

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

Landowners, Farmers, Foresters: Be Wary Of EPA Proposal

The recent record growth in the economy of the United States could come to a crashing half if an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposal that would more stringently monitor water systems is allowed to go into effect.

The federal agency is seeking to aggressively enforce a portion of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act that would severely hamper agriculture and silviculture (forestry), and place an undue financial burden on many private property owners.

There are numerous reasons why the Pennsylvania State Grange, an agricultural, rural and community service organization with over 25,000 members across the state, is adamantly opposed to this initiative.

As part of the Clean Water Act, which became law in 1972, such activities as farming, animal production, timber harvesting, etc., have been considered as nonpoint sources of pollution while point sources were historically limited to industrial sites, which usually contain pipe sources of discharge.

Now, EPA is attempting to reverse this process by reclassifying silvicultural activities and agricultural production as point sources. Point sources are required to obtain a prescriptive National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit which can cost up to \$10,000.

Private property could also be considered as a point source since the reclassification included "anywhere that rain falls". Such a broad-based definition would include rooftops, driveways, shopping centers, highways, parking areas, gardens and lawns.

For nearly 30 years the agency did not implement the provision known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) — and for good reason. It is bad policy that could potentially cost landowners in Pennsylvania over \$1 billion a year in permit and legal fees and other costs. In fact, in 1990 EPA admitted such permits "would not be productive and would be cost prohibitive".

Prohibitive and burdensome costs, however, aren't the only negative aspect of the permit process. Permits could be subject to delays or refusals. They require public comment and many times include statements of unsubstantiated public opposition. They expose landowners to harassment and private litigation. Even if a permit is approved, it can be challenged by unscientifically based environmental groups of private entities.

Obviously the cost and liabilities incurred through the permit process will be a disincentive for landowners to maintain their properties in an agricultural or forested state — which is the exact opposite of farmland and forest preservation efforts across the Commonwealth. Soil conservation programs, Best Management Practices and other environmental initiatives used by farmers and foresters clearly demonstrate their willingness to preserve our natural resources.

The vast majority of farmers and foresters are good stewards of the land. They realize the economic gains of preserving the very land they till or forests they harvest. When will the policy makers who are far removed from the fields and forests of our great nation embrace this logical concept?

Finally, the Grange backs the death of this reclassification because it would snatch the regulatory process out of the hands of individual states (currently administered most effectively by the Department of Environmental Protection in Pennsylvania) and drop it squarely in the lap of EPA without any input from Congress. It is a scary notion — and sets a dangerous precedent — when a government agency can thumb its nose at lawmakers and set policy as it pleases.

It isn't too late, however, for concerned citizens to voice their opposition to this rule. Two public meetings are being held in the month of June to gather information as part of EPA's public comment period. On Thursday, June 8, a meeting is scheduled for The Casino at Lakemont Park in Altoona, Blair County, while a second meeting will be held on Thursday, June 15, at the Berks County Agricultural Center in Leesport. Both meetings, where residents can speak out against this rule, begin at 7 p.m.

If concerned citizens are unable to attend either of these meetings, they can still write or call their federal legislators and voice their opinion. Residents are also encouraged to ask their legislators to endorse and fast track efforts before Congress that would delay implementation of the reclassification of nonpoint sources and require a study on: the scientific basis underlying the development and implementation of TMDLs; costs of implementing measures to comply with such loads; the availability of alternative programs or mechanisms to reduce the discharge of pollutants from point sources and nonpoint source pollution to achieve water quality standards.

If these efforts are unsuccessful, the rule could be in effect by the end of June 2000.

As we approach the celebration of our Independence Day in early July, we may very well feel the erosion of our personal freedoms as we ask ourselves the inescapable question, "What's next?"

James C. Mentzer
Public Relations Director
Pennsylvania State Grange



Now Is The Time

By John Schwartz

Lancaster County
Agricultural Agent

To Look At Wire Spacing

For effective animal control, wire spacing is more important than fence height, reports Chester Hughes, Lancaster County extension livestock agent.

More animals go through and under fences than over them. Proper wire spacing makes your fences more effective.

Regardless of how many wires your fence has, always position one wire at the shoulder height of the animal to be controlled. This is the "nose wire" that your animals see and touch when they approach the fence. Other fence wires should be spaced

according to the type of animal: 10-12 inches apart for cattle and horses and 6-8 inches apart for sheep and goats. The bottom wires should be closer together than the top wires.

Fences taller than 48 inches are not really necessary. In many countries, livestock fences are seldom over 42 inches tall. Electric fences maybe even lower: 36 inches for cattle and horses and 30 inches for sheep and goats. Shorter fences also allow closer wire spacing.

To Ground Electric Fences

When utilizing electric fences, you cannot have too many ground rods, according to Chester Hughes, Lancaster County extension livestock agent. Sometimes one ground rod will work, but three are better.

