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The Honorable Joseph Bartenfelder
Secretary of Agriculture
Maryland Department of Agriculture
Wayne A. Cawley, Jr. Building
50 Harry S Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401 – 8960

February 13, 2020

Dear Secretary Bartenfelder,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) plan to support the implementation of the Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT). The Delmarva Land and Litter Collaborative (DLLC) recognizes the hard work that it takes to implement the PMT while providing support to farmers. Our members offer the following consensus supported recommendations that we believe are complementary of your efforts and ask for the opportunity to meet with your staff to further consider how DLLC can assist MDA in moving the PMT implementation forward.

Prioritize funding for manure transport

The priority focus for the immediate time frame should be increased transportation of poultry litter from Maryland farms that are prohibited from applying litter to ones that can safely receive litter under the PMT. To that end, we are enclosing a copy of our April 2017 “DLLC Recommendations for Model Poultry Litter Transportation Program Attributes.” Through a dedicated workgroup of diverse members, jointly chaired by representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Mountaire Farms, DLLC developed a fairly comprehensive set of litter transportation program recommendations that we believe are still relevant.

Our recommendations include providing funding to build transportation and end-user storage capacity. Specifically, we recommend allocating most, if not all, of the available funding through Maryland’s Animal Waste Technology Fund to projects that directly address the immediate needs of moving manure, including investments in transport, storage and application equipment. Once the PMT is fully implemented and transport infrastructure is in place, this program could again be used to invest in innovative technologies that may provide future solutions.

Provide funding for end-user storage

DLLC recommends increasing on-farm storage and hauling capacity so that litter can be moved directly from the poultry houses to the fields where it will be used. University of Maryland Extension recommends continued education to farmers about designating space in their fields where they can store litter. However, due to public

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concerns about field storage, we recommend making cost share funding available for end-user storage. Ideally, the source of these funds would not require NRCS building standards and specifications be met so that farmers have the flexibility to address their specific needs in the most cost-effective manner. There is a precedent for this in the Chesapeake Bay Program Resource Improvement protocol. Cost share for manure storage facilities should include low-cost storage alternatives like underutilized existing buildings, hoop houses and structures with sidewalls that are not required to bear the weight of stacked litter. Litter should only be moved to a state-operated Maryland Environmental Services (MES) facility as a last resort, as that will increase costs requiring the litter to be moved twice.

Increase flexibility in cost share programs

Increased financial assistance for those in a position to purchase and operate hauling and spreading equipment can help build capacity to move litter. MDA should consider extending eligibility for the Low Interest Loan for Agricultural Conservation (LILAC) program to brokers, custom applicators, and CAFO operators who demonstrate an ability to achieve the intended purpose of the funds. Program requirements should specify that the exclusive purpose of the funds is to facilitate implementation of the PMT.

Support the development of a private online litter marketplace

DLLC and its partners are in a unique position to develop and manage a private, online regional litter market service for growers, haulers, and receivers. Through our partnership, we plan to seek external funding to develop this web-based application. We ask MDA to consider contributing non-federal matching funds for the grant. The department should continue the existing manure hotline until the market site is in operation. MDA's input on this DLLC initiative is welcome.

Increase efficiency and transparency

DLLC appreciates all of the work that MDA is doing to support the PMT implementation. The following actions could increase the program's overall efficiency:

1. Cross train MACS program personnel to allow multiple staff to process paperwork and eliminate a bottle neck when one staff member is out of the office.
2. Make more information publicly available on the University of Maryland field science study referenced in the "Keeping PMT on Schedule" factsheet.
3. Convene, the PMT Advisory Committee quarterly, at a minimum, to update its members and invite input, and provide more transparency of the implementation process.

I would like to extend an invitation to you and/or Hans Schmidt to participate in our next DLLC meeting on February 25 in Georgetown, Delaware. If you are available, we would welcome an update on the PMT Implementation and the opportunity to discuss our recommendations with you in more detail. If you are not available on that date, we would be happy to arrange a separate meeting with the DLLC policy workgroup and your office.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our recommendations. We look forward to coordinating our efforts to ensure we are all working toward successful implementation of the PMT.

Sincerely,

Kurt H. Fuchs

Kurt Fuchs
Chair

CC: Hans Schmidt
Senator Paul Pinsky
Senator Cheryl Kagan
Delegate Kumar Barve
Delegate Dana Stein