
NACWA Urges Action on Nutrient Control in Farm Bill

NACWA urges Congress to support strong provisions in the Farm Bill to address agricultural nutrient runoff and to improve water quality.

The Nutrient Challenge

Nutrient pollution is the greatest water quality challenge facing the United States today.

- According to state water quality reports, 80,000 miles of rivers and streams; 2.5 million acres of lakes, reservoirs, and ponds; 78% of assessed continental U.S. coastal areas; and more than 30% of estuaries are impaired because of excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrients).
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies excess nutrients as the direct or indirect cause of more than 50% of impaired river and stream miles; more than 50% of impaired lake acres; and nearly 60% of impaired bay and estuarine square miles.
- Nutrient runoff from agricultural lands is the dominant source of nutrient impairments for the majority of these waters.
- Excessive nutrients in water supplies can lead to adverse human health effects, including cancer in adults and “blue baby syndrome” in infants. In waterways, excess nutrients can cause harmful algal blooms and hypoxia zones, in which no aquatic life can survive.

Over the next decade, reducing runoff of nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrients) in our waters will be the critical challenge in restoring and maintaining clean and safe water.

Addressing Nutrient Runoff in the Farm Bill

The *Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act*, passed by the Senate in June 2012, includes provisions in §2401, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), that provides stable funding over a five-year period to producers that implement nutrient management activities and prioritize nutrient management activities as a program focus. The RCPP, which replaces several water quality-related programs, is designed to encourage partnerships between agricultural operators and entities such as wastewater utilities, NGOs, and other governmental agencies to focus on improving conservation practices on the farm. By providing partnerships with stable funding for five years, the RCPP will help farmers address the nutrient challenges in many critical watersheds, including the Great Lakes, Mississippi River Basin, and Chesapeake Bay.

As the 113th Congress considers Farm Bill reauthorization, NACWA urges support for maintaining these provisions to more effectively reduce agricultural nutrient runoff and improve water quality throughout the United States.

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