



## PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Mikaela Bender-Rice  
Communications Coordinator  
717-687-8484

[mbenderrice@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](mailto:mbenderrice@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

### **A Once in a Generation Moment for Lancaster County's Waterways**

Everyone wants it. It provides countless benefits to public health, local economies, and quality of life. With it, wildlife thrives, communities flourish, and anglers smile. I'm talking, of course, about water—more importantly—clean water.

But as we celebrate Lancaster Water Week here in Lancaster County, more than half of our 1,400 miles of streams are impaired. According to monitoring data from the U.S. Geological Survey, streams in Lancaster County have the highest amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment of all monitored streams in the Chesapeake Bay region relative to watershed size. What does this mean? Lancaster County needs to remove 11 million pounds of pollutants annually from its waterways by 2025 and 80 percent of that reduction is expected to occur within the agricultural sector. Farmers and the practices they are implementing on their farms are playing a critical role in the race to save the Chesapeake Bay.

In my time at Lancaster Farmland Trust, I have interacted with hundreds of farmers throughout the county who are eager to more effectively steward their land. However, many conservation projects, such as updating manure storage infrastructure, improving barnyard areas, installing fences along streams, and planting streamside buffers come with five or six-figure price tags. With many farmers operating on razor thin margins, these projects are often prohibitively expensive without financial assistance.

It's not all bad news. The good news? The Commonwealth's Independent Fiscal Office is projecting at least a \$5 billion surplus and Pennsylvania is sitting on approximately \$2.8 billion in unspent "use it or lose it" funds from the American Rescue Plan. Now, we have a "once in a generation" moment to make a critical investment in our farmland, natural lands, and water resources.

To meet this prime opportunity are two programs that would boost conservation and healthy waterways. First is Growing Greener III. Established in 1999, the Growing Greener program has invested nearly \$1.7 billion in addressing critical environmental concerns across the Keystone State. If signed into law, Growing Greener III would provide \$500 million in funding to address a host of environmental needs. Specifically, the legislation would direct \$75 million to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture for farmland preservation, with 30 percent (\$22.5 million) dedicated explicitly to private land trusts to preserve farmland. Never before has the Growing Greener program

dedicated funds to land trusts for farmland preservation. Additionally, hundreds of millions of dollars could be available to make agricultural conservation practices a reality.

Another critical program is the Clean Streams Fund (CSF) which would invest \$250 million to improve local waterways. The first state program dedicated solely to clean water, the CSF would address the top sources of water pollution across the Commonwealth. Most importantly, for Lancaster, the CSF would invest half of its funds to create an Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program to help farmers implement more agricultural conservation practices on their land. These practices can reduce input costs, improve profit margins, and benefit water quality, and while providing a boost to the local economy through jobs and materials for conservation projects.

With these proposed investments, and increased collaboration among a variety of stakeholders facilitated by organizations groups like Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster Clean Water Partners, there is momentum building to implement clean water projects throughout Lancaster County with a focus on our farms.

While the stars are aligned for Pennsylvania to make crucial advances in protecting and restoring our precious waterways, progress is not a given. The state legislature has the opportunity to make critical investments in Pennsylvania's future with the inclusion of Growing Greener III and the Clean Streams Fund in the state budget. And if they do, perhaps nowhere will the positive ripple effect of these investments be felt more than right here in Lancaster County.

*Jeff Swinehart is President and CEO of Lancaster Farmland Trust, a nonprofit organization with the mission of preserving agriculture and stewarding the land in Lancaster County. Jeff is also Chair of the Lancaster Clean Water Partners.*