

Deadline Extended to Urge EPA to Ditch the Rule

After several years of leading the fight against the federal government's Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule, the agricultural community finally has a chance to bring the effort over the finish line. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, acting on an executive order from President Donald Trump, has proposed rescinding the rule.

But the controversial rule — which would greatly expand the federal government's regulation of farms and other land — isn't off the books yet. The EPA is soliciting public comments to hear from people for and against repealing the rule before any decision is final. That comment period was recently extended to **Sept. 27**. It's critical that the agricultural community's voice is heard during that process. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is urging members to tell the EPA how the rule would affect their farms.

"While it's encouraging that the federal government is taking steps toward repealing WOTUS, it's important to remember that it's not a done deal yet," said PFB President Rick Ebert. "Now more than ever, farmers must make their voices heard that they want EPA to ditch this misguided rule once and for all."

WOTUS gives EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers broad authority to regulate many land areas as "water" and would affect an estimated 98 percent of Pennsylvania land. The rule was issued in 2015 by President Barack Obama's administration but never went into effect because of injunctions issued by federal courts that questioned the rule's legality.

Farm Bureau has been a leading opponent of the rule and believes it attempts to regulate land areas well beyond what is allowed by federal law.

To submit comments to EPA, visit: www.pfb.com/WOTUS.

SPECIAL BONUS ISSUE:

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PFB Leaders Share Agriculture's Priorities with Members of Congress

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau was busy advocating for the farming community's priorities during two recent events with members of Congress.

At Ag Progress Days, PFB President Rick Ebert served as a moderator for a discussion on issues facing Pennsylvania agriculture hosted by U.S. Reps. Glenn "G.T." Thompson and Dwight Evans. PFB Vice President Chris Hoffman testified during the panel discussion and highlighted the importance of trade to agriculture, the need for tax reform, and the need for reforms that ensure farms have access to workers from other nations.

Hoffman — along with Lancaster County Farm Bureau President Steve Hershey and other members — also participated in a roundtable discussion on the 2018 Farm Bill with U.S. Sen. Bob Casey in Lancaster County. At that session, Hoffman called for funding for agriculture programs to be maintained at current levels (if not increased), keeping crop insurance a priority, increasing the spending cap on livestock insurance products and considering dairy as a commodity (rather than livestock) for crop insurance purposes to move it out from under that cap. Hershey discussed the changing landscape of agriculture in Lancaster County as well as the importance of farms having access to foreign workers.

PFB Annual Meeting Approaching

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's 67th Annual Meeting will take place Nov. 13-15 at the Hershey Lodge, Hershey. In addition to celebrating PFB's accomplishments, hundreds of members will gather to elect leaders and establish our policies on farming and rural life issues. Several important deadlines related to Annual Meeting are coming up. The deadline for room reservations is **Oct. 3**.

Detailed information about meal tickets, room reservation and the meeting agenda are available at <https://www.pfb.com/annual-meeting-home>. Members can also contact Kim Flegal, PFB's Annual Meeting Coordinator, at **717.731.3580**.



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Agriculture Water Quality Inspections Underway

Pennsylvania's farmers are fortunate to have plentiful access to water with the state's extensive network of rivers and tributaries. Lately, however, agricultural producers have found that the bountiful resource comes with a cost.

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency implemented a total maximum daily load (TMDL) limit on the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment that can be deposited into the Chesapeake Bay. Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection is tasked with enforcing the TMDL and meeting EPA's targets of a 25 percent reduction in nutrient loadings and a 20 percent reduction in sediment loadings by 2025.

Last year, DEP and several county conservation districts began an Agricultural Inspection Initiative to gauge farm-level nutrient and erosion control compliance. Staff from DEP and the conservation districts have reported more than 1,125 visits to farms within the watershed between September 2016 through March 2017 with at least 875 more scheduled for the rest of 2017.

The inspections are intended to ensure compliance with the required implementation of both a written Manure Management Plan (MMP) and an Agricultural Erosion and Sedimentation Plan (Ag E&S Plan), if applicable.

As of mid-July, DEP had inspected 264 farms and conservation districts had completed 861 inspections, covering at least 119,000 acres. Of the farms that have been inspected, 81 percent were required to have implemented a MMP and 83 percent of producers were required to have introduced an Ag E&S Plan on their farms.

Of those farms required to have an MMP, DEP reported that 70 percent had a plan written and 64 percent were meeting the baseline requirements. Of those needing an Ag E&S Plan, 68 percent had one written and 59 percent had a plan that met the necessary requirements for erosion control.

DEP's quarterly progress report found that 74 percent of farmers with a written MMP reported they had received some form of assistance with plan development and 61 percent of farmers had help completing an Ag E&S Plan.

For additional information about the Agricultural Inspection Initiative or assistance with nutrient and sediment plan development, please visit: <http://bit.ly/PaDEPVisits>. Farmers can also use PAOneStop, an online tool designed to help farmers meet nutrient loading requirements, at <https://www.paonestop.org>.

PFB Supports Bill to Expand Broadband in Rural Areas

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is putting its support behind a bill in the state Legislature that would help rural communities keep pace with urban areas in affordable and reliable phone and broadband service.

Senate Bill 740, sponsored by state Sen. Ryan Aument of Lancaster County, was referred to the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee for consideration. The measure would extend the life of the state's Universal Service Fund through at least 2021. That fund supports telecommunication services in rural areas, which tend to be the most costly areas to provide service to.

PFB believes that the fund plays a critical role in ensuring that phone and broadband service is available and affordable to rural residents and that it is needed now more than ever due to decreased support from federal programs.

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