

Submitted by Bill Chain, PA Senior Agricultural Program Manager, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Briefing on the Bay, 1/8, 9:00 AM Erie Room

- I'd like to begin by saying my expertise is strictly Agriculture and my comments this morning will be specific only to the agricultural sector. It is entirely fitting to meet here at this wonderful showcase of farming.
- Thank you,
 - An honor for me to have the opportunity to present this morning. My name is Bill Chain and I'm employed by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as the PA senior agricultural program manager and PA assistant director. I live in Carlisle PA, work at our office in Harrisburg and have the good fortune to travel the state working with county conservation districts, farm organizations, and the USDA, local district NRCS offices.
- This Briefing on the Bay is an important topic, one that requires a great deal of understanding and appreciation;
 - The role of PA agriculture, my specific interest, (more specifically the family farmer-who is and has been the back bone of our agricultural economy), and the honest recognition that farming currently contributes the majority of the nutrient load to our PA streams and rivers.
 - the need to care for our environment (our drinking water, the natural resources we enjoy as Pennsylvanian's; our parks, game lands, streams and rivers) and where those rivers flow – and the impact we have as Pennsylvania's on perhaps more distant ecosystems
 - And our responsibility to everyone downstream in Pennsylvania and the waterman; the farmers of the Chesapeake Bay.
- Sharing my background, in brief
 - Farmer for 20 years; a hog and hay producer (beginning 1981, Franklin County)
 - constructed a concrete manure holding structure with state help in 1982, John Acers – the county ag tech helped me with the grant funding and construction design
 - Vocational agriculture teacher and school administrator
 - remember taking a group of 12 FFA students to the bay in 1986 to learn about the connection between agriculture and the bay. Like many PA farmers, that was my first time seeing the bay. A profound experience that has taught me connections and balance
 - Most recently proudly serving my employer, providing insight and action contributing to increased Ag conservation efforts in Pennsylvania.
- In preparation for today I'm referring to the guidance provided to me by Mr. Troutman -discuss what's working, what's ***not*** working, and what local/state leaders need to pay more attention to in meeting Bay goals. I plan to limit my comments to the agricultural sector who I think can and will rise to the occasion of reducing nutrient and topsoil losses to pa streams and rivers. I'd like to frame my comments in the context of Leadership, Commitment, and Investment (I think of those words as the ingredients necessary for the success in most efforts)
- Let's first talk about what's working

- Leadership, Commitment and Investments
 - Federal Government
 - USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service, the people and programs that play a role in providing ag cost share program throughout the entire country.
 - The Chesapeake Bay Commission
 - Created in 1980 to coordinate Bay-related policy across state lines and to develop shared solutions.
 - Our State Departments and County Conservation Districts
 - The 3 Secretaries, Russ Redding, Dept. of Ag- spokesman for the ag industry, Cindy Dunn, DCNR- owning Riparian Buffer goals, and Patrick McDonnell, DEP excellent work they've done with developing programs that track, report on progress, initiating a WIP development process that was inclusive of farmers and environmentalists
 - County Conservation Districts, boards, managers, and staff of technical assistance providers
 - Our State University
 - Penn State University through research and extension education has and continues to play a huge role in conservation programs while supporting the agricultural industry and their economic viability. PA in the Balance- a set of conferences setting the stage for conservation success
 - All the non-profits and community organizations supporting conservation
 - These are organizations similar to my own, that depend on funding from grants and members to finance conservation projects like planting trees along streams (as my organization does through leading with the Keystone 10 Million Tree Partnership). While other organizations advocate for programs like nutrient stewardship/4rs or by connecting ag conservation to food marketers. And then the many community organizations who depend on the commitment of volunteers to make a difference.
 - But most importantly for this discussion, it's the Farm Sector
 - Pa Farm Bureau- Their involvement in development of the Ag WIP process goals and recommendations- part of the solution, Farm Bureau was there at the very first PA in the Balance conference and recently co-chaired our State Ag Workgroup --- WIP3
 - Farm organizations-The Pa No-Till Alliance teaching the value of no-till and using cover crops
 - individual farmers- voluntary conservation practice implementation, like the farmer I'm seated next to – spending their own funds, those farmers

taking pride in conservation, I've never met a farmer that didn't want to leave the farm better than they found it.

- What's needed
 - Frankly what's needed and noticeably absent is Leadership, Commitment, and Investment from our State Legislature.
 - What's needed is for our State Government to recognize the effort that currently exists (that which I and others have spoken about today, and others who are not here today that are living the effort) and -to enhance that effort with a commitment to legislating and funding an Ag Conservation Cost Share Program that provides Leadership, Commitment and includes the essential Resources to implement the conservation practices on the scale necessary. That program, in order to accelerate conservation practices throughout the State, would have the following characteristics;
 - Build upon the foundation of work that's been done
 - PA- WIP3
 - Ag workgroup recommendations
 - The present PA farm bill- Conservation Excellence
 - Provide equitable funding for a program that;
 - Works and acts locally;
 - County based, authority and responsibility
 - Building upon present relationships and trust
 - Connecting with neighboring farmers
 - Provides cost-share funding for farmers to improve conservation practices and management – resulting in both a better environment, clean water, and economic viability for the family farmer. A win/win – not a handout but ag sector development, with success this will welcome a new generation of farmers with opportunity in PA, keeping the family farmer as our neighbor
 - The program will need people to ensure its ability to work efficiently and effectively
 - A program that has proper oversight, perhaps nested within the State Conservation Commission.
 - A program that operates with simplicity and clearly articulated goals and measures of success.
 - A program that has the support of our farm organizations
 - A program that makes us proud of our Keystone State – our leadership and commitment.
 - A program that will not be cheap --it will be an investment.
 - Let me conclude with a short story from the Tangier Island farmers to the waterman visit.
 - The insight into the challenges faced by those who provide our food

- What do farmers and waterman have in common? an exercise we did during a desert social with the two groups.
 - positive things; family heritage work with family, nature and beauty, independence, pride
 - conversation continued ---we work long hours, dependent on weather, price ups and downs, work in isolation, large investments with limited returns- I guess we're all informed on the economics facing farmers today- 2017 record drought, 2018 record rainfall –flooding, 2019 better, but a continuing down cycle of prices for many commodities, most notable milk. Similarly, true for the waterman
 - then health insurance, **the room was silent**--- who can afford health care? Open discussions with groups of people don't usually get this personal but this one did. I think we learn a lot when we stop and listen.

- The point of the story, for me, is the reminder of the harsh economic challenge faced by our farm families across our State. The reasons for the hardships are many and probably recognizable to you; markets, input costs, land value, weather (drought/too much rain). The Ag conservation cost share program I've described is an investment in our family farmers and frankly the beauty and natural wonders we love about Pennsylvania. I'm hopeful we can develop that cost share program and fund it in our next fiscal year. Our Pennsylvania will be better off with the investment.