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**Members of Congress Propose Better Deal for Chesapeake Farmers**

*Bill would provide increased funding for reducing pollution from farms in watershed*

(ANNAPOLIS, Md.) – Today, Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md. and Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., introduced the Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017 in both the Senate and House of Representatives, respectfully. The Choose Clean Water Coalition, a nonprofit organization with more than 230 members across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, applauds these members of Congress for introducing these bills that will increase critical funding to farmers for conservation practices and will reduce pollution across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Both bills have been collectively endorsed by 73 members of the Coalition.

Under the 2014 Farm Bill’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the Chesapeake watershed was designated as one of eight “priority critical conservation areas” across the country. In spite of this designation, funding for conservation in the watershed declined significantly to only $12 million a year. Previously, under the 2008 Farm Bill, the Chesapeake had received over $47 million a year. These bills intend to close the funding gap and provide more resources for restoration projects that will help communities reduce pollution to their local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

“The Coalition thanks Sen. Van Hollen and Rep. Bobby Scott for continuing to be champions of Chesapeake Bay conservation and restoration,” said Chanté Coleman, director of the Choose Clean Water Coalition. “This bill will not only help to improve the health of our local rivers and streams, but also presents more opportunities for on-the-ground restoration projects in rural communities across the watershed.”

Farmers play a critical role in the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams, as agriculture is the single largest source of nutrient and sediment pollution in the watershed. By implementing voluntary conservation practices, like installing stream buffers and cover crops, farmers are helping to improve the health of their communities and those downstream. However, the demand for these projects exceeds the amount of funding available, which is one of the issues these bills will address.

“With over 90 percent of land in the Chesapeake being privately owned, it is essential that landowners, including farmers, are given the tools and resources they need to be stewards of our watershed,” said Jennifer Mihills, Mid-Atlantic regional executive director of the National Wildlife Federation and co-chair of the Choose Clean Water Coalition. “In addition, the projects that this funding will help to support go beyond improving the health of our waterways, they provide critical wildlife habitat.”

Federal support is critical to the success of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort. With wide-spread bipartisan support for the Chesapeake, the Coalition will continue working with members of Congress to restore federal funding for the Bay, including programs eliminated in the President’s proposed fiscal year 2018 budget.

*The Choose Clean Water Coalition, an organization that harnesses the collective power of more than 230 local, state, regional and national groups to advocate for clean rivers and streams in all communities in the Chesapeake region.*

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