

# Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF)



## Framing the Conversation

Today's Objective: MDA is looking to hear about the types of practices occurring across the landscape that should be eligible as a LEEF "conservation practice". BMPs related to water quality, wildlife habitat, soil health, carbon sequestration, etc. are examples. Future meetings will consider administrative decisions, such as prioritization or verification, as well as program incentives.

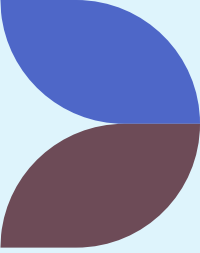
## 9:00 Welcome & Overview

- Welcome from Secretary Atticks
- Review of LEEF framework and purpose
- Overview of partnership and reporting processes in place
- Current Conservation Practices and Emerging Conservation Practices
- Collaboration between Programs

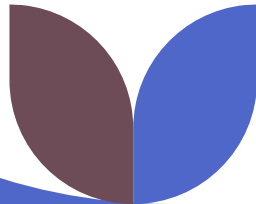
## 9:20 Discussion - Hearing from Partners

Topics to include:

- Water Quality Practices
- Climate Smart, Soil Health, and Wildlife Habitat | Co Benefits
- Emerging Practices and Science
- Tools and Models
- Program Structure Questions



# Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act



Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2

### **Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act**

3 FOR the purpose of establishing the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged  
4 Farming (LEEF) Program; establishing the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally  
5 Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund; altering the  
6 definition of “healthy soils” for purposes of the Maryland Healthy Soils Program;  
7 exempting certain holders of certain fishing licenses from the requirement to obtain  
8 a food establishment license from the Maryland Department of Health; establishing  
9 the Water Quality Monitoring Program; altering provisions of law regarding  
10 fisheries management plans, including the entities required to be consulted,  
11 circumstances under which a plan may be prepared, authorizing rather than  
12 requiring that certain measures be adopted by regulation, and the location of certain  
13 public hearings; altering application and public informational meeting requirements  
14 and authorizations for certain submerged land or water column leases; altering  
15 reporting requirements for the leaseholder of certain aquaculture and submerged  
16 land leases; authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to lease certain land  
17 to a person implementing practices that support healthy soils and regenerative  
18 practices and traditions; establishing a process to develop a plan for permitting and  
19 expediting the permitting of certain projects under the Whole Watershed Restoration  
20 Partnership; requiring the Department of the Environment, by a certain date, to  
21 authorize certain projects to be eligible to generate water quality trading credits and  
22 develop a process for certifying the credits; providing that certain provisions of law  
23 regarding stream and floodplain restoration projects may not be construed to apply  
24 to permit or license applications submitted before a certain date; and generally  
25 relating to the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays watershed.



**LEEF**

The purposes of the program are to -

- 1) Invigorate strategies to:
  - a) Reduce nutrients in support of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Restoration
  - b) Mitigate farm emissions and increase carbon sequestration in accordance with Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan
  - c) Align environmental goals and initiatives of the department and the state while enhancing farm profitability
- 1) Provide producers with greater incentives to voluntarily participate in the adoption of multiple conservation practices and community best practices within individual agricultural operations or across multiple operations that are in close proximity to one another.
- 2) Establish tiers of recognition for producers to be evaluated for program certification.
- 3) Provide state funds to incentivize the coordinated adoption of conservation practices and community best practices to achieve environmental, social, and climate resiliency benefits and nutrient and sediment reduction.

# Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming | LEEF

Design Practices

Value & Prioritize

Implement

## **Conservation.**

Conservation tillage, nutrient input reductions, cover crops, natural filters, buffers, wildlife and pollinator habitats, healthy soils practices, adoption of on-farm renewable energy, WIP eligible, and more...

**Community.** Research, mentorship, service to food banks and solutions for food insecurity, participation in Maryland's Certified Local Farm and Fish Program, and more...

**Value.** Practices would have weighted points assigned, according to intensity of a practice and/or according to their value in reaching statewide goals.

**Prioritize.** Practice weights can be assigned based on the location of a priority BMP, if it falls within the critical area, for example. Practices must cross between environmental, conservation practices and community practices.

**Implement.** Farms would add practices based on their unique situational needs, and resource concerns.

**Stack.** Farms would be encouraged to add practices that further enhance their efforts and increase their overall score.

# Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming | LEEF

## Verify

**Verify.** MDA already serves as the accounting agency for the agricultural sector, tracking progress towards environmental goals, and provides field assessment for verification of practices.

## Certify

**Tiers.** Participants would earn points to qualify for tiers. *Example:*

- Platinum (80+)
- Gold (60-79)
- Silver (50-59)
- Certified (40-49)

Point groupings may differ. Tiers would acknowledge practices in place, as well as unlock greater incentives.

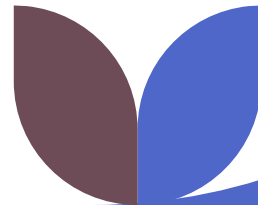
## Promote

**Promo.** A farm's LEEF Certification would be promoted by MDA and by partners to promote a farm's stewardship.

**Incentives.** Prioritization for funding for equipment, for contracts with vendors. Future incentives could include priority access to programs and grants, tax incentives, etc.

# Watershed Implementation Plans Next Steps

- ❑ **Watershed Wide --**  
What happens after 2025 is not solely a Maryland decision or agricultural sector decision - it is a partnership decision amongst all Bay states and jurisdictions.
- ❑ **As a State --**  
While the Bay partnership works through what is to come and how we plan for it, Maryland leadership has been proactive in recommitting to the agreement and looking to explore how all agencies can further focus our restoration efforts.
- ❑ **MDA approach --**  
MDA remains committed to the plan of conservation as outlined in our Phase 3 WIP through July 1, 2025. We will continue to make strong strides towards implementation of BMPs and our goals. Our efforts to-date only puts us in a better place to plan for next steps once we know more as a state and participant in the Chesapeake Bay Partnership. **Our ETA may have changed, but our map has not.** Any formal changes will include locally-led conversations.



# Maryland's Path Forward

- Prioritize Co-Benefits across the many outcomes of the Bay Agreement.
- Consider new ways to measure “progress” – including capturing BMPs that are innovative and new to the landscape.
  - Holistic evaluation of agriculture’s role, outside of the model.
- Leverage partnerships and funding.
- Prioritize key landscapes and stacking of BMPs.







# WIP Tracking & Reporting

Phase 6.0 model

## Sources of Data

Conservation Tracker

MACS database

NM Database (AIR)

WIP Category	BMP Codes
Ag Stormwater Management	ASM - Agricultural Stormwater Management (Animal Facilities)
Ag Drainage Management	587 - Structure for Water Control RI 17 - Water Control Structure 604 - Saturated Buffer 605 - Denitrifying Bioreactor
Alternative Crops	606 - Subsurface Drain 620 - Underground Outlet 782 - P Removal System 554 - Drainage Mngmt Plan
Animal Waste Management Systems	
Barnyard Runoff Controls	RI 3 - Alternative Crop/Switchgrass
Conservation Plans/SCWQP	313 - Waste Storage Structure 359 - Waste Treatment Lagoon 425 - Waste Storage Pond RI 1 - Dry Waste Storage Structure
Cover Crop	
Exclusion Fence w/ Grass or Forest Buffer Exclusion Fence w/ Narrow Grass or Forest Buffer	558 - Roof Runoff Structure RI 16 - Barnyard Clean Water Diversion
Forest Buffers	382 (A-C) - Fencing RI 4a/b - Watercourse Access Control - narrow grass or trees RI 5/6 - Watercourse Access Control - grass or trees
Grass Buffers	
Horse Pasture Management Land Retirement to Pasture or Open Space	391 - Riparian Forest Buffer RI 9 - Forest Nutrient Exclusion Area RI 10 - Forest Buffer on Watercourse
Litter Amendments (Poultry)	386 - Field Border 390 - Riparian Herbaceous Cover 393 - Filter Strip 412 - Grassed Waterway RI 7/8 - Grass Nutrient Exclusion /Grass Buffer on Watercourse
Loafing Lot Management	
Off-stream Watering w/o Fencing	512 - Forage and Biomass Planting RI 13 /14- Conversion to Pasture or Hayland 327 - Conservation Cover 342 and 342A - Critical Area Planting
Manure Transport	591 - Amendments for the Treatment of Ag Waste
Mortality Composters	561 - Heavy Use Area Protection (excl. poultry)
Precision/Rotational Grazing	614 - Watering Facility RI 18 - Watering Trough
Stream Restoration Ag	316 - Animal Mortality Facility RI 2 - Animal Compost Structure
Tree Planting	528 - Prescribed Grazing RI 15 - Rotational Grazing
Wetland Restoration	580A/B - Streambank Protection or Shoreline Protection 584 - Channel Bed Stabilization
Nutrient Management Conservation Tillage & High Residue Management Cropland Irrigation Manure Incorporation or Injection Nursery Capture & Reuse	380 - Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment 612 - Tree/Shrub Establishment 422A/B - Hedgerow Planting RI 11/12- Veg. Buffer on Poultry - grass or trees
	657 - Wetland Restoration 658 - Wetland Creation

