

Wayne Conservation District

Wayne County Park Street Complex

648 Park Street, Suite D

Honesdale, PA 18431

Telephone 570-253-0930, FAX 570-253-9741

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PA Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment at today's listening session. I have been employed at the Wayne Conservation District for 23 years and have experienced many changes in conservation programs at all levels of government.

Conservation districts have been one of the leaders in the conservation movement since the enactment of the Conservation District Law in 1945. Districts have been able to partner with many agencies to accomplish numerous different conservation practices.

Sadly funding for implementing nutrient management and soil conservation best management practices has fallen inadequate.

In earlier years of conservation, funds were provided primarily by the US Department of Agriculture. In Wayne County alone conservation work would occur on an average of 10 to 15 farms per year. Installing some of the same best management practices installed today. With funding at existing levels installation occurs on only 3 to 4 farms per year in Wayne County.

Agricultural producers have seen an increase in regulations, requiring additional monitoring and the need for more intense nutrient management and other conservation measures to protect soil and water resources. The assistance for the implementation is provided from several funding sources, USDA, PA Nutrient Management Program and in some areas the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Each of these sources have been funded at a near static level or reduced in recent years. This situation results in fewer practices being installed on the area farms.

To further exacerbate the situation many farmers in our area fall lower in the ranking. This is due primarily to our special protection waters and lack of concentrated animal operations. Target areas for practices have been impaired waters and either concentrated animal operations or concentrated feeding areas. This also affects priorities for nutrient management planning. The States Plan Development Incentives Program was established to provide funding assistance to producers for planning their farm nutrient use.

Funding for the nutrient management program needs to increase to expand to the areas identified above. Studies have shown that it is much more cost effective to keep clean water clean.

This is a pivotal time for America's agricultural as we are looking for alternative energy sources. Many of the sources are turning to the farmer as the source, from biodiesel, ethanol, methane to fuel pellets. This is not the time for the State or Federal governments to maintain an agricultural budget at status quo.

Moving from the agriculture area I would like to further comment on the flooding issues in Pennsylvania.

In this months article of PA Township News it is stated that Pennsylvania led the nation for flood losses each year between 1955 and 1999. Most recently the flooding of June 2006 dealt a devastating blow to the Northeast. The state and federal governments have reacted to the devastation and have offered some aid to those affected by these events. But, funding falls short in taking a proactive instead of reactive approach to flood protection.

Funding needs to be provided to mitigate the hazards, such as debris in streams and rivers, floodplain encroachment, and stormwater management.

A majority of surveys performed in rural areas, during comprehensive planning, identify protection of rural living and rural areas as the highest priority. It is commendable that this committee is canvassing the State to hear from its citizens on issues that affect their lives and livelihoods.

Once again, I thank you for providing this opportunity for input into the State's rural future. Please feel free to contact me at anytime.

Sincerely,

Robert A Muller Jr.
District Manager