



## **Healthy Waters Coalition Update**

### **December 2012**

*The Healthy Waters Coalition is a diverse group of municipal and state water and wastewater organizations, and conservation and sustainable agriculture organizations working in Washington DC and in communities throughout the country. The Coalition is focused on strengthening links between our working agricultural lands and the quality of our Nation's waters with a specific focus on nutrients. If you do not wish to receive these updates, we can remove you from our lists.*

*Below is an overview of the related press coverage during the month of December.*

### **Farm Bill Extension**

#### [Fiscal Plan Averts "Dairy Cliff," Buys Time for Farm Bill](#)

*Reuters*

A deal approved by the U.S. Congress late on Tuesday to avoid the automatic tax hikes and spending cuts known as the "fiscal cliff" also includes measures to avert the "dairy cliff" - a steep increase in milk prices. The tax agreement contains a nine-month fix for expiring farm subsidy programs by extending a 2008 farm law. That gives lawmakers time to come up with a new five-year replacement. Without the fix, the farm law would have expired and dairy subsidies would have reverted to 1949 levels, meaning retail milk prices could have doubled to about \$7 a gallon in coming weeks or months. Lawmakers have so far failed to finalize a new \$500 billion, five-year farm bill to replace the 2008 legislation, which authorizes spending on food stamps and crop subsidies. Also covered in: [Politico](#), [Des Moines Register](#), [Farm Futures](#), [Fox Business](#), [Wall Street Journal](#), [Food Safety News](#), [CQ Roll Call](#), [Food Business News](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Huffington Post](#)

### **Studies and Research**

#### [Water Pollution and the Farm Economy](#)

*The New York Times*

As many people know, the astounding increase in agricultural output that marked the latter half of the 20th century came at a high environmental price. Agriculture is a major contributor to global warming, and runoff from farm fields helps pollute rivers and streams. In the United States, nothing quite symbolizes this issue like the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, near the mouth of the Mississippi River, which is largely a consequence of fertilizer runoff from the Midwestern farming region. Now the Environmental Working Group, a Washington outfit known for its work on agricultural issues, is calling attention to the lingering problems with a new report titled "Muddy Waters." While it focuses on water

quality in Iowa, the report makes a broader point about the relationship between agriculture and the environment. Read the report [here](#). Also covered in: [The Gazette](#), [Sioux Falls Business Journal](#), [Des Moines Register](#), [Greenwire](#), [Common Dreams.org](#), [Triple Pundit](#)

#### [New report shows Chesapeake Bay health improves](#)

*Wall Street Journal/ Associated Press*

The health of the Chesapeake Bay improved slightly last year with underwater grasses the only area suffering a setback, according to an assessment released Wednesday by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation that sounded cautious optimism for a decades old effort now under tougher federal guidance. Bay grasses were hurt by high water temperatures in the lower bay and heavy rains that washed sediment and pollution into local waterways. All other indicators either improved or stayed the same, with crabs, oysters and oxygen levels in bay water all seeing gains. The foundation gave the bay an overall score of 32 out of 100, up one point over the last report in 2010 and four points since 2008.

#### [Climate Change Could Cut Western Water Runoff by 10%](#)

*Los Angeles Times*

Another climate change study is projecting declines in runoff in many parts of the West, a scenario that would put more pressure on the region's water supplies. Using new model simulations, scientists at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory expanded on 2007 research that predicted a drier future for the Southwest. The reasons involve more than a drop in precipitation -- which is actually expected to increase in some areas that are critical to Western water supplies. Researchers concluded that average annual runoff will fall by about 10% in the three regions examined in the study: California-Nevada, the Colorado River headwaters and Texas.

### **State Activities**

#### [Iowa Soybean Leaders Back Plan to Reduce Runoff](#)

*KCRG/Associated Press*

Environmentalists say it doesn't go far enough, but the Iowa Soybean Association is praising Gov. Terry Branstad's strategy to keep harmful nutrients from reaching Iowa waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. Association leaders who met in Ankeny this week reaffirmed their support for the plan, which was released last month. ISA President Mark Jackson says the plan is based on science, recognizes the diversity of the state's landscape and is "much more effective than a costly, one-size-fits-all effort to improve water quality." The plan calls on wastewater treatment plants to make upgrades to reduce their discharges into waterways. But it asks farmers to take voluntary steps to reduce the runoff caused by fertilizers and manure on farm fields. Also covered in: [San Francisco Chronicle](#), [Seattle Post Intelligencer/Associated Press](#), [Des Moines Register](#)

