



## **Healthy Waters Coalition Update October-November 2015**

*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. Please feel free to circulate this list to your members and let us know if you have any colleagues who would find this monthly update informative. 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 and other materials from the months of October-November.*

### **National Activities**

#### [USDA Begins 49th Enrollment Period for the Conservation Reserve Program](#)

##### *USDA News Release*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack reminded farmers and ranchers that the next general enrollment period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) begins today, Dec. 1, 2015, and ends on Feb. 26, 2016. December 2015 also marks the 30th anniversary of CRP, a federally funded program that assists agricultural producers with the cost of restoring, enhancing and protecting certain grasses, shrubs and trees to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

#### [USDA Invests \\$30 Million to Improve Water Quality in Mississippi River Basin](#)

##### *USDA News Release*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will invest \$30 million this year in 33 new projects and 40 existing projects to improve water quality in high priority watersheds the Mississippi River Basin. These projects reduce loss of nutrients and sediment to waters that eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico.

#### [Fact Sheet: Impact of USDA Investments to Protect and Sustain America's Water Supply](#)

##### *USDA News Release*

Over the past six years, USDA has worked with private landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices that conserve and clean the water we drink. USDA support—leveraged with historic outside investments—boosts producer incomes and rewards them for their good work. At the same time, USDA investments have brought high quality water and waste services to rural communities, which are vital to their continued health and economic viability.

## [FACT SHEET: USDA Invests in Locally-Led Conservation Projects Through New Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#)

*USDA News Release*

Created under the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a new, comprehensive and flexible program that is designed to build strong and diverse partnerships, multiply the federal conservation investment and target conservation goals on a regional or watershed scale. RCPP empowers local leaders to work with multiple partners-such as private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profit groups and other non-government partners-along with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to design solutions that work best for their region.

## [Interest Builds In Giving Farmers Credit For Growing Green](#)

*NPR*

Like all business owners, farmers want to get paid for their work. Sometimes, that work creates problems for the environment, so regulators are advancing the idea of creating environmental markets to allow farmers to make money off of their conservation practices. Under plans in development, farmers could generate environmental credits by farming in ways that store carbon, filter out water pollution, or preserve wildlife habitat. Those credits could be bought, sold, and traded by companies that need to balance out their own emissions or pollution.

## [Nitrates a costly, persistent problem for small towns](#)

*KVNO News*

Earlier this year, Des Moines, Iowa, made news when the city announced it would sue farmers in a legal battle over fertilizer. Des Moines is unusual, though. In most cases, nitrate pollution is not a big city problem. It's most often a small town problem, says Bruce Dvorak, who studies environmental engineering at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

## **State Activities**

### [Chesapeake Bay cleanup: Is Iowa next?](#)

*Des Moines Register*

An expensive and controversial plan to rein in toxic pollutants flowing from farms and cities to the picturesque Chesapeake Bay, home to blue crabs, otters, bass and osprey, may serve as an object lesson for Iowa and its water quality problems. For decades, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia had worked voluntarily with the federal government to curb runoff into the 200-mile-long bay — the nation's largest estuary. But when the partnership failed to sufficiently reduce runoff in the 64,000-square-mile watershed, President Obama signed an executive order in 2009 to restore the troubled bay.

### [Can these men clean up Iowa's water?](#)

*Des Moines Register*

Neither Larry James nor Steve Bruere like to dwell on what divides environmentalists and the ag community when it comes to Iowa's issues with water quality. Both are more interested on finding solutions as the two men tapped to lead a Greater Des Moines Partnership task force on water quality. The group is expected to submit its proposals next month to the Iowa Legislature and Gov. Terry Branstad, who plans to introduce his own package.

### [Vilsack: Iowa needs to commit more money to water quality](#)

*Agrinews*

Iowans need to resolve the legal dispute between the Des Moines Water Works and three northwest counties, says U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. The lawsuit could affect agriculture not just in Iowa but across the United States, the ag secretary said. "We need to resolve it with a consensus-driven, incentive-based system in which we say that there is a partnership between those who own and farm land and those who benefit from the activities that take place on that land whether they are connected to jobs or they drink the water in a city or town."

### [Farmers Subject to New Clean Water Rules](#)

*VT Digger*

Farmers in Vermont are preparing for a long list of upcoming regulations targeting phosphorus pollution into waterways. Until now, farmers were advised to follow these practices, but beginning July 1 will be required to adopt them. Under the proposed rules, owners of small farms will be required to submit to inspections once every 10 years, and must attend training courses on methods to prevent excessive runoff from their properties. They'll also become responsible for annual compliance reporting. Among the most significant changes is a requirement that small farm owners write and follow a plan designed to keep nutrients from running off the land and into Vermont's lakes.

