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USDA, EPA: \$23 million for Chesapeake Bay restoration

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On Thursday, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative. This new initiative strengthens coordination and cooperation between the two federal entities to help agricultural producers improve the environment in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes the initiative and provides \$23 million in 2009. Congressionally authorized future funding levels are: \$43 million in 2010; \$72 million in 2011; and \$50 million in 2012. The initiative will be delivered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and all EQIP requirements and policies will apply.

“The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative is an important new source of technical and financial assistance for agricultural producers who voluntarily go the extra mile to improve and protect the bay,” Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer said.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to nearly 17 million residents and covers more than 64,000 square miles. It is the largest estuary in the United States and is critical to the region’s economy, culture, and out-doors recreation. Twenty-five percent of lands within the Bay Watershed are used by agriculture for crops and pasture.

“This funding will help the agricultural community turn the tide on a cleaner, healthier Bay,” said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. “Working together, the federal government and our partners can solve the challenges of the Chesapeake Bay.”

Among these challenges are changing landscapes, toxic chemical contaminants, air pollution, sediment, and excess nutrients-primarily nitrogen and phosphorous.

Initiative funding is available to eligible agricultural producers within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to assist with voluntary implementation of beneficial conservation practices. Portions of six states lie within the watershed including: Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, and New York. Interested producers in these states should contact the local USDA Service Center to determine eligibility and apply for funding.

Eligible landowners can use available technical and financial assistance to address soil erosion, sedimentation, and excess nutrients in streams and waterways, as well as other related natural resource concerns such as air quality, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and forestry.

EPA is a member of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership which fosters stewardship of bay resources. The Agency implements and coordinates the science, modeling, monitoring, data collection, and other activities that support the Chesapeake Bay Program and assists partners in developing and implementing specific action plans.

USDA leads efforts to help reduce nutrient and sediment runoff from public and private lands and encourages locally led conservation through community involvement to promote effective land and resource management. USDA research examines innovative nutrient reduction technologies and market-based approaches for the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will administer the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative. For more information, stop by your local USDA service center or visit NRCS online at: www.nrcs.usda.gov; also visit the Chesapeake Bay Program at: www.chesapeakebay.net .

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