



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

8930 Liberty Road • Randallstown, MD 21133 • (410) 922-3426

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Farmers Speak Out On Latest Nutrient Regulation

Maryland farmers are sharing their concerns about a proposal to update the phosphorus measurement portion of their nutrient management plans. The Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) is designed to be more sensitive to the potential for phosphorus to move from farmland. Hundreds of family farmers spoke at recent briefings, are filing official comments and will voice their opposition at an upcoming hearing.

While leading the nation in management practices that protect the environment and the Chesapeake Bay, farmers in the Free State believe there are too many unanswered questions with this latest regulation that could put them out of business.

"When our Board of Directors met with Governor O'Malley just a few years ago in Annapolis, he pledged that he would not ask Maryland farmers to do more until the farmers in surrounding states caught up with what we already accomplished," said Maryland Farm Bureau President Patricia Langenfelder. "No other state has come close to catching up and no other state is proposing to adopt the PMT."

In basic terms, many farmers who are now using the organic manure from their poultry houses to fertilize their fields will not only have the expense of hauling that away, but will have to purchase man-made chemical fertilizers and new equipment to enrich their soil.

Some of the concerns raised at the recent farmer briefings include:

- The research by the University of Maryland scientists is still evolving and is expected to be updated again in the next 6-8 months.
- No analysis has been done on the overall impact to the Bay of substituting commercial water-soluble nitrogen for the slow-release organic nitrogen currently

used. In a wet spring, like the one experienced in 2013, we could end up with a nitrogen impact on the Bay in the effort to limit phosphorus under the new tool.

- The cost to the state to subsidize the movement of so much poultry litter at one time may be unreasonable with the current budget conditions.
- If implemented under the current schedule, one poultry litter hauler estimated that 450,000 tons of poultry litter will have to be moved to the mid-shore or across the Bay Bridge annually. That's 18,000 truckloads or 72 trucks every day, 5 days per week.
- Farmers have already made tremendous progress on phosphorus reductions. Through work with Extension researchers, farmers have reduced the amount of poultry litter applied to fields. What started out as 15 tons to the acre decades ago was reduced to 5 tons per acre in 1996. Under the current nutrient management program, most farmers apply at the crop removal rate of 2 tons every 3 years.
- The Chesapeake Bay model does not recognize the phosphorus reductions that have already been made. The earliest the model will change is 2017.
- An organic grower said he will have to take land out of organic production under this new rule because he cannot get organic nitrogen without phosphorus attached to it.
- Phosphorus in the soil is not always plant available. Tissue samples have demonstrated that plants in high phosphorus soils do not have enough phosphorus for optimal growth.
- The anticipated additional costs to farmers for cleanout, replacement fertilizer or new equipment could mean the difference between making a mortgage payment or not – between failure of a business or not. Implementation without additional time to plan will have a meaningful and negative impact on the economy of the entire eastern shore.

The Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review (AELR) Committee will hold a hearing on the PMT at 2 p.m. Wednesday, November 20th in the Legislative Services Building in Annapolis. Hundreds of farmers are expected to attend.

Contrary to recent reports from environmental groups, Maryland Farm Bureau has stood firm with its farmers on the PMT regulations. "Farm Bureau and other groups did not make an agreement with anyone on this issue," said Valerie Connelly, MFB government relations director. "We listened to what the Administration and the environmentalists

said they were willing to do. We advised them that one year was not long enough to phase in a major change like the one they proposed. We asked for more time. We were denied.”

Maryland Farm Bureau is a private, non-profit membership organization. It is controlled by its members through the democratic process and is financed by voluntary membership dues. Its strength comes from the active participation of over 37,000 member families that belong to the state’s 23 county Farm Bureaus.

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