

October 29, 2013



Members of the 2013 Farm Bill Conference Committee:

As you begin conference deliberations for a final Farm Bill package, we urge you to maintain provisions adopted in S. 954 that would provide stronger tools in the newly established Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) within the Conservation Title to help agricultural producers manage nutrients more effectively in order to improve water quality in local watersheds.

Nutrient runoff 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 the assessed continental U.S. coastal areas and more than 30% of estuaries are impaired due to excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrients). In all, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency attributes excess nutrients as the direct or indirect cause of impairments in over 50% of impaired river and stream miles, over 50% of impaired lake acres, and nearly 60% of impaired bay and estuarine square miles. For the majority of these waters, nutrient run-off from agricultural lands is the dominant source of the nutrient impairments according to studies by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Over this next decade, the critical challenge facing efforts to restore and maintain clean and safe water is reducing excessive amounts of nutrients in our waterways.

The Senate-approved Farm Bill reauthorization package, S. 954, includes several provisions in the RCPP (§2401), that offer additional, more targeted, tools to help agricultural producers undertake effective nutrient management activities in critical watersheds to improve local water quality. The provisions include encouraging partnerships between agricultural producers and municipal entities such as water and wastewater utilities and non-governmental organizations to help farmers manage nutrients more effectively, provide stable five-year funding for nutrient management practices, prioritize nutrient management activities in critical watersheds, and prioritize conservation investments that result in overall water quality gains. Collectively, these provisions provide important steps forward in conservation and water quality policy.

We have an opportunity in this next Farm Bill to establish policies to more effectively reduce agricultural nutrient run-off and improve water quality throughout the United States. Critical watersheds such as the Mississippi River Basin-Gulf of Mexico, the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes, would all benefit from targeted investments that these provisions would allow. We urge you to maintain them in the RCPP and the final Farm Bill package to support our nation's water quality goals.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and please contact Patricia Sinicropi with the National Association of Clean Water Agencies at psinicropi@nacwa.org if you would like additional information about this request.

Sincerely,

American Public Works Association

American Water Works Association

Association of Clean Water Administrators

Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies

California Association of Sanitation Agencies

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Clean Water Action

Iowa Soybean Association

Milwaukee Metropolitan Sanitation District

National Association of Clean Water Agencies

National Association of Water Companies

Water Environment Federation