

Establishment of a Workgroup to discuss implementation of VACS and the impacts of implementation on the ability to meet Virginia's water quality goals

§ 10.1-502. Soil and Water Conservation Board; composition.

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board is continued and shall perform the functions conferred upon it in this chapter. The Board shall consist of nine nonlegislative citizen members and one ex officio member with nonvoting privileges. The Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation or his designee shall be a nonvoting ex officio member of the Board. Three nonlegislative citizen members of the Board shall be appointed by the Governor as at-large members, of whom at least two members shall have a demonstrated interest in natural resource conservation with a background or knowledge in dam safety, soil conservation, or water quality protection. Additionally, four nonlegislative citizen members shall be farmers at the time of their appointment and two nonlegislative citizen members shall be farmers or district directors. Each of the six nonlegislative members who is a farmer or district director shall be a resident of a different one of the six geographic areas represented in the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and shall be appointed by the Governor from a list of two qualified nominees for each vacancy jointly submitted by the Board and the Board of Directors of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in consultation with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation and the Virginia Agribusiness Council. Nonlegislative citizen members shall be appointed for a term of four years. All appointed members shall not serve more than two consecutive full terms. Appointments to fill vacancies shall be made in the same manner as the original appointments, except that such appointments shall be for the unexpired terms only. The Board may invite the Virginia State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, to serve as an advisory nonvoting member. The Board shall keep a record of its official actions and adopt a seal and may perform acts, hold public hearings, and adopt regulations necessary for the execution of its functions under this chapter.

Recommended Motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) directs the Department of Conservation and Recreation (Department) to convene a Workgroup to discuss implementation of the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share (VACS) Program and the impacts of implementation on Virginia's ability to meet its water quality goals, including the goals established in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). Additional topics of discussion should include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Are there ways to increase participation in the VACS Program (and partner programs) to achieve the necessary nutrient and sediment reductions? (ask for acreage data here) (is the annual practice actually an onramp to further practices, what does the recruitment up the ladder numbers look like)
 - a. In FY2022, there were approximately 2,100 participants in VACS. This is a small percentage of producers throughout the state participating and needs to increase in order to achieve the necessary reductions.

2. Are the practices that are currently being encouraged by the Board the practices that reflect the best return on investment for Virginia?
 - a. Do practices with a longer-term lifespan, specifically structural and land use change practices, have a better return on investment for Virginia?
 - b. If yes, are there actions the Board should take to further encourage the implementation of those practices without harming the implementation of agronomic practices that are needed to achieve Virginia's nutrient reductions.
 - c. How does the Board prioritize practices with the highest pollution reduction efficiencies?
3. Are there barriers to participation in VACS that could be diminished?
 - a. Are there steps that could be taken to increase participation of small producers?
 - i. Are there practices that could be developed for small producers that are not currently used in the VACS Program?

The Workgroup will be comprised of, at a minimum, representatives from this Board as well as representatives from the following organizations:

- Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts;
- Virginia Farm Bureau Federation;
- Virginia Agribusiness Council;
- Chesapeake Bay Commission;
- Virginia Cooperative Extension (if available); and
- At least one nonprofit organization that partners with agricultural producers to implement and install practices.

The Workgroup will meet at least once prior to the December 7, 2022 Board meeting. The Department will provide an update to the Board about the discussions of the Workgroup throughout the upcoming year (or for as long as the Workgroup continues to meet) and will share items that the Workgroup recommends the Board take action on.