



Healthy Waters Coalition Update **March/April 2016**

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 month of March and April.

National Activities

[USDA Launches \\$41 Million Initiative to Improve Water Quality for Western Lake Erie Basin](#)

USDA Press Release

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will invest \$41 million in a three-year initiative to support the work of farmers in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana to improve water quality in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB). The initiative helps farmers and ranchers implement science-based conservation measures to reduce runoff from farms entering the region's waterways.

State Activities

[Oklahoma measure pits farmers' rights against pollution fears](#)

Reuters

Oklahoma's "right to farm" measure, which would declare agriculture as a vital economic sector that must be safeguarded by the state constitution, is dividing voters ahead of a November ballot and is seen as a bellwether for similar amendments in other states. By placing a right to farm in the state constitution, critics say the provision could supersede state rules on items such as pesticides, pollution and livestock treatment, letting big industrialized farms sow destruction and trample smaller family farms that cannot compete with them.

[Virginia lawmakers OK millions for farm BMPs, sewage plants](#)

Bay Journal

Virginia farmers, wastewater treatment plant managers and localities stand to receive about \$140 million over the next two years to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution under the biennial budget

approved by the General Assembly in March. Another \$20 million would fund land conservation programs.

[More than 10,000 Ohio farmers have received water quality training](#)

Farm and Dairy

In a little over a year, Ohio State University Extension has trained more than 10,000 Ohio farmers on best practices to apply fertilizer for optimum crop yield, reduce the risk of nutrient runoff and improve water quality throughout the state. More training opportunities are scheduled to reach even more farmers. Known as Fertilizer Applicator Certification Training (FACT), this program allows farmers and commercial fertilizer applicators to meet the educational requirements of Ohio's new agricultural fertilization law.

Regional and Local Activities

[State, federal agencies: Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's dire warning not true](#)

Lancaster Online

Thousands of farmers have been told repeatedly by the state's largest farm organization that hundreds of thousands of acres of cropland may be forcibly retired by federal agencies as part of Chesapeake Bay cleanup. Turns out, the warning may not be true after all, according to state and federal agencies involved in the cleanup.

[Ag groups pick up tab for water quality lawsuit defense](#)

Des Moines Register

The Iowa Farm Bureau and other commodity groups are bankrolling legal expenses racked up in defense of a lawsuit filed by Des Moines Water Works over nitrate pollution in the Raccoon River, a Farm Bureau spokesman confirmed. But exactly where the money is coming from to litigate the expensive lawsuit — and how much it will cost — has been a question mark.

[Most believe reducing nutrients in Iowa's drinking water will take decades](#)

The Gazette

Two-and-a-half years into Iowa's nutrient reduction strategy, Iowans accustomed to rapid gratification and a 24/7 news cycle might be inclined to ask, "Are you done yet?" But accomplishment of the strategy's overarching goal — 45% reduction in nutrient pollution — will likely take generations and cost billions.

Research and Studies

[Report: Farmers doing too little to stop Lake Erie algae](#)

News-Herald News

Cutting phosphorus runoff into Lake Erie enough to prevent harmful algae outbreaks would require sweeping changes on the region's farms that may include converting thousands of acres of cropland into grassland, scientists said in a report Tuesday. The study released by the University of Michigan Water Center found current efforts to keep phosphorus, which is found in livestock manure and artificial fertilizers, on fields instead of flowing into the lake are falling drastically short of results needed to achieve a 40 percent drop in runoff — a target set by the U.S. and Canada in February. Ohio and Michigan rely largely on voluntary compliance, but too few farmers are participating, the report found.

[Fertilizer Applied to Fields Today Will Pollute Water for Decades](#)

Lab Manager

Nitrogen fertilizer applied to farmers' fields has been contaminating rivers and lakes and leaching into drinking water wells for more than 80 years. Now, a new University of Waterloo study shows that fertilizer applied today will continue to pollute water for decades because it's building up in the soil. The study presents the first direct evidence of a large-scale nitrogen legacy across the United States' Mississippi River Basin.

[Nitrogen Pollution Linked to Endangered Species Decline](#)

HNGN

Nitrogen pollution finds its way into our air and water from various sources, including fertilizers, agriculture, smokestacks and car tailpipes—and it is affecting the behavior of dozens of endangered species in the United States, according to a recent study. In their work, the research team looked at 1,400 species with Endangered Species Act listings. They found that 78 of those are battling known threats caused by excess nitrogen.

[Farm Pollution Doubles the Risk Of Several Cancers](#)

Environmental Working Group

Pollution in Minnesota's drinking water has gotten worse in recent years, but no one wants to call out the industry responsible. Big growers apply a lot of fertilizer to their fields, which runs off into groundwater in the form of nitrates. It's been the primary source of water pollution for decades, making water in some areas of the country dangerous to drink and costing local taxpayers millions of dollars to clean it up. And what Minnesota residents may not know is that this pollution could double their chances of getting bladder, thyroid, and ovarian cancer.

Miscellaneous

[Water pollution plummeted after Denmark tied farm runoff to subsidies](#)

Bay Journal

Imagine a scenario in which farmers would only receive government subsidies if they followed a strict fertilizer budget for their farms. Imagine also that, like all good budgets, theirs required a little belt-tightening, so they could only apply enough crop nutrients for 90 percent of their current yield. Denmark enacted such a nutrient budgeting less than 20 years ago and since has experienced a 50% drop in nitrogen and a nearly 90% drop in phosphorus levels in streams and rivers.