



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education*

## **House Bill 1176** Agriculture – Maryland Healthy Soils Grant Program

**DATE: February 21, 2020**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

**The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) SUPPORTS HB 1176.** This bill would help Maryland address an unfunded mandate to provide financial assistance to farmers who wish to implement farm management practices that contribute to healthy soils.

Healthy soils retain more water, enhance the cycling of nutrients, and reduce farm input costs. They also store atmospheric carbon underground, which mitigates greenhouse gas emissions and improves Bay health. The grant program authorized by the bill and funded by a \$300,000 appropriation proposed annually by the Governor would begin to deliver resources needed to meet the Maryland General Assembly's directive to invest in soil health practices.

The Maryland Healthy Soils Program was established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2017 to improve the health, yield, and profitability of the soils of the State. The Program is intended to increase biological activity and carbon sequestration in Maryland soils by promoting the widespread use of certain farming practices among Maryland farmers. However, while the Maryland Department of Agriculture made some investments in staffing and procurement of non-State resources, the charge to provide incentives including financial assistance subject to available funding as required by 2-1901 in the Agriculture Article has not been fulfilled.

HB 1176 would provide grant funding to farmers to implement farm management practices that contribute to healthy soils. By requiring grant amounts to be proportional to the amount of greenhouse gases that a funded project is intended to reduce, this legislation provides critical resources to implement farming practices that are shown in Maryland's 2019 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act Draft to have significant carbon sequestration outcomes. Only projects that are not otherwise funded by a federal or State program are eligible for funding, ensuring that the benefits of the State's investments are additive rather than duplicative. The bill also leverages additional resources for farmers, including those provided by CBF and partners in the Million Acre Challenge, a new collaborative that seeks to achieve one million Maryland acres in regenerative agricultural production by 2030.

The grant program authorized by HB 1176 helps Maryland meet its commitment to invest in healthy soils practices, implements State greenhouse gas reduction strategies, and enhances the health and productivity of the Bay and Maryland's farms.

**For these reasons, CBF SUPPORTS HB 1176 and urges the Environment and Transportation Committee's FAVORABLE report.** For more information, please contact Alan Girard, Eastern Shore Director, at [agirard@cbf.org](mailto:agirard@cbf.org) or 410-543-1999.

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*The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 107,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.*