

To: House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees
From: Donald R. McNutt, Administrator, Lancaster County Conservation District
Date: August 9, 2010
RE: Testimony for August 18, 2010

Thank you for this opportunity to share not only a few “good news stories” about Pennsylvania farmers, but also to challenge you to consider your thought process about Pennsylvania’s farmers in the context of local water quality and the efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay.

First, I ask that you join me in saying “thank you” to the farmers within the Chesapeake Bay watershed for their diligence in implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) on their farms. These BMPs have played a vital role in the improved quality of not only local streams but also the Susquehanna River itself. The Susquehanna River Basin Commission can validate that the quality of the Susquehanna River has been increasing steadily over the past 25 years. These documented increases in water quality are directly related to implemented ag BMPs. Also please be aware that many farmers have paid for the BMPs out of their own pocket without local, state or federal help. In Lancaster County it is estimated that the ratio has been historically 8:1. This means as much as \$8.00 comes from the farmers own pocket while only \$1.00 comes from local, state or federal cost share programs for BMPs. Technical assistance from a local agency such as the Conservation District or the locally led federal agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides a very strong partnership along with private consultants in delivering technical assistance. Technical assistance is people. It is staff. It is boots on the ground! Technical assistance to evaluate, plan, design and complete the implementation of BMPs is vital to the continued success associated with increased water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Second, in order to address an increased rate of BMP adoption and improvement in the local water quality and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay, I encourage your support of several new programs. The REAP Program as well as the fledgling Nutrient Trading Program have both demonstrated and showed great promise in providing a catalyst for the adoption of new technologies. These programs are new to the ag scene but have great potential to offset the loss of other cost-share programs that may have been limited or reduced based on the reduction in tax revenues at the state and federal levels. These programs also share a unique opportunity to demonstrate both a business and an environmental linkage to the non-ag sector. Another new program available to farmers beginning last month is a funding opportunity for BMPs through PennVest. This program has very close ties to the Nutrient Trading Program, and linked together they can promote even greater gains in the implementation of BMPs.

Third, and finally, I am happy to report that more BMPs are in place than anyone estimated. I use the word estimated as the Chesapeake Bay Model input data comes from BMPs which have been validated through reporting in various cost-share programs not estimations. Bradford and Lancaster County Conservation Districts have just completed an effort to conduct limited surveys in their respective counties as per implemented BMPs both paid for through a cost-share program or implemented by the farmer without any funding assistance from local, state or federal sources. The results may be surprising

to the modelers, scientists and others in the environmental communities, yet the results were very predictable to those of us who provide technical assistance. Many farmers have implemented BMPs such as no-till, cover crops and buffers without any “cost share program assistance”. That is not surprising because it is the right thing to do for local soil and water quality. It is not surprising because it makes good financial sense and it is not surprising because agriculture values local water quality. Bradford County reported a range of 45 to 88 percent of ag BMPs were not reported. Lancaster reviewed over 379 farms and found on average 51% of the acres were planted using no-till, over 40% used cover crops and 3 out 4 farms had grass or riparian buffers 30 feet in width or greater. Again, those numbers may be surprising to others. However this was very predictable by local partnership of the CD, NRCS and private consultants who have been working over-time to provide the technical assistance requested by the farmers.

Finallyremember **agriculture is the solution** to local water quality and to the restoration of one of our national treasures, the Chesapeake Bay.

My thanks again to the farmers who have shown great leadership through the implementation of BMPs; and also my thanks to you for providing leadership in the political arena.