### [The elephant in the water-quality room](#)

*StarTribune*

In his call for a summit to address the "critical" condition of Minnesota's lakes and streams, Gov. Mark Dayton correctly said that surface-water deterioration can no longer be ignored. It's noteworthy that Dayton announced the summit before the state's largest agricultural groups — the Farm Bureau and the Farmers Union — where he boldly spoke the truth: "Modern farming practices, especially the use of nitrogen fertilizer," contribute to farm-country lakes being mostly lost.

### [Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association: Tackling Water Quality Issues Through Partnerships](#)

*CropLife*

You've got to be doing something right if lots of people keep coming to you for advice. That's what's happening in Illinois as the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association (IFCA) continues to be inundated with requests to share how it's hammered out a number of solutions to help curb nutrient loss in fields. IFCA and its partners — which include the state's Farm Bureau and corn and soybean associations — have no magic formula, but instead a series of carefully orchestrated programs to help retailers and growers ultimately protect waterways while at the same time increase yields.

### [Can Farming Practices in Oklahoma Solve Climate Change?](#)

*Scientific American*

The Sooner State is part of a trend toward leaving farmland untilled to tackle runoff and climate change, but some remain wary of associated pesticide use. Greg Scott, with his thick mustache and dusty jeans, looks more cowboy than scientist but is one of the state's leading voices in advocating for switching to no-till farming. It's not just rivers benefitting, he said, but more fertile soil, less irrigation and fuel needs, and soil better equipped to sequester carbon dioxide from the air.

### [Phosphorus just a piece of the blue-green algae puzzle](#)

*Burlington Free Press*

Much has occurred on the recent policy front to lend hope about the future of Lake Champlain. Vermont passed a new clean water bill whose implementation should improve many practices around the state

that affect water quality. Yet, even if these policies are 100 percent effective we will still see algae blooms in the lake going forward. No one dismisses the idea that phosphorus plays a significant role in controlling algae blooms, but it is a mistake to look at phosphorus as the only important variable.

### ***Regional and Local Activities***

#### **[Bay Program OKs controversial nutrient reduction credits for farms](#)**

*Bay Journal*

The state-federal Bay Program partnership has approved controversial recommendations to award greater nitrogen and phosphorus reduction credits for farms that have nutrient management plans, one of the most widespread nutrient control practices used on the region's farms. The change could help states edge closer to meeting their Bay nutrient reduction goals. But the approval came with a big caveat — it was conditioned on states providing information about how well nutrient management plans are actually implemented. That could mean that fewer plans get counted toward Bay goals.

#### **[Feds plan new guidelines on toxic algae in Lake Erie, rivers and other lakes](#)**

*Crains Detroit Business*

New national guidelines are being developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to protect swimmers and kayakers from the growing threats posed by toxic algae in lakes and rivers. Agency officials said the focus will be on people who are likely to swallow water during recreational activities. The EPA issued a report to Congress last week saying that it also will be looking at whether new health advisories are needed on algae toxins in drinking water.

#### **[Fertilizer runoff feeds growth of harmful algal blooms](#)**

*Go Erie*

Over the past decade, Lake Erie's western basin has been plagued with harmful algal blooms (HABs) with a devastating impact on marine life, tourism, recreational and commercial fisheries and drinking water. HABs have also reduced the amount of oxygen to such low levels that dead zones have been created in the central basin. Golf courses and lawns, which use commercial fertilizers that contain phosphorus, contribute to Lake Erie's nutrient pollution, but experts identify agriculture as the biggest culprit.

#### **[Hogan proposes Chesapeake pollution trading plan](#)**

*Baltimore Sun*

The Hogan administration announced Friday a renewed effort to devise a "pollution trading" system in Maryland, which proponents contend could speed cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay by lowering the cost. Proponents say trading could significantly reduce the projected \$15 billion cost to Maryland of curtailing nutrient pollution fouling the bay. Communities facing expensive mandates to upgrade sewage plants or reduce stormwater pollution, for instance, might be able to meet their requirements by paying farmers far less to reduce runoff of fertilizer from their fields.

#### **[More than \\$2.16 million awarded for ag water quality projects](#)**

*The Daily News*

More than \$2.16 million in state funding will help farms in Genesee and Wyoming counties protect water quality. The funding — announced Tuesday by state Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball — will help keep local farms economically viable while protecting the environment. The local grants are part of \$11.1 million awarded to support 29 agricultural water quality conservation projects across the state, benefiting 116 farms.

### ***Research and Studies***

## [Strip tillage and cover crops enhance soil quality in the southeast in the face of climate change](#)

*Phys Org*

Soil quality is a major issue in the southeastern United States because the sandy, eroded soils there have few of the nutrients and organic matter that crops need. Moreover, climate change is expected to make matters worse, bringing more intense rainstorms that will increase runoff and rob the land of even more nutrient-rich soil. Agricultural Research Service scientists in Tifton, Georgia, are providing guidance to growers on how to maintain soil quality in the face of climatic changes with a study comparing runoff and sediment losses from two common tillage systems.