

Support increased funding in the 2023 Farm Bill that benefits small family farms and landowners, and cleaner rivers and streams

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Did you know that over one-quarter of all the land in Pennsylvania is farmland? Of the 52,700 farms on this land, 88% are small producers making under \$250,000 in gross revenue each year.

Many farmers rely on federal Farm Bill conservation programs to adopt conservation practices. Congress will soon consider a 2023 Farm Bill which could provide a unique opportunity to focus resources on farms in Pennsylvania helping ensure enough clean water for future generations, reduce pollution, bolster them to weather the changes brought by climate change, and keep them operating with a profit.

The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD), representing all 66 conservation districts in the Commonwealth, strongly supports funding for state and federal conservation programs.

Conservation districts are local units of government providing a wide range of services for the conservation of the Commonwealth's natural resources. Districts implement programs, projects, and activities working with landowners, local governments, and a variety of partners to provide technical and financial assistance. These natural resource programs supported by PACD provide almost \$46 million to Pennsylvania's producers to implement environmentally beneficial best management practices (BMPs) on their farms. Combined, these programs included 733 contracts with Pennsylvania farmers, encompassing 155,658 acres.

The 2023 Farm Bill should increase funding for these effective programs responding to a growing demand and helping ensure success of resource protection efforts. The key to success involves highly trained field staff to ensure that tools and incentives are efficiently used to target the most effective practices in the most effective locations, accelerating restoration progress. Funding for technical assistance personnel at the local level through conservation districts is vital to preserve both surface and groundwater



resources.

While 28% of Pennsylvania is farmland, over 58% is forest lands totaling 16.8 million acres. Non-industrial private forest lands cover about 11.5 million acres in Pennsylvania which is owned and operated by more than 738,000 private forest landowners. Forest Buffers and streamside trees are one of the most cost-effective BMPs for reducing pollution to Pennsylvania's rivers and streams, while also providing benefits to wildlife, sequestering carbon, and making streams resilient to weather extremes of flooding and drought.

Through financial and technical assistance, and in coordination with partners, PA is making significant steps toward a goal of maintaining and improving the health and resiliency of forested ecosystems on private forest lands. We highly recommend funding in the 2023 Farm Bill to address the health and resiliency of Pennsylvania's forests.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is another program geared toward providing incentives to restore and improve Pennsylvania's water quality. It is a voluntary federal-state partnership allowing landowners to remove marginal land from agricultural production under 10-15 year contracts. In return, landowners receive annual rental, incentive, maintenance and cost-share payments. Legislative changes in the 2023 Farm Bill removing barriers to enrollment and allowing states to easily take advantage of program improvements and incentives for landowners will help re-invigorate this critical opportunity to enhance the CREP program.

Please join PACD to support increased funding for these federal programs in the 2023 Farm Bill that benefit small family farms and landowners, and cleaner rivers and streams, and contact your United States Representatives and two United States Senators as they deliberate this critical piece of legislation. Thank you.



Brenda J. Shambaugh is Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. (PACD). As PACD's Executive Director, Brenda represents the 66 Pennsylvania conservation districts at the state and national level. In addition to being the organization's spokesperson, she manages all operations of the PACD office and is responsible for the organization's financial management. She also develops and implements the association's government relations strategy.

The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. (PACD) is a non-profit organization whose guiding values include: Sustainable Resource Conservation; Integrity, Local; Education and Outreach; and Partnerships. PACD primarily serves as the collective voice for Pennsylvania's 66 county conservation districts. For more information about PACD, visit www.pacd.org.

