

**Testimony for the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs
and Environmental Resources and Energy Committees on the
Chesapeake Bay Reboot Strategy**

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Chairpersons Causer and Maher, Secretary Quigley, Secretary Redding, and distinguished members of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Environmental Resources and Energy Committees, it is a pleasure to discuss strategies for improved water quality in the streams and rivers of Pennsylvania and in the Chesapeake Bay on behalf of College of Agricultural Sciences at Pennsylvania State University.

As you are well aware, nutrient and sediment runoff from agriculture and storm water into the streams of Pennsylvania and the Chesapeake Bay is one of the most serious environmental problems facing Pennsylvania. The College of Ag Sciences and Penn State University have strong and in some cases unique capabilities in data collection, research and education to help solve these problems for the people of the Commonwealth and the region. I am personally committed to engaging both the College and the University more broadly in this effort, including the Chesapeake Bay Reboot Strategy.

The first major step of the Strategy will be to survey more than 20,000 farmers, on an intensity and scale probably never before attempted, to quantify conservation practice implementation in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed for which Pennsylvania has not be credited.

The College and Cooperative Extension have not only deep expertise in runoff and water quality, we have a broad geographic distribution in all counties across the Commonwealth and a well-earned reputation as “honest brokers” for providing advice and especially for maintaining confidentiality of information. We have a number of legal protections that allow us to prevent others from accessing data from individual farms, including that we have helped design this survey to include essential research on challenges and needs in applying the best practices.

The survey has been developed collaboratively by 10 government and industry organizations, and the questions pre-tested and refined by farmers and conservation professionals. Included are questions about 12 priority conservation practices or plans that achieve high levels of nutrient and sediment reductions, such as nutrient and manure management plans, manure transport, animal waste storage systems, barnyard runoff controls, no till cropping, cover crops, stream bank fencing, riparian buffers, and land retirement.

Participation in the survey will be completely voluntary, but respondents are advised that 10% will be selected at random and contacted for farm visits by Penn State Extension to assess inventory results, help researchers analyze and better understand the responses, including the challenges faced by farmers in understanding and using best practices. All names and locational

information will be kept completely confidential. The results to be provided to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to document conservation practices implemented will be cumulative by county and will not include names or addresses of the respondents. All names and addresses will be removed from survey and farm visit results, and once study is completed, all identifiers will be destroyed.

The survey is being administered by the Penn State Survey Research Center, with an invitation letter mailed to more than 20,000 farmers in the Bay watershed on January 29, 2016. As of last week, the Survey Research Center reported about 1200 completed surveys, almost all online.

The survey has now also been mailed, giving the farmers now the option to return a paper copy. We're expecting another surge of returns with continued support and promotion by the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, PennAg Industries, the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, and the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania. The survey closes on April 30, after which Penn State Ag Sciences researchers will analyze the survey responses and begin the random on-farm visits.

I have asked faculty and staff in the College and Extension to make assistance to the Reboot Strategy a high priority, even to the extent of delaying other work already planned. To be able to deliver the survey results on time and in enough detail, my colleagues estimate that about 40-50 extension staff will be heavily involved for several weeks, not to mention their administrative support and travel costs.

I look forward to reviewing the results of the survey. However, it's also clear that more needs to be done and can be done to meet water quality goals and public expectations in the streams and rivers of Pennsylvania, from both agriculture and urban run-off. It's too easy to observe farms with cows in streams, straight pipes from milking barns toward streams, barnyards that runoff into streams, plowing and the application of manure right up to streams, manure spreading on frozen ground, and so on. We need better compliance on small farms and on properties managing horses, and better forest riparian buffer implementation in certain agricultural regions of the state. Further, better implementation of Best Management Practices is a key step, but probably not enough without a strategic change in our agricultural systems to sustainably address the regional nutrient imbalances from animal feed imports into Pennsylvania that have led to the current problems.

Towards this end, the College of Agricultural Sciences is hosting motivated leaders from throughout Pennsylvania's agricultural and environmental community for the "Pennsylvania in the Balance" conference over the next few days. The goal of this conference is to provide a collaborative forum to identify new, innovative solutions that can help us further ensure vibrant, productive agriculture while meeting water quality goals. The conference will be held at the Hershey Country Club beginning at noon tomorrow and finishing up by lunchtime on March 3.

Sponsors include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund; 9 Penn State University Institutes, Departments and Colleges; the USDA, Office of Environmental Markets; the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds; Stock and Leader

Attorneys at Law; Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau; Penn Ag Industries Association; and the Pennsylvania Water Resources Research Center.

Finally, I must acknowledge that the lack of resolution regarding the state appropriation to the College, through the Land Scrip Fund, casts a shadow over our abilities to carry out the final stages of the current survey and otherwise contribute to water quality in initiatives. As Penn State President Eric Barron announced at the University Board of Trustees meeting on Friday, and has shared directly with the Governor via a letter, if the current budget stalemate continues into April, we must begin the process for eliminating unfunded positions in the College, which would include all of Extension and many faculty positions at University Park, a total of more than 1,100 jobs across Pennsylvania.

It is now is the time for farmers to tell their story. I am confident that this survey will demonstrate that there has been far greater adoption of best management practices than has been previously documented. I look forward to helping farmers report conservation practices implemented on their farms so that Pennsylvania agriculture can get the credit it deserves for improving water quality.