



March 8, 2024

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Senate Bill 932 – Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program - Established

Position: **Informational**

Chair Feldman & Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) I am providing information regarding the establishment of a Best in Show – BMP Program within the Department of Agriculture (MDA). Soil Conservation Districts serve as trusted advisors to farmers, assisting them in developing Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans tailored to their specific needs, local environmental conditions, and resource concerns. This personalized approach ensures that each farming operation can effectively address its goals and capacity while contributing to broader conservation objectives. Over the years, the state has made significant investments in both technical and financial assistance to enhance water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and implement practices outlined in our Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP).

In coordination with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland's Soil Conservation Districts have been successful in their recent efforts to expand the number of staff dedicated to conservation delivery and have bolstered the capacity to write plans and implement practices, thereby advancing progress toward WIP goals. Maryland's Conservation Grants Programs have proven to be a successful model of voluntary conservation, combining a science-based approach with multiple options for financial assistance. These programs offer simplicity and flexibility, resulting in some of the highest Best Management Practices (BMP) adoption rates in the country.

As we work towards the establishment of a Best in Show Program, it is essential to recognize the continued reliance of farmers on our Soil Conservation Districts for guidance on financial assistance options and navigating program requirements. While our current capacity is adequate to address existing workload demands, we anticipate that applicants interested in the new program may require additional assistance in fulfilling responsibilities that exceed our current capacity and skillsets. The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) fully supports efforts to incorporate recommendations from the scientific community while maintaining the qualities that have made existing programs successful. This collaborative approach ensures that our conservation efforts remain effective and sustainable in the long term.

Thank you for your kind consideration and attention to this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jen Nelson, Executive Director
Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts