



## Chesapeake Bay Commission Analysis of Proposed 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Title

Status: H.R. 2 Passed House Ag Committee April 18, 2018  
 Mark-up expected in May  
 Senate version pending

<b>CBC Farm Bill Priorities</b>		<b>H.R. 2 Provisions</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1.	Focus the critical role of NRCS on providing Conservation Technical Assistance, development of practice standards and training to increase the availability of conservation professionals.	§2502 would provide for “alternative certification” of third-party TA providers. The Secretary shall approve any qualified certification, such as Certified Crop Advisor, Certified Professional Agronomist or similar.	Still allows for Secretary’s discretion as to whether the program “meets or exceeds” USDA criteria.
2a.	Reserve a percentage of EQIP for direct state agency partnerships or for “State Agency-Approved/Prioritized projects.”	§2301(d) would establish a program for “Stewardship Contracts” based on state priorities, up to 3 priorities/state. Up to 50% of funds may be used for Stewardship Contracts.	
2b.	Allow RCPP, EQIP or other programs to be delivered through a “block grant” or an analogous method between the conservation districts and state agricultural agencies, with administrative duties retained by NRCS.	None	
3.	Enhance financial and technical support for the working lands programs.	EQIP authorization would increase, to \$2B in 2019 up to \$3B in 2023.	CSP did not have a specific authorization, so the net difference

		Previously, the highest authorization is \$1.75B in 2018. However, the Conservation Stewardship Program has been eliminated.	between EQIP increase v. CSP elimination is yet to be determined.
4a.	RCPP: Align with Regional Priorities	§2702(b) would require partners to quantify the environmental outcomes of the project.	Does not directly address alignment with regional priorities, but could be helpful when evaluating projects.
4b.	RCPP: Transparency	§2702(c) would require that the application process be “simplified.”	No other details are provided, but when combed with the quantification requirements, a “simplified” process could improve transparency of the program.
4c.	RCPP: Technical Assistance	None	
4c.	RCPP: Funding	<p>§2704 would fund RCPP at \$250M/year.</p> <p>§2702(b) would allow contract lengths exceeding five years, at the discretion of the Secretary.</p> <p>§2702(c)(2) would allow renewals of successful projects through an “expedited application process.”</p>	<p>Up from \$100M/year, but funds would not partially come from CRP/CREP. To be determined whether the decrease in CRP/CREP and increase in RCPP will be a net benefit or not.</p> <p>Currently, contracts are 5 years, with a 1-year extension possible.</p>
5.	Increase CRP to 30 Million Acres	§2201(b) would increase enrollment from 25 million acres in 2010 to 29 million acres in 2023.	Up from 24 million acres in 2018.
6a.	CREP: Encourage partnerships with NGOs for TA	None.	Other changes are proposed that are a mix of positives and negatives. On the positive side, §2201(c) would allow contract lengths of 15-30 years (up from 10-15 years) for riparian forest buffers or when the conservation practices results in the
6b.	CREP: Allow TA funding for riparian forest buffers to go directly to a state forestry agency	None.	
6c.	CREP: Allow for enrollment of riparian forest buffers that were previously	None.	

	unmaintained grass buffers.		rest of the field being infeasible to farm. However, if the land is devoted to hardwood trees only one re-enrollment is allowed. On the negative side, rental rates would be reduced to 80% of county rates, and cost-share is reduced from 50 to 40%. Also, in the last year of the contract, the landowner can begin preparations for cropping, and can begin preparations for organic farming 3 years before the end of the contract.
6d.	CREP: Allow for pooling of maintenance payments.	None.	
7.	Provide longer-term funding for annual practices.	The new Stewardship Contracts under §2302(d) would last from 5 to 10 years.	Currently, EQIP contracts may be up to 10 years, but practice seems to be 3-5 years, so a 5-year minimum would be helpful.
8a.	ACEP (Ag Conservation Easement Program): Baseline funding for ACEP should be restored and increased to at least \$500 million annually over the next ten years.	§2501(a)(3) would authorize \$500M annually through 2023.	
8b.	ACEP: Water quality benefits should be prioritized at the same level as wildlife benefits under the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Partnership	None.	
8c.	Improve the certification process to recognize the diversity of state/public	§2603(b)(2) would allow the adjustment of ranking criteria based on “geographic differences among states.”	

	programs.	<p>§2603(b)(3) would allow mineral development on eased land.</p> <p>§2603(b)(4) would allow certified entities to “use their own terms and conditions” as long as they are consistent with the purposes of the program, and would allow land trusts to be certified entities.</p>	
8d.	Provide states and public programs with the flexibility to substitute parcels.	None.	

Other notable provisions: Negative

- §2206(a) would allow a one-time early termination of CRP contracts that have been in place at least five years.
- §2302(b) would eliminate the 60% allocation of EQIP funding to livestock-related practices. Given the ability of states to determine priorities, the impact of this is yet to be determined.

Other notable provisions: Positive

- §2501(d) would remove the requirement for regional equity among states when allocating program funds.
- §2503(2) would reserve at least 10% of each conservation program to be used for source water protection. Increased incentives and cost-share rates could be provided for projects that relate to water quality or quantity and provide “significant environmental benefits . . . outside of the land on which the practices are implemented.”