

Written Comments
Dennis C Wolff, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
on
“Pennsylvania’s Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy”
Before a Joint Meeting of the
House and Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee
and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
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The Honorable Chairpersons White and Waugh, the Honorable Chairpersons Adolph and Hershey, distinguished Committee members, on behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, it is my privilege to present to you comments on Pennsylvania’s Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy.

Background

At the turn of the century, Pennsylvania entered into the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement committing the Commonwealth to help remove the Chesapeake Bay from the federal Clean Water Act’s list of impaired waters by 2010. Governor Tom Ridge took on this voluntary commitment in order to avoid mandatory action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Pennsylvania plays a critical role in the multi-state effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay in that approximately 50% of the fresh water flowing into the Chesapeake Bay flows from the Susquehanna River. The Potomac River, with a sizable portion of its watershed within Pennsylvania, adds another 20 percent. When these waters rain down on the land and flow through our cities and towns, forested mountains and productive agricultural lands, they make their way to the Chesapeake Bay picking up excess nutrients and sediments as they flow through the watershed.

Pennsylvania has been actively engaged in the organized multi-state efforts to help restore the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay since the mid 1980’s, and farmers have been and will continue to play a critical role in our efforts to help restore the Bay. In fact, the majority of our early efforts to restore the Bay focused almost exclusively on working to decrease the loss of nutrients and sediments from Pennsylvania’s farms and working lands.

More than ever before, it is abundantly clear that a healthy Chesapeake Bay Watershed depends on a healthy, productive and profitable agricultural industry. While Pennsylvania doesn’t share a single mile of Bay waterfront, our farmers and citizens have been actively engaged for more than three decades in helping to restore water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. They are keenly aware that clean streams enhance the health of our families and our communities, and help increase the productivity of their farming operations.

Pennsylvania's agricultural community has played a critical role in our success to date to help restore the health and vitality of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Through the installation of soil and water conservation best management practices, stream-bank fencing, changes in soil tillage technology, changing the way we feed poultry and hogs through the addition of phytase enzymes, and the development and implementation of nutrient management plans, our farmers have helped to reduce the flow of nutrients and sediments to the Bay.

In fact, since the development of Pennsylvania's first Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy in 1988, through 2002, it is estimated that nitrogen loads to the Bay have been reduced by 10.9 million pounds, phosphorous loads have been reduced 0.86 million pounds and sediment loads have been reduced by 0.13 million tons per year. A large portion of this success came through farmers assessing their farming operations (with technical assistance from conservation districts, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and state agency staff), and then implementing the necessary management changes, acre-by-acre and farm-by-farm. However, to meet new water quality standards established by the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, Pennsylvania will need to reduce nitrogen by an additional 37.3 million pounds per year, phosphorus by an additional 1.13 million pounds per year and sediment by an additional 116,000 tons per year.

Achievements

Pennsylvania is working aggressively to achieve the numerous commitments in the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement. We are the **first** Bay state to:

- Meet the goal to permanently preserve 20 percent of our bay watershed land area from development.
- Achieve a net gain of wetland resources with over 6,000 acres gained in the last two decades.
- Implement mandatory nutrient management planning requirements for certain high-density livestock and poultry operations.
- Require phosphorous-based nutrient management plans (phosphorous indexing) for regulated farms.
- Require the registration and certification of manure haulers and brokers to regulate the distribution and application on manure as it is moved through out the state.
- Require odor management plans for new and expanding large livestock and poultry operations and the certification of agricultural odor management specialists.

Pennsylvania also is working to meet riparian forest buffer installation goals for the Bay. In cooperation with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and with significant investments of Growing Greener funds, more than 1,335 miles of riparian forest buffers established through the USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and similar efforts, the majority of which have been installed by farmers on our agricultural lands throughout the watershed.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), in cooperation with the State Conservation Commission and county conservation districts, is also working to help Pennsylvania farmers achieve the numerous commitments contained in the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement through a number of different efforts. The department actively supports the following programs and initiatives:

- Nutrient Management Program – This program provides more than \$5 million annually to help support and oversee the development and implementation of nutrient management plans. These funds are provided by the department, through the State Conservation Commission, to support conservation district funding (for county-based implementation), grants and loans to farmers, education and outreach, research and program administration. As of March 2005, nearly 2,000 Pennsylvania farms have developed nutrient management plans covering more than 500,000 acres, with more than 80 percent of these planned acres within the Bay watershed. Many of these farms implemented plans on a voluntary basis.
- Conservation District Support – This program provides \$1.66 million annually to conservation districts to support agricultural conservation technicians, training, administrative and technical support for farmland preservation efforts, ombudsman efforts and general administrative and managerial support. These technicians help ensure that conservation and nutrient management plans are developed and best management practices are installed on the ground.
- Agricultural Research Funding – This program provides nearly 1 million annually for a variety of agricultural research projects, including research on alternative uses manure, reducing air emissions from livestock and poultry operations, and other technologies necessary to assist farmers in reducing the flow of nutrients and sediments to the Bay.
- Farmland Preservation Funding – This program provides approximately \$40 million annually to help preserve farms throughout the Commonwealth through the purchase of permanent conservation easements.
- First Industries Fund – This is a grant and loan program aimed at strengthening Pennsylvania's agriculture and tourism industries. The First Industries Fund is part of PA Grows, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's new initiative designed to assist agricultural producers in gaining access to the capital they need to begin, continue, or expand their businesses.

