Secretary Designees Discuss Ag, Environmental Topics

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focus will be on strengthening and growing the economy, "and farmers know a lot about growing," he said.

The administration, county and township governments, and neighbors are necessary for investment into agriculture and ag-related businesses, he said.

In addressing the environment, Wolff noted how the focus on nutrient loading has shifted from point sources (a specific, discernible location) to non-point sources (such as parking lots, homes, or farms).

"With this shift, we need to realize that we should approach the problem in a different way," he said.

"We need a change in personal habits — to reshape how and what people think through education, technical and financial assistance, and enforcement.

"Agriculture must learn how to balance its role in producing food and fiber with functioning as stewards of the land."

Part of education includes township officials, he said. "We think as a whole, township supervisors and farmers are on the same wavelength," although he acknowledged that there were also areas of disagreement.

Recently the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) set up a tour for township supervisors to help them understand how responsible the producers are, how they work under the restrictions of laws, and the farms' impact on the local economy, according to Wolff.

At the recent Ag Issues Forum is, from left, Alan Bair, Pennsylvania Dairy Stakeholders; Dennis Wolff, secretary (designee) of agriculture; Karen McGinty, secretary (designee) of the Environmental Protection Agency; and Michael Brubaker.

"We started a dialogue that needs to continue," he said.

Wolff noted that the tour has helped to waylay further regulations on concentrated animal feeding (CAFO) operations.

"We must continue to educate our society about what we're doing," Wolff said.

According to McGinty, the EPA will welcome dialogue with producers facing challenges with environmental regulations.

"When I see people of good faith coming to us, people who are trying to do the right thing, we try to come to the table together," she said. "The buzzword is that we exercise our enforcement discretion."

For producers who see future requirements that would impose a burden on their facility, and come to the EPA with ideas to meet and achieve those requirements with added flexibility from the EPA, "you will have a partner in me with your ideas," she said. "If you have a better way, I'd love to hear it."

McGinty began by discussing challenges with nutrient management and the Chesapeake Bay.

"We need to make sure that we have a healthy, vibrant agriculture industry," she said. McGinty is concerned "when I see the magnitude of the challenges of nutrient management standards producers are going to need to try to meet.

"I want to find ways in which we can meet them in a way to thrive and maybe find new economic activity.

"Meeting these challenges cannot fall wholly on the backs of agriculture. The truth is that there are a myriad of other factors that lend themselves to nutrient loading in the water."

To meet these challenges, she said, she hopes "to get everybody at the table," including other headwater states in addition to Pennsylvania.

McGinty has been pursuing an option to transfer the air emissions trading paradigm to the water arena. When meeting nutrient requirements, there would be an opportunity to partner with another business that can reduce their nutrients more inexpensively, she said.

"I am 100 percent confident that as we get into the program, people will see the cost savings available there and the system will sell itself."

Additionally, nitrogen controls are already in place at power plants, so McGinty is looking for ways to encourage the power plant to run these controls year-round — instead of only in times of high ozone levels, as is the case now — in hopes that "the amount of reduction achieved would lighten the load on everyone," she said.

McGinty also discussed the opportunities of biosolid use. She would like to further develop the idea of using biosolids as inputs into biogasification plants, a clean source of energy, she said. She is researching using grant money from the Growing Greener program to help foot the bill.

CAFOs were also a part of her agenda.

"Some in the environmental community are opposed to CAFOs," she said. "I tell then that I part company with them on that issue."

According to McGinty, the EPA has a job to monitor and report nutrient pollution, and she has found that it has been easier for her to work with operations that have the capital, technology, attitude, and resources to change, she said.

"I think everybody wants to do the job of maintaining natural resources," she said. "The issue of biosolids is on many lawmakers minds.

Biosolids, applied correctly to fields, "can convert challenge to opportunity," she said.

A Better Way To Deal With Cattle Runoff

CLAY CENTER, Neb. — Eliminating odors from cattle waste runoff is only one advantage of a new, environmentally friendly system developed by Agricultural Research Service scientists in Nebraska to handle animal waste.

Another benefit of the new system is reduced costs for farmers, since the nutrients will flow from lagoons onto nearby fields to fertilize hay.

The feedlot at ARS' Roman L. Hruska U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) in Clay Center, Neb., is situated on top of a foothill.

Rainfall runoff from a series of pens within this feedlot is directed to a small basin that runs the length of the pens. The runoff collects in the basin for a short period of time, allowing the solid particles to settle. The runoff is then discharged to a hayfield, where the water and nutrients are "recycled" to help the hay grow without any additional water or nutrients.

The retained solids have to be removed from the basin once a year. But these solids are spread on cornfields as fertilizer, thereby 'recycling" them back to the production system.

Cattle's bodies cannot utilize all the nitrogen, phosphorus and other nutrients contained in their feed, and the excess ends up in the animals' manure.

But with the new system, these underutilized nutrients can be put to work as fertilizer to help grow the thousands of acres of corn and hay that are planted each year as food for the MARC cattle.

This not only saves money on commercial fertilizer costs, but also helps keep nutrients such as nitrogen out of water supplies by reusing those nutrients as fertilizer, rather than letting them wash away to nearby streams or other bodies of water.

In the three years that agricultural engineers have studied the system, there has been no runoff of nitrogen or animal wastewater from the hayfields to the surrounding area.