



2018

OFBF Water Quality Status Report

“I would argue that no other group has done more to help address the issue than the agriculture community.”

~ Ohio Farm Bureau Executive Vice President Adam Sharp

The level of farmers' commitment to improve Ohio's water quality is impressive. They've dug deep into their pockets to invest in conservation measures and support research efforts. They've voluntarily taken the time to put in cover crops to improve their soil and developed nutrient management plans. They've set aside land for conservation and invested in precision agriculture technology to reduce fertilizer use and runoff. They've opened their farms up to researchers studying nutrient runoff and shared ideas on how to improve Ohio's water quality.

Since September 2014, Ohio Farm Bureau has helped guide farmers through the process with its comprehensive Water Quality Action Plan. Scientists agree that a multi-pronged approach is needed to protect Ohio's water, and this plan does that with the support of dozens of partnering

organizations. So far, Ohio Farm Bureau has committed \$2.5 million of member funds to help farmers improve and protect water quality for all Ohioans. These proactive efforts have drawn national attention and for the second year in a row, Ohio Farm Bureau was honored with American Farm Bureau's prestigious New Horizon Award for its water quality efforts.

Ohio Farm Bureau will continue to work to find tangible solutions to the state's water quality challenges and show how Ohio can have both clean water and productive farming.

This water quality report is the fifth in a series of reports Ohio Farm Bureau has produced to show the strides farmers have made in improving and protecting one of the state's most valuable resources.

WATER QUALITY BY THE NUMBERS

Member investment: \$2.5 million of member funds have helped farmers improve and protect water quality for all Ohioans.

National recognition: For an impressive two years in a row, Ohio Farm Bureau has won American Farm Bureau's prestigious New Horizon Award for its water quality efforts.

Fertilizer certification collaboration: To date, more than 17,493 farmers have taken the certification class, including some who are not required by law to be certified. Ohio Farm Bureau provided funding and support for some of the classes.

Getting results: A federal report shows farmers' conservation practices reduce sediment losses from fields by about **80 percent** and reduce the amount of sediment going into Lake Erie by about **40 percent**. Agricultural soil phosphorus levels held steady or were lower in at least **80 percent** of Ohio counties from 1993 through 2015, according to Ohio State University research. According to USDA, **99 percent of cropland acres in the Western Lake Erie Basin are managed with at least one conservation practice.**

4