

# Nutrient Management

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Humphries' "gentle" comment brought snickers from the audience. And Millersville farmer and State Representative John Barley, one of the prime sponsors of HB 496, called it anything but gentle. "We need to keep practical, production agriculture in mind when we look at nutrient management," Barley said.

His concern with the bill is that the language is so vague it leaves regulatory bureaucrats with too many interpretive options. Barley nevertheless sees a definite need for statewide legislation, because farm operations often transcend township and county boundaries.

Brubaker, who is also a Warwick Township supervisor, feels local legislation can get the job done, citing his own backyard as an example. In September of 1988, the township adopted an ordinance requiring farmers to get a manure management plan if they wanted to boost their animal numbers by more than 10 percent.

Shortly after the law took effect, five farmers gave notice that they wanted to expand their operations. They got nutrient management plans, the plans were approved by the township and the farmers were able to add to their businesses. This was proof, Brubaker said, that local efforts could work. However, he also expressed concern about townships adopting

ordinances restricting farmers' right to farm.

More such evidence came from Garth Becker, who represents the Lancaster County Solid Waste Authority on the Forum. Lancaster County had a problem with leaves and grass going into landfills, Becker told the gathering. So the county commissioned a study of ways to get those materials onto farmlands, where they could serve as valuable fertilizer.

Using the study results, procedures were set up that brought trash haulers together with farmers who had nutrient management plans that allowed for the spreading of leaves and grass on cropland.

Local action again solved a problem, Becker noted, without any need for state help or supervision.

Whether the state gets involved in nutrient management sooner or later, farmers have already altered their operations in ways that help solve the problems of manure disposal, according to Jeffrey Stoltzfus, a Lancaster County extension agent.

As most people define the problem now, it has two parts: 1- Excessive manure applications to farmland result in the leaching of nitrates into groundwater supplies; 2- The runoff of nitrogen into nearby streams, where it eventually causes problems with

aquatic life in the Chesapeake Bay.

In past years, the nitrogen problem was complicated by the fact that farmers applied both manure and commercial fertilizer, overwhelming the land's ability to absorb nitrogen.

Stoltzfus told the gathering that he had worked in a Rural Clean Water Program (RCWP) centered in the northeastern part of Lancaster County. Some 365 farmers cultivating a total of 24,134 acres participated in the RCWP. By the end of the five-year program, between 1986 and 1991, these farmers had reduced their use of commercial nitrogen fertilizer by 78 percent without suffering any loss in crop yields.

Yields remained high for these farmers because the manure applied to their croplands was sufficient - and often more than sufficient - to support maximum production.

Nutrient management planning can help farmers save significant

amounts of money. And while they may have to spend some money to draw up and implement their plans, they probably won't have to spend \$38,000 to do it, according to Robert Gregory of the Lancaster County Conservation District.

The \$38,000 figure had been quoted in news reports from a February 12 State Senate hearing in Bloomsburg on HB 496.

One of the programs Gregory administers helps farmers pay for nutrient management plans and programs designed specifically to prevent runoff from entering streams and thence the Chesapeake Bay. The District has already signed 150 contracts with farmers who have agreed to change their operations in some way to limit runoff.

Gregory said after the meeting that while some manure storage


structures can be expensive, storage isn't always necessary. Grass waterways and diversion terraces, along with more effective nutrient management procedures, can often solve on-farm problems for a \$1,500 out-of-pocket cost to farmers.

Lamont Garber is an agricultural specialist with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. He has an office in Harrisburg, just about a block-and-a-half from the Susquehanna River, which is the main carrier of nutrients and silt into the Chesapeake.

Garber pointed out that regulations which affect farmers are here already and more are on the way. He pointed to the Conservation District programs as an economical way of combatting the nutrient problem. "There are more ways than spending money to balance nutrient input with crop output," he said.

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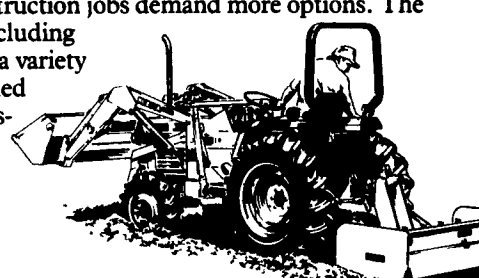
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**Observation #3** Today's painted metal siding and roofing has a remarkably short life. Bad alloy or metal. There might be another list of reasons for this. To save it at reasonable coating cost - timing is important.

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