

# Chesapeake Bay Action Plan 2018-2019 Progress Report



The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America and the third largest in the world. It holds tremendous ecological, cultural, economic, recreational, and agricultural value for the region and its citizens. For nearly four decades, it has been the focus of coordinated public-private efforts to improve water quality, soil health, and fish & wildlife habitat.

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed (CBW) covers approximately 68,500 square miles and is home to over 18 million people. Agricultural lands make up nearly a third of the CBW, making agriculture the largest land use in the watershed after forestland. Some agricultural practices—such as heavy tillage, leaving soils uncovered between growing seasons, and over-application of fertilizer and pesticides—contribute pollutants to local waterways and ultimately to the Chesapeake Bay. Agriculture has been identified as a source of historical and current nutrients and sediment entering the Bay.

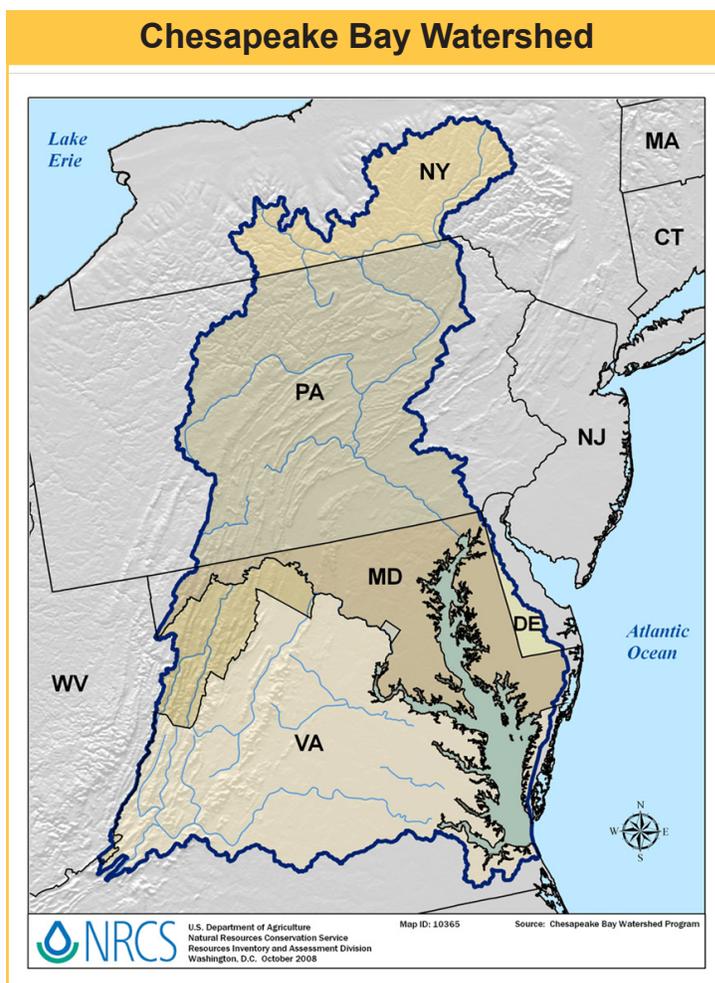
More than 83,000 farms and ranches in the CBW contribute over \$10 billion in annual production to the region's economy. The CBW is an important area for agricultural production in the Northeast, and a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector is critical to restoring and maintaining the health of the CBW.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) *Chesapeake Bay Action Plan* identifies nine priorities, six of which have 2020 goals and annual numeric milestones, to continue improving the health of our Nation's largest estuary while sustaining and enhancing the productivity of agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture in the CBW.

## NRCS and the Chesapeake Bay

Well-managed agricultural lands can sustain crop yields and forests while restoring rivers, streams, and valuable fish & wildlife habitat. For over 70 years, NRCS has worked with local partners including conservation districts, state agencies, and private organizations in the CBW to help producers plan and implement agricultural conservation practices to improve water quality, soil health, and fish & wildlife habitat.

NRCS uses a whole-farm approach to help producers evaluate their entire operation, planning and implementing practices to address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resource concerns, as well as family and economic aspects. The systems approach to conservation is science



based, utilizing the most current data to deliver voluntary conservation programs and services to customers. When effective landcover and adaptive management occur year-round, agricultural systems can store carbon, minimize soil erosion and nutrient losses, and reduce vulnerability to flooding and the effects of climate change.

In fiscal years 2018-2019, NRCS worked with producers to plan and implement conservation practices using conservation technical assistance and financial assistance through the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills. NRCS is using new provisions under the 2018 Farm Bill to continue agricultural conservation under the *Chesapeake Bay Action Plan*.



NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to producers and landowners to improve land, water, and wildlife in the CBW.



NRCS uses a voluntary, science-based approach in working with customers to develop and implement conservation systems.

## Outcomes and Impacts

NRCS works with customers in the CBW to plan practices and systems that can immediately begin improving soil, water, and fish & wildlife habitat resources. When maintained, conservation systems provide long-term benefits and returns on investment, and they demonstrate to the community the benefits of improving natural resource management. NRCS also administers voluntary conservation easement programs to protect agricultural land from development and to restore and permanently protect wetlands. The collective results of these actions are reflected in progressive improvements in the Chesapeake Bay and upstream communities toward an environmentally and economically sustainable CBW.

## NRCS Priorities and Goals

The NRCS goals for Natural Resource Priorities are based on acres treated to address critical resource concerns in the CBW (Water Quality, Soil Health, and Fish & Wildlife Habitat).

The goals for Outreach & Engagement Priorities are based on training, engagement, and outreach events and activities to address critical resource concerns in the CBW:

- Training of public and private conservation professionals to plan and implement conservation practices
- Engagement with partners and citizens in meetings and committees to provide input on NRCS programs/services
- Contact with new and underserved customers, and with customers in priority areas, about NRCS programs/services

## 2018-2019 Progress toward Action Plan Milestones

### Natural Resource Priorities



FY20 goal: 920,000 acres



FY20 goal: 700,000 acres



FY20 goal: 120,000 acres

### Outreach & Engagement Priorities



FY20 goal: 4,700 trained conservation professionals



FY20 goal: 27,700 partners and citizens



FY20 goal: 15,900 new and underserved customers

### NRCS Investments in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

#### Conservation Technical Assistance

FY18: \$16.1 million  
FY19: \$15.8 million

#### Easements and Restoration Programs

FY18: \$8.2 million  
FY19: \$6.0 million

#### Financial Assistance for Practices and Enhancements

FY18: \$62.0 million  
FY19: \$82.3 million

## Natural Resources Conservation Service

[nrcs.usda.gov/](http://nrcs.usda.gov/)

