Much of the work and funding necessary to achieve and maintain clean and healthy water in this region would be accomplished through the Farm Bill’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). We urge you to provide full funding, $300 million for the RCPP. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed is one of eight Critical Conservation Areas under the RCPP, and this program is vital for
our region’s farms and waterways.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is also a key conservation program for our region’s farmers, and we urge you to provide full funding for FY20 at $1.75 billion. Historically, EQIP has been the primary financial assistance program for conservation in the Chesapeake Bay region.

All six Chesapeake Bay watershed states have participated in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and this program is the key to restoring riparian buffers that are critical for water quality and wildlife habitat. The 2018 Farm Bill codified CREP and we urge you to ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture fully enrolls CREP acres based on the new provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill.

In order to follow a common sense path to maintain economically viable well run farms and to have healthy local water and a restored Chesapeake Bay, which is critical for our regional economy, we request full funding for all conservation programs in the Farm Bill for Fiscal Year 2020.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important request to maintain funding for these programs which are critical to both our agricultural community and for clean water throughout the mid-Atlantic region. Please contact Peter J. Marx at 410-905-2515 or peter@choosecleanwater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Action Together Northeastern Pennsylvania
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Chestnut Land Trust
American Rivers
Anacostia Riverkeeper
Anacostia Watershed Society
Annapolis Green
Arundel Rivers Federation
Audubon Maryland/DC
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
Back Creek Conservancy
Baltimore Tree Trust
Blue Heron Environmental Network
Blue Ridge Watershed Coalition
Blue Water Baltimore
Butternut Valley Alliance
Cacapon Institute
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Center for Progressive Reform
Chapman Forest Foundation
Chemung River Friends
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Chesapeake Conservancy
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Clean Fairfax
Clean Water Action
Clean Water Linganore
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania
DC Environmental Network
Defenders of Wildlife
Delaware Nature Society
Ducks Unlimited
Earth Conservation Corps
Earthworks
Earth Forum of Howard County
Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
Elizabeth River Project
Environmental Integrity Project
Environmental Justice Center of Chestnut Hill
United Church
Environmental Working Group
Experience Learning
Float Fishermen of Virginia
Friends of Accotink Creek
Friends of Frederick County
Friends of Herring Run Park
Friends of Little Hunting Creek
Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek
Friends of Quincy Run
Friends of Sligo Creek
Friends of the Bohemia
Friends of the Cacapon River
Friends of Dyke Marsh
Friends of the Middle River
Friends of the Nanticoke River
Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
Friends of the Rappahannock
Friends of St. Clements Bay
Goose Creek Association
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake
James River Association
Lackawanna River Conservation Association
Lancaster Farmlands Trust
Little Falls Watershed Alliance
Lower Shore Land Trust
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Lynn River NOW
Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland Environmental Health Network
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Native Plant Society
Maryland Nonprofits
Maryland Science Center
Mattawan Watershed Society
Mid-Atlantic Council Trout Unlimited
Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Muddy Branch Alliance
National Aquarium
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature Abounds
NeighborSpace of Baltimore County
New York League of Conservation Voters
New York State Council of Trout Unlimited
Neighbors of the Northwest Branch
Otsego County Conservation Association
Otsego Land Trust
Partnership for Smarter Growth
Patapsco Heritage Greenway
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust
PennEnvironment
PennFuture
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited
Piedmont Environmental Council
Potomac Conservancy
Potomac Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Potomac Valley Audubon Society
Queen Anne’s Conservation Association
Preservation Maryland
Rachel Carson Council
Restore America’s Estuaries
Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection
Richmond Audubon Society
Rivanna Conservation Alliance
St. Mary’s River Watershed Association
Savage River Watershed Association
Severn River Association
Shenandoah Riverkeeper Shenandoah Valley Network
ShoreRivers
Sidney Center Improvement Group
Sierra Club – Maryland Chapter
Sleepy Creek Watershed Association
Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
SouthWings
Susquehanna Heritage
Talbot Preservation Alliance
The Downstream Project
Transition Howard County
Trout Unlimited
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Virginia Association of Biological Farming
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Warm Springs Watershed Association
Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore, Inc.
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
West Virginia Citizen Action Group
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Wetlands Watch
Wicomico Environmental Trust