

Presentation by:

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Conservation District Activities within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

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Good Morning. My name is Brenda Shambaugh and I am the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD). Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today concerning conservation district involvement in the Phase III WIP.

PACD represents 66 conservation districts across the commonwealth. Each district is led by a voluntary local board of directors who prioritize their county's conservation needs. The goal for all 66 districts is to preserve and protect our natural resources. The conservation districts work in partnership with federal and state agencies, private organizations and individuals to participate in a wide range of agricultural and urban interests and programs. Their activities are numerous and include watershed protection, erosion and sedimentation pollution control, agricultural assistance, forest and wildlife management, abandoned mine reclamation and dirt and gravel road improvement to name just a few.

You just heard from Nikki Kasi from the DEP Chesapeake Bay Office with a comprehensive overview of the Commonwealth's Chesapeake Bay Program. You most likely already know that approximately one and a half years ago Pennsylvania's conservation districts within the Bay watershed were asked to conduct farm inspections to determine whether or not the farm operator has a working manure management plan and an erosion and sedimentation plan. Collectively to date, those conservation districts participating in the program have inspected over 1570 farms in the Bay watershed. If the inspected farm did not have either one of those plans, the conservation district assisted the farmer to develop and implement them. Additionally, those districts who chose not to participate in the inspection process still provided technical assistance to their agricultural community. As a result all the conservation districts in the Bay watershed had a substantial workload increase, but the bottom line is more manure management and erosion and sedimentation plans are being developed. I'm sure the district workload will continue to increase as more inspections are conducted.

In round numbers, approximately half the farms inspected had either a manure management plan or an erosion and sedimentation plan. Many of the farms without plans had conservation practices in place, but not necessarily a plan outlined on paper. Additionally, most farmers willingly complied with developing the needed plans. Only a few were uncooperative and those operators were reported to DEP for enforcement action.

The biggest challenge we face today is how to pay for Best Management Practices (BMPs) on the ground. BMPs can be expensive to design and build, but necessary in order to reduce



nutrients going into our local waterways. Unfortunately, with today's economy, farmers can't afford to pay thousands of dollars for additional BMPs on their operation.

Pennsylvania has been grappling with this financial reality for a long time. Numerous pieces of legislation have been introduced to create a new fund to pay for environmental practices and programs in the Commonwealth. Ideas discussed include a new Growing Greener III initiative with part of the program's funding dedicated to reducing nutrients going into the Chesapeake Bay. Another idea is to enact a water resource fee for major water withdrawals in the Commonwealth. The revenues generated could be used to fund water related programs and again a portion of the funding could be dedicated to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed counties. PACD has policy to support both those legislative initiatives.

In conclusion, conservation is a vital tool for a viable agricultural industry. In order to stay productive, agricultural operations need to have a strong safety net, vigorous marketing opportunities and a supportive farm policy. Funding for technical assistance and conservation planning is a critical tool and first step in evaluating a producer's resource needs. Conservation districts, along with their long standing partners help agricultural producers plan and apply conservation practices on the land which can then be incorporated into the WIP III to show nutrient reductions going into the Bay watershed.

Thank you again for allowing me to express the thoughts of conservation districts within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

