



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry

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SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE CAPITAL BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE

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1) The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends that MDA comment on the relative role that streamside protection BMPs, such as the forest and grass buffers, will play in the MACS funding mix and in MDA's ability to meet the Phase III WIP nitrogen goal for the agricultural sector.

Maryland's agricultural Phase III WIP plan was developed with input from the agricultural community based on the local landscape within each county. Although forest and grass buffers are critical components in meeting Maryland's agricultural nitrogen reduction goals, goals vary by county. Maryland's 2019 progress report indicates statewide 82% of forested buffers and 69% grass buffers of the 2025 WIP III goals have been established either through active local, state and/or federal contract agreements or verified through MDA's verification protocol approved by EPA. Active agreements are typically cost shared through the MACS Program using GO bonds or other cost-share funding sources.

MDA verifiers inspect best management practices with expired agreements that no longer receive credit within the Chesapeake Bay model. Additionally, they inspect practices installed by farmers and landowners without technical or cost-share assistance, known as resource improvements, such as forest and grass buffers. In both cases, verification of best management practices that meet resource improvement standards receive credit within the Chesapeake Bay model without the need for any additional GO bonds. MDA is currently evaluating programmatic changes to enhance interest in additional establishment of grass and forested buffers.

Each county regularly evaluates progress to meetings its own WIP goals. The addition of soil conservation positions will help access through conservation planning where new appropriate buffers should be establish to meet the most water quality benefit. As stated in the analysis, demand

for poultry-related best management practices are slowing down, which has shifted funding resource needs from fewer, more costly capital projects to more, less costly practices like forest and grass buffers that address nitrogen reduction goals.

In addition to co-cost share assistance from the federal government for certain practices, MDA has applied for and partnered on several grants that provide matches and additional funds for the establishment of best management practices that help Maryland agriculture meet Phase III WIP goals.