

# Water Quality Initiative Affects Farmers

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Many people, environmentalists, legislators and farmers — are concerned about the quality of some part of this nation's water resources, especially the part that furnishes their drinking water.

Against this background, President Bush last year recommended in his 1990 budget proposal to Congress a new initiative for enhancing water quality.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's response to the initiative defines a vigorous effort to protect ground and surface water from potential contamination by agricultural chemicals and wastes, especially pesticides and nutrients.

In his statement of principles and policies, the president made it clear that farmers need to take responsibility for any contamination of water that may result from management practices they apply to the landscape.

He said that the role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is to conduct research and provide education and technical assistance that encourages "farming practices that avoid water quality degradation" and are economically sound.

In its July 1989 "Water Quality

Program Plan," which supports the President's initiative, the USDA outlines a multi-disciplinary approach to meet water quality challenges head-on during the next five years. The program demonstrates that the U.S. agricultural sector is concerned about the environment and will make the necessary changes to protect groundwater quality.

Major cooperating USDA agencies include the soil conservation service, extension service, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. These federal agencies are working with state and local agencies such as agricultural experiment stations and the cooperative extension service at land-grant universities, together with soil conservation districts throughout the nation.

The management of agricultural chemicals and wastes to meet environmental and public safety objectives is in many ways a new activity for the USDA, particularly as it relates to groundwater contamination. However, such activities have existed at state and local levels for nearly a decade.

USDA technical assistance programs relating to water quality have historically focused on reducing sediment and sediment-

borne contaminants in surface waters as well as animal waste management and salinity control.

The USDA water quality task force planning document declares that biological pest control, integrated pest management, and nutrient management programs are being linked with compatible efforts in order to understand and address groundwater contamination.

Eight USDA agencies and their cooperating state counterparts are collaborating with the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to produce a wide range of new and interrelated water quality projects.

The USDA's Water Quality Program Plan is designed to complement established programs such as integrated crop management (ICM), the National Agricultural Pesticide Impact Assessment Program (NAPIAP), and newer programs such as sustainable agriculture. Its successful implementation would contribute importantly to compatibility between agricultural production and environmental quality.

A continuation of on-farm demonstration projects, together



Maryland Involvement in the USDA's Water Quality Program Plan became official when representatives of the cooperative extension service and soil conservation service signed a memorandum of understanding late last year. Seated are Dr. Craig S. Oliver, extension director at the University of Maryland and Stephanie E. Taylor, deputy state conservationist. Standing is Floyd Allred, Jr., of Coloma, chairman of the state soil conservation committee.

with information for farmers and technical assistance, will speed delivery of management systems to farmers.

Economical and social evalua-

tions will assure that the management systems recommended are both practicable and profitable. Public information efforts will promote communitywide understanding and acceptance of the need for increased compatibility between agriculture and the environment.

The cooperative extension service and the soil conservation service will provide joint leadership for establishing on-farm demonstration projects. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service will provide financial assistance.

Another objective of the USDA Water Quality Program plan is to provide the background, technology, and consultation support that will allow farmers and woodlot owners to meet state and regional water quality objectives without economic hardship.

A number of interstate efforts, such as the Chesapeake Bay Program, also have ongoing initiatives to reduce nonpoint agricultural source contamination of regional watersheds.

A water quality information center is being established at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Md. Dr. Janice C. Kemp is the coordinator. Kemp already has established a Water Information Network on the library's electronic bulletin board system. Those with computer modems who wish to use this computerized conference category can dial (800) 345-5785. Local area users should dial (301) 344-8510.

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