When an animal touches the fence, the electricity must travel through the animal into the soil, then through the soil to a ground rod. The electricity then travels from the ground rod to the fence charger where the circuit is completed. Only then does the animal feel the shock. Therefore, the more ground rods, the more electricity gets back to the fence charger.

That is why the best ground system consists of three galvanized ground rods, at least six

feet deep in the soil and spaced 10 feet apart. For best results, install your ground rods where soil moisture is constant. Always use clamps to attach the ground wire to the ground rod. Remember, your electric fence is only as good as its ground system.

To Know Child Labor Laws

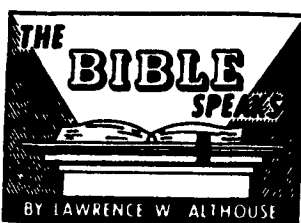
An Oregon newspaper recently reported that a grass seed farmer was likely to be fined \$375,000 for multiple state and federal child labor law violations.

More than \$50,000 of the fine being proposed was for farm safety violations of the "Youth Hazardous Occupational Order." This order prohibits people younger than age 16 to perform many hazardous jobs on the farm, including driving tractors, operating machinery, working in confined places, and several other activities.

If you employ young people on your farm, it would be a good idea to familiarize yourself with this child labor law. Agricultural Engineering Fact Sheet E31, available at your Penn State Cooperative Extension office, provides additional details about this law.

Feather Prof's Footnote:
"Success is not final; failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts."

— Winston Churchill



HOME ON A BROKEN WING

Background Scripture:

2 Corinthians 13:1-13.

Devotional Reading:

Acts 4:32-37.

Some years ago I received a letter from a man with whom I had once served on the board of a religious organization.

When I saw his name on the envelope, I was surprised because, doing our years of joint service, the man had been quite antagonistic toward me.

The contents of the letter, however, were even more surprising, for he told me that in reviewing his life he realized that he had been unfair to me and asked for my forgiveness. Whatever my previous estimation of him had been, I now greatly admired his sincere repentance. It is something all too rare.

A short time after I responded to him, he died, and I couldn't help thinking of William L. Sullivan's classic remark: "There is in repentance this beautiful mystery — that we may fly faster home on broken wing."

The world is filled with conflict and the churches have their share and perhaps even more. Several large Protestant denominations are facing the prospect of permanent division over a host of issues, the most prominent being the place of avowed homosexuals in the life of the church. Unlike the secular world, it appears that the churches are slow to acknowledge and face these conflicts and they are sometimes castigated for this perceived "weakness."

WEAKNESS OR STRENGTH? There is Biblical precedence for that perception of "weakness." From Paul's two letters to Corinth, we can piece together a hazy picture of the conflict Paul experienced there. In 2 Cor. 13 we find Paul facing a crisis. Some intruders have entered the Corinthian congregation and incited the people there to an arrogant attitude. These intruders not only have attacked Paul and his apostleship, they have arrogantly refused all his requests to cease and desist. Their immoral behavior has been blatant and defiant.

We may gather from what Paul writes that there have been some criticisms from Corinthian Christians concerning his handling of the crisis. Paul has been accused of weakness. Some of the Corinthian Christians have contrasted his lack of power with the power of the Spirit bestowed upon people in the Corinthian church.

Paul obviously still hopes the problem can be handled without stern measures, but his letter makes it clear that he is prepared to act vigorously and powerfully if they do not grasp this last chance to repent. "I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will ill not spare them. . . ." (13:2). He is hoping that this strong warning will lead them to repent before he comes.

FOR BUILDING UP. Some of Paul's critics will probably receive this letter with disappointment and criticism. They don't want to give the intruders still another chance. But the patience of love which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, while it appears as "weakness," is really the "strength" of love.

Impatience to condemn and punish is weakness but love re-

quires all the strength we have. Paul's is the "authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down" (13:10). Paul is aware that some of the Corinthians are obsessed with finding fault in Paul, but he warns them that they had best "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves" (13:5). If they are looking for someone's weaknesses to pounce on, let them look in a mirror and examine themselves.

What the mirror demands from us is not pride and judgmentalism, but humility and repentance. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote to her daughter, "It is eleven years since I have seen my face or my figure in a glass. The last reflection I saw was so disagreeable that I resolved to spare myself such mortification in the future." We cannot afford to let so much time pass until we examine ourselves and are moved, not to judge, but to repent — and "fly home on a broken wing."

Note: In the Steps of Paul to Rome & Greece, an 18-day tour conducted by Larry and Valere Althouse, is scheduled for April, 2001. If interested, please contact us: 4412 Shenandoah Ave, Dallas TX 75205/e-mail: althouse@aol.com; fax: (214) 52109312.

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