

SCC Nutrient Advisory Board To Bring Pieces Together

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Lancaster Farming Staff
(part 2 of 2)

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The nutrient management advisory board to the State Conservation Commission has accomplished a majority of the work needed on 17 sub-issues of what is to be final regulations for nutrient management on farms.

The 15-member board has been charged with helping to create, review and recommend regulations that fulfill the requirements of the state's Nutrient Management Act, which was passed earlier this year by Gov. Robert Casey.

The expressed intent of the board is to do more than merely provide minimum regulations to

satisfy the expressed requirements of the act. Instead, board members have agreed that the final base of regulations, especially for agriculture, must provide the environmental protections, but also not unduly burden farmers compelled to manage their handling of livestock manure.

As it is, the nutrient management act targets high-density livestock operations for mandatory controls of manure handling.

The threshold for being considered a farm needing nutrient planning has been arbitrarily set in law as those operations with 2,000 pounds liveweight of livestock per acre, regardless of the number of animals.

In general, the basic intent of the

act is to ensure that nitrogen is controlled so as to not present a pollution problem.

More specifically, the act deals with nitrogen used with livestock operations and in cropping operations associated with livestock operations.

Eventually, all nonpoint sources of nitrogen are to be considered for legal controls, but high-density livestock operations were chosen as first targets for control, since they are a relatively recent phenomenon in the industry, driven by low commodity prices and increasing production competition.

Furthermore, there have been some obvious pollution problems associated with such farming operations, and with large industry

investment geared toward such high-production facilities, lawmakers sought to get controls in place before that type of new agricultural operation grew further without the required responsibility to not pollute.

Under state law, water pollution is illegal, but since the cost and impracticality of proving in court that a farm is responsible for pollution, even if it appears obvious, there has been little use of existing clean water laws to control such activities.

By requiring operators of high-density facilities to create and follow a management plan of nutrients (specifically nitrogen), it is assumed that the commonwealth can be better assured that illegal

and irresponsible practices aren't being used in order gain a competitive edge or to increase profits.

As of the last meeting, held Nov. 4, the board has reported having taken final action on six of 17 regulatory "concepts."

Those concepts include regulations covering the general provisions of the act; some of the general requirements for submitting nutrient management plans and identifying CAOs; what is to be contained in the nutrient management plan; manure management; excess manure utilization; and the delegation of authority to local conservation districts.

Other aspects being worked on include definitions, storm water control; criteria for manure storage; and financial assistance. However, these areas still contain a lot of uncertainty and are under review by committees.

Other issues which are just being researched, or have yet to be addressed by the board include voluntary plans (which may require some rewording and reworking of regulations already considered to be finalized), manure handling in emergency conditions, plan amendments, and recordkeeping.

The advisory board has created several committees to deal specifically with the issues, and the committees have been meeting regularly between board meetings in order to have as much work accomplished as possible for full board consideration.

Joel Rotz, chairman of the board, said that the board must now begin to consider the workability of the final regulatory package. Mike Krempasky, secretary of the State Conservation Commission, said that some of the wording may change after legal review, so board members should not be surprised nor conclude that changes were made behind their back.

As reported last week, uncertainty about the extent of changes to the state Department of Environmental Resources as promised by Gov.-elect Tom Ridge in his campaign platform.

Overall, the board may find it necessary to request an extension of deadline to finalize regulations under the act, although members did not concede that such a request is imminent.

Penn State To Help Reintroduce Fishers

UNIVERSITY PARK (CENTRE Co.) — The fisher, a sleek member of the weasel family, is poised to roam the forests of Pennsylvania if a Penn State program to reintroduce the animals succeeds over the next several years.

The fisher project, which follows on the heels of a successful program to reintroduce the river otter into Pennsylvania, is likely to begin sometime in November, according to Thomas Serfass, a research associate in the School of Forest Resources who is overseeing the project.

As part of a cooperative effort between the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the university's Wildlife and Fisheries Science program, the project will release 25 to 30 fishers and track their movements and behavior over a

year's time to determine how the animals will survive in Pennsylvania. If those fishers survive, the researchers hope to release more than 100 into the wild.

"This project is returning part of Pennsylvania's history," Serfass said. "There are more practical reasons as well, but bringing back a species that had disappeared from the state is reason enough."

Fishers, which are 30 to 45 inches long and can weigh from four to 12 pounds, were abundant in Canada and the northern United States in the early and mid-1800s. In the late 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, extensive logging along with unregulated trapping in the state destroyed much of the fisher's natural habitat and the species vanished from Pennsylvania.

"The main reason fishers disappeared was the loss of the forest" Serfass said. "That we are able once again to put fishers into Pennsylvania woods is a testament to modern forestry practices started during the past 100 years."

Despite its aquatic name, fishers don't like water much and don't eat fish. Serfass says their diet includes mice, shrews, squirrels and in the summer, nuts and berries. They will scavenge, eating deer gut piles and deer carcasses during hunting season. They also are one of the few predators of porcupines, which can be a timber nuisance in some areas.

Fishers are strictly forest animals and they have such a wide home range that Serfass estimates that a 50,000-acre forest could support just 100 fishers. "They really dislike open spaces and go out of their way to avoid them," he said. "People should not expect to see them in their backyard."

The fisher project, which is overseen by Dr. Robert Brooks, associate professor of wildlife ecology, and Dr. Walter Tzilkowski, associate professor of wildlife science, will use animals trapped live from populations in New York's Adirondacks Mountains and perhaps the White Mountains in New Hampshire.

ABA Selects First Princess

BRATTLEBORO, Vt. — Gwendolyn Murray of Toulon, Ill., recently won the first-ever Ayrshire Princess contest at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky.

Murray has had a life-long involvement with Ayrshires, starting with the family herd of 35 Ayrshires and 35 Milking Shorthorns.

"I can't even remember when I started officially working with the breed," she laughed. "I do know I showed my first junior calf at the district show when I was five."

An integral part of the contest was answering the question, "Why have you chosen to work with Ayrshires?"

Murray's response was simple, because of her family involvement. For her, the more pertinent question was why stay with Ayrshires?

"Ayrshires are efficient grazers, adaptable to change, hardy and easy to raise," she said. "They have excellent mammary systems, and produce high quantities of protein. Ayrshires also live longer and are affordable animals."

Her first official activity as Ayrshire princess was handing out ribbons and promoting the breed at the Southern National Ayrshire Show.

The other two judges, who came from other breed backgrounds, also agreed. They were: Janet Keitley Smith, a Kentucky Jersey breeder who has judged several previous contests for other breeds and Patti McDowell Holbert, a Guernsey breeder also from Kentucky.

First runner-up was Tami Swartz from Iowa and second runner up was Gretchen Greiwe from Sidney, Ohio. Other contestants included Amy Covey from Rose, Okla.; Marian Myatt from Mt. Hermon, Ky.; Karen Neville from Little Meadows, Pa.; and Jennifer Scoon from Downing, Mo.



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