#### [Nutrient Management Planning: Continued Progress in State](#)

*Agri-View*

Nutrient management in Wisconsin has come a long way very quickly, said Sue Porter who oversees the program at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Porter

talked about today's "better and faster" nutrient management planning at UW-Extension's Soil, Water and Nutrient Management Meetings held around the state the past two weeks. Agri-View attended the Marshfield meeting, where Porter highlighted that this year, just over 1.9 million acres of Wisconsin cropland – 22 percent of the state's 9 million total crop acres – are covered by a nutrient management plan (NMP). That's a 5 percent increase from 2011, and a whole lot more than just six years ago, when only 800,000 acres were covered by NMPs.

#### [Gwen Keyes Fleming: State makes progress to address costly pollution](#)

*Tallahassee.com*

Nutrient pollution, the excess nitrogen and phosphorus that causes algal blooms and fish kills, is a major source of water quality impairment across the state of Florida. Nutrient pollution threatens human health and the environment, hurts businesses and costs jobs, reduces property values, diminishes recreational opportunities and impacts your quality of life. The federal Environmental Protection Agency has long held that limits are necessary to protect Florida's waters from nutrient pollution. The Clean Water Act (CWA) designates primary responsibility for protecting water quality with states, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has worked for years to collect data on the condition of state waters and adopt its own numeric nutrient standards. Also covered in: [Gasparilla Gazette](#), [Environmental Expert \(EPA Press Release\)](#), [Sunshine State News](#),

#### **Local Activities**

##### [Fertilizer Runoff a Growing Concern in Country](#)

*Mount Vernon News*

Manure application was the main topic of the Ohio Knox County Farmers Breakfast on Tuesday, but they weren't talking politics. Instead, the topic was fertilizer and keeping it from polluting waterways. Knox Soil & Water Conservation District Director Rob Clendening, and OSU Extension Educator John Barker talked about how controlling chemical runoff from fertilizers, especially the phosphorous and nitrogen from the manure farmers spread on their fields, is a growing concern in much of the country. They do not expect that severe restrictions such as those being put in place around Grand Lake St. Mary's are likely to be coming to Knox County anytime soon, but the runoff issue is a concern and is a reason crop farmers need to plan spreading manure in the right quantities to meet their crop's needs.

##### [Valley Farm Works To Stop Runoff](#)

*WHSV*

Over time, the runoff produced by 1100 cows on a 2000 acre farm would wreck havoc on any water source in its path. But not at Cave View Farms in Weyer's Cave. "I like healthy animals," said Senior Partner Gerald Garber. "I like healthy soil. If any water leaves my farm I want it to be as clean, or cleaner, than when it got here. I don't want to be the problem down stream." By comparison, Cave View is one of the largest dairy farms in the Valley. About ten years ago they started an active effort to clean up their runoff. Some examples of those efforts; cows are no longer taken to natural watering sources, cover crops are always planted instead of tilling the land, and fencing to dictate cow behavior are now in place.

### [Harris views runoff solution](#)

*Star Democrat*

Farmer has created system of shallow basins, seeks state, federal interest - "It makes a lot of sense," Congressman Andy Harris said. Harris, R-Md-1st, was talking about Sam Owings' high impact environmental installation on Hambleton Creek Farms on Church Hill Road, a short distance from Chestertown. Owings' installation is a series of shallow basins along a natural drainage channel. The basins are designed to slow down stormwater runoff so it drops its load of silt and nutrients before entering the nearby creek, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. Owings created the system in 2011, and has been working to create interest in it ever since. "It's cost-effective and simple," he told Harris.

### [Valley water quality board adopts pollutant rules](#)

*Modesto Bee*

A board has given final approval to rules aimed at protecting groundwater from farm-based pollutants in part of the San Joaquin Valley. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board voted unanimously to adopt the rules, which apply to the parts of Stanislaus, Merced and Madera counties east of the San Joaquin River. The board also agreed, to the approval of agricultural interests, to have the effort carried out by the same farmer-funded coalition that has handled surface water issues for almost a decade. The group, the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition, pays for water testing and educates growers about farming practices that reduce pollution, all under state supervision.