

## Study Resolution

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### **Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program**

Authorized by the Commission on December 16, 2025

WHEREAS, the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program (VACS) offers financial and technical assistance to incentivize agricultural landowners and operators to implement best management practices (BMPs) that reduce nutrient and sediment discharges to improve the water quality of streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is responsible for implementing VACS, in partnership with the state's 47 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs); and

WHEREAS, VACS is primarily funded through the state's Water Quality Improvement Fund and Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund and received \$223 million for FY26; and

WHEREAS, there are more than 70 BMPs—such as cover crops, nutrient management plans, livestock stream-exclusion systems, and rotation grazing—and individual agricultural landowners and operators can receive up to \$300,000 in financial assistance to implement them; and

WHEREAS, DCR conducts a biennial nonpoint source assessment that identifies and prioritizes watersheds that are most vulnerable to water quality degradation from nonpoint source pollution; and

WHEREAS, DCR is responsible for allocating cost-share and technical assistance funds to SWCDs based on where BMPs can achieve the greatest reductions in surface and groundwater contamination; and

WHEREAS, SWCDs award cost-share funds to individual agricultural landowners and operators based on criteria established by each district that are required to maximize nutrient and sediment pollution reduction using the most cost-effective BMPs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission that staff be directed to review the VACS. In conducting its study, staff shall evaluate (i) the nonpoint source assessment biennially conducted by DCR; (ii) the criteria and process to allocate cost-share and technical assistance funds to SWCDs; (iii) the criteria and processes used by SWCDs to select agricultural landowners and operators to receive cost-share funds; (iv) the contract development process for specific cost-share awards, including the assignment of costs and determination of award amounts; (v) the quality of technical assistance provided; and (vi) DCR and SWCD efforts to verify compliance with program guidelines and requirements.

JLARC may make recommendations as necessary and may review other issues as warranted.

All agencies and political subdivisions of the Commonwealth, including the Department of Conservation and Recreation and soil and water conservation districts, shall provide assistance, information, and data to JLARC for this study, upon request. JLARC staff shall have access to all information in the possession of agencies pursuant to § 30-59 and § 30-69 of the Code of Virginia. No provision of the Code of Virginia shall be interpreted as limiting or restricting the access of JLARC staff to information pursuant to its statutory authority.