# Conservation Practices

Conservation Tillage

Nutrient Input Reductions

Cover Crops

Natural Filters

Wildlife and Pollinator Habitats

Healthy Soils Practices

Adoption of on-farm renewable energy

WIP eligible (NRCS and RI)

Creditable towards climate goals, and growing list of environmental initiatives

And more...



# Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List for FY2025



Highlighted activities have been added or updated in FY2025.

Code	Conservation Practice Standard Name <sup>(1)</sup> (practice unit)	Code	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Enhancement Activities <sup>(1)</sup>
<a href="#">311</a>	Alley Cropping (acres)		None Available
<a href="#">313</a>	Waste Storage Facility (number) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to implement compost bedded-pack<sup>(2)</sup></li> </ul>		None Available
<a href="#">314</a>	Brush Management (acres) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to remove woody invasive vegetation in arid regions and the removed material will be left onsite<sup>(2)</sup></li> </ul>	<a href="#">E314A</a>	Brush management to improve wildlife habitat
<a href="#">315</a>	Herbaceous Weed Treatment (acres) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to release desired deep rooted perennial species<sup>(2)</sup></li> </ul>	<a href="#">E315A</a>	Herbaceous weed treatment to create desired plant commur consistent with the ecological site



## Maryland Bay-Friendly Farming

Recognizing and supporting certified bay-friendly farmers who keep our waters and natural resources healthy.

# Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan

Policies to Reduce Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions 60% by 2031 and Create a Path to Net-Zero by 2045

## HEALTHY SOILS COMPETITIVE FUND

Accepting Applications: December 2, 2024 - March 7, 2025



The Maryland Department of Agriculture will accept applications for our Healthy Soils Competitive Fund from December 2, 2024 - March 7, 2025. If you have an innovative conservation idea for your farm, this program is for you! We provide financial assistance to qualifying farmers who want to adopt a range of soil health or agroforestry practices. Our aim is to support farmers and organizations that are ineligible for other programs.

### How Much Money Is Available?

This competitive grant program awards selected applicants with up to \$50,000 to support 3 years of enhanced soil health practices.

### When Can I Apply for Your Grants?

MDA will accept applications through March 7, 2025. Grant recipients will be announced by May 30, 2025. You must provide proof of compliance with Maryland's nutrient management requirements when you submit your application.

### What Types of Projects Are Funded?

Financial assistance is available to manage conservation practices in new and innovative ways that improve soil health, yield, and profitability and capture carbon. Eligible practices include:

- Cover Crops
- Conservation Tillage
- Pasture and Hay Planting
- Conservation Cover
- Critical Area Planting
- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Nutrient Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Prescribed Grazing
- Soil Carbon Amendment



Eligible Agroforestry practices include:



- Alley Cropping
- Hedgerow Planting
- Silvopasture
- Tree and Shrub Establishment
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment

### Who Is Eligible for Funds?

The following individuals or groups may apply for funding. You may apply for funding for more than one...



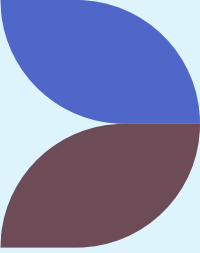
- Funds may not be used to cover overhead or indirect costs.
- Funds may be used to:
  - ✓ Support implementation of conservation practices
  - ✓ Cover staff and administrative time for organizations that provide technical support to producers
  - ✓ Cover research costs
  - ✓ Purchase or rent equipment that supports the adoption of soil health practices

SCAN THE QR CODE with your mobile device to visit the website or go to: [bit.ly/MDAHealthySoil](http://bit.ly/MDAHealthySoil)



### HEALTHY SOILS PROGRAM

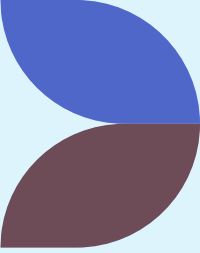
Nick Miller, Healthy Soils Program Specialist  
[nicholas.miller2@maryland.gov](mailto:nicholas.miller2@maryland.gov)  
410-841-5866 or 410- 980-2350



# Discussion

MDA is looking to hear input of partner knowledge or thoughts on practices. We will not be discussing weight or value of practices. We will not be making decisions on the “how” - how these components will work together.