Farmers' efforts to restore Chesapeake Bay water quality are also given a tremendous boost through USDA Farm Bill conservation programs and funding. These USDA programs annually bring more than \$20 million annually in conservation cost-share dollars to Pennsylvania, with approximately 2/3 of this funding going to farmers within the Bay watershed. The top five programs include: Environmental Quality Incentive program (\$10.5 million); Farm and Ranchland Protection program (\$6.7 million); Agricultural Management Assistance Program (\$1.4 million); Conservation Security Program; and the Grassland Reserve Program (\$1.0 million).

While our accomplishments to date in helping to restore the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay are to be celebrated, and the resources provided to assist farmers and landowners in achieving water quality goals for the Bay are substantial, a number of things are abundantly clear. First, the revised nutrient and sediment budgets established in 2003 for Pennsylvania and other Bay states will require substantial investments and commitments of resources in broad array of both point sources and non-point sources efforts at the local state and federal levels. Second, agriculture and other non-point sources must do even more to help reduce the flow of nutrients and sediment to the Bay. Third, reductions in agricultural non-point source loads alone cannot achieve the necessary water quality improvements. And finally, this effort will require increased and targeted local, state and federal investments of both financial and technical assistance resources in order to successfully accomplish the Chesapeake Bay water quality goals for 2010.

PDA Recommendations

The following are offered as recommendations to help the Commonwealth meet its challenging 2010 nutrient and sediment reduction goals for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

- **Supporting the Fundamentals** – Conservation planning, nutrient management planning, cover crops, stream bank fencing, conservation tillage and no-till are fundamental conservation practices that form the backbone of our agricultural non-point source pollution control programs in Pennsylvania. While we hope and search for the new “silver bullets” that will help us eliminate runoff from our farms and working lands, these are the programs and technologies that have produced our success to date. We need to ensure that cost-share funds and adequate technical assistance through our county conservation districts and other sources remain available to implement these critical practices as we explore ways to implement new and innovative best management practices.
- **Preserving the Farmer** – We cannot simply preserve farmland and expect farmers to survive and thrive. Additional efforts are necessary to help ensure that our farms and farm families remain productive and profitable. We need to continue to build on success such as that in the First Industry Fund and the Center for Dairy Excellence to enhance farm income and to help ensure that new farmers enter the business and that they have the expertise, support and financial resources necessary to succeed and grow. We need to continue to explore and promote innovative mechanisms to provide incentives and financial rewards for farmers to install nutrient, sediment and air emission reductions such as nutrient trading and the federal Conservation Security Program.

- **Target Cost-Effective Strategies** –Targeting available resources will be critical if we are to achieve and significant measure of success. Recommendations and strategies such as those contained in the Chesapeake Bay Commission’s “Cost-Effective Strategies for the Bay – 6 Smart Investments for Nutrient and Sediment Reduction” should be implemented to help maximize the return on investments made.
- **2007 Farm Bill Activities** – The 2007 Farm Bill programs and funding levels will be critically important to the achievement of water quality goals for the Bay. The Department through its “Seeds of Change” initiative is actively exploring ways that increased federal farm bill dollars can be more equitably targeted to Pennsylvania. The Department is also supporting regional efforts to increase federal farm bill funding for critical resource concerns such as the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- **Research Funding** – Past PDA funded research has provided important insights and knowledge concerning cost effective ways to minimize nutrient and sediment runoff and air emissions from agricultural operations. PDA will continue to prioritize and target these and other areas for funding.
- **Preserving Farmland** - Efforts need to continue to preserve farmland and to control haphazard suburban development. While Pennsylvania’s substantial commitments through Growing Greener and other funding sources will help ensure continued success in the purchase of agricultural conservation easements, other tools such as agricultural zoning and comprehensive land-use planning will be necessary to help ensure greater that our valuable farm lands are protected and preserved. These planning and zoning tools can only be effectively implemented at the local and regional level through a partnership between the agricultural community and local elected officials.
- **Investments in New Technologies and Innovative Best Management Practices** – The revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Strategy contains a number of new and innovative technologies and best management practices such as precision feeding, air emission controls, nutrient trading and yield guarantees. While it is noted that a number of these new nutrient and sediment reduction strategies have not fully been defined or implemented by the Bay Program, the Commonwealth must invest the time, energy and financial resources necessary to help develop, nurture and implement these new nutrient and sediment reduction concepts. In addition, we must make the investments necessary to demonstrate and implement innovative technologies, especially in the area of alternative uses of manures. This area is a priority for PDA, DEP and the State Conservation Commission.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and recommendations. The Department and the agricultural community looks forward to the challenges of

implementing the programs and best management practices necessary to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed water quality goals.