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Senate Bill 737 - The Comprehensive Conservation Finance Act of 2021

Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

MGPA Position: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Grain Producers Association serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. On an annual basis, nearly a million acres of these crops are grown in Maryland.

Senate Bill 737 would make Maryland a leader in advancing voluntary conservation in a way that is mutually beneficial to farmers, landowners and the public. MGPA supports and appreciates the existing conservation cost-share programs. Every farm across the state is unique and farmers know their land. They may need to tailor conservation practices to the conditions of their operations, but they can absolutely deliver outcomes beneficial to the state and the environment. Changes in this bill make it easier for farmers, the state, and others to focus on what conservation results are being produced and give farmers a little more freedom in how it is produced.

MGPA also supports the provision in the bill that prohibits the state from prohibiting or limiting farmers participating in cost share programs from also receiving compensation through carbon, soil health or greenhouse gas reduction programs. USDA is investigating making carbon into a commodity. That would allow significant USDA funds to be put into paying for carbon-related commodities. In many ways, this bill would put Maryland ahead of the federal government on this issue, not just for carbon but also for water quality outcomes. Changes also make it clear that MDE's revolving loan funds can be used to support watershed work. This could eventually be an important tool in supporting voluntary conservation initiatives by producers.

MGPA supports voluntary conservation, pay for performance and compensation of farmers for beneficial environmental outcomes; which this bill advances.

We request your favorable report on Senate Bill 737.