Rather, at this point in development, we are looking to gather as much information as we can on the continuum of conservation practices occurring across the many operations in Maryland.



# Discussion

What practices are occurring outside of Federal or State Cost-Share practices?

What emerging practices should we be considering?

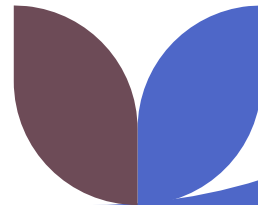
What programs exist that could complement and/or be referenced within the framework?

MDA is considering overlapping drivers like SWISLR, Critical Area, priority wildlife habitat areas - to connect with prioritized practices – what others should be considered? Thoughts on those drivers?



# Thank you!

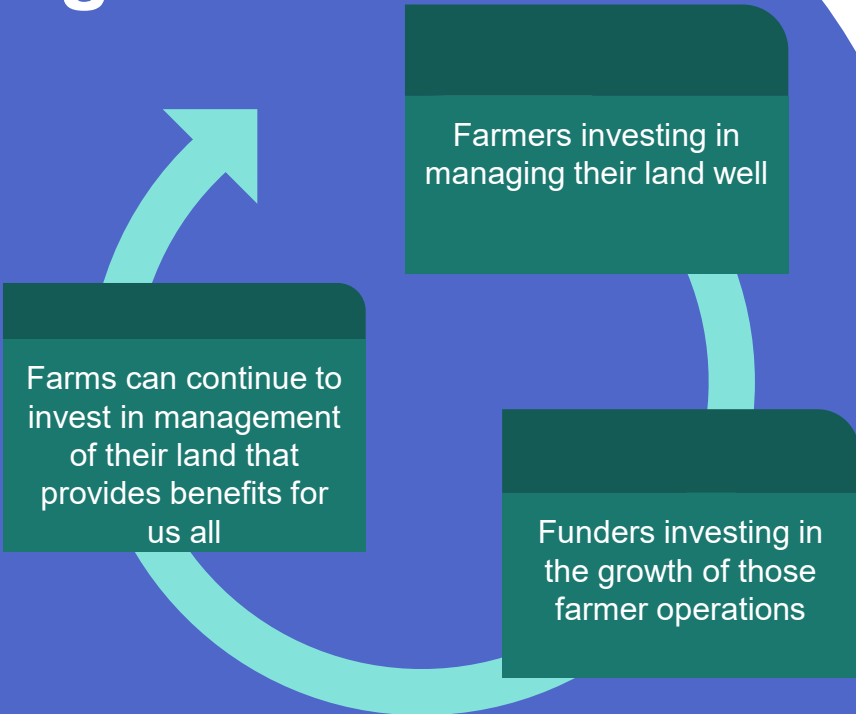
Questions can be emailed to  
[LEEF.MDA@maryland.gov](mailto:LEEF.MDA@maryland.gov)



# How could it be leveraged?

Farm is Silver LEEF certified, recognizing them as good stewards on both the conservation and community front — could that be leveraged when applying for infrastructure grants to build processing plant?

Investing back into an operation that is committed to conservation and community, supporting local economy by assisting them with tools to grow their operation, building resilient food systems by adding to the “missing middle.”



Farms can continue to invest in management of their land that provides benefits for us all

Farmers investing in managing their land well

Funders investing in the growth of those farmer operations



# How does it connect us to innovation?

Participation in field trials, being early adopters, bringing that information back to MDA and conservation partners allows for:

- program alignment
- confidence for funding new practices
- better understanding of practice performance and value





# Feedback & Next Steps

- Practices
- Incentives
- Collaborations
- Structure
- Other initial thoughts and ideas?



Survey is live!

