

Part II: Nutrient Management Proposals Challenge Farming

(Continued from Page A1)

Board gave a rough overview of the situation as it was presented to Pennsylvania.

In essence, it is this: it appears imminent that nutrient management planning here will have to address phosphorus as much as nitrogen (currently the nutrient of most concern to Pennsylvania); and that means manures high in phosphorus will not be allowed to be applied on croplands with existing adequate to excessive levels of phosphorus; and since manures generally provide more phosphorus than plants need, farmers will be forced to purchase nitrogen to fulfill plant requirements, while at the same time finding some means of disposing of unusable manure.

To Pennsylvania's southern neighbors, according to a representative of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, it appears imminent that proposed legislation there (Gov. Paris Glen-

dening's proposal has been endorsed by the Maryland Farm Bureau) would require all farms 10 acres or more, regardless of livestock raised or owned, to have nutrient management plans based on phosphorus.

Those who have proposed the legislation already have proposed state funding to help cost-share the expense of shipping manure out of the Maryland Eastern Shore, as well as for helping to pay for the nitrogen that farmers would have to buy to raise crops on the high phosphorus soils.

According to information presented to the Pennsylvania SCS Nutrient Management Advisory Board, in most cases balancing the nutrient load for fields means that most manures would provide the limit for phosphorus well before reaching the need for nitrogen.

It means that nitrogen will have to be a purchased nutrient in many, if not most, cases.

The irony of the situation is that phosphorus is not directly a human health threat, while nitrogen can be.

The only reason for the heightened concern about phosphorus is that it does stimulate algae and bacterial blooms, which can deplete dissolved oxygen levels in water, thereby killing fish; and the algae can serve as food and thus indirectly may provide the stimulus for boosting *pfisteria piscicida* populations.

Whether phosphorus causes *pfisteria* to turn into a fish killer or emit neurotoxins into the waters is uncertain, though that is another premise for the emphasis on phosphorus.

However, there is another possibility, something seemingly more biologically plausible, that could discount the role of phosphorus as causing *pfisteria* to kill fish.

It has been suggested that, because the timing of the *pfisteria*

problem coincided with a change in the movement of the fish species most affected, that perhaps a chemical released by migrating schools of fish may have actually triggered the switch in the *pfisteria* from feeding on alga to fish.

Many life forms are advantageous feeders and can switch from food source to food source on a seasonal, or other basis. At the core of that is a biological rule of thumb: life seeks out whatever provides the most nutrition for the least amount of work.

However, not enough money or time has been devoted to discovering the actual cause.

In addition to the *pfisteria* problems, the EPA cites major dumpings of manure into waterways and potentials for future pollutings to occur as enough reason to increase national regulatory control of livestock operations in the United States.

In Pennsylvania, there has been

no proposal for creating an educational, testing and certification program for applying manure on land, but that is part of some of the proposals for Maryland.

Pennsylvania does have a certification program for those who develop nutrient management plans — a document describing a livestock farmer's plan of practices and actions to account for the safe handling and disposition of manures generated on a livestock farm.

While Pennsylvania agriculture and environmental groups, including those representing organizations to revive and protect the Chesapeake Bay aquatic ecosystems, developed the state Nutrient Management Act and the regulations, the federal initiative has already caused changes.

However, proposed regulatory changes in Pennsylvania for issuing permits for the construction of manure storage facilities are to increase, and a federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit and a state Part II permit are to be required in addition to a nutrient management plan.

According to Carol Young with the state Department of Environmental Protection, work is being done to revise state regulations covering the public review of environmental permits required for large livestock feeding operations.

She told the board that while there is no official moratorium on approving permit applications for construction of new or expanded manure storage facilities, since the application form and permits have not yet been revised, in effect there are several known applicants who have been put on hold until the revisions can be made.

(Turn to Page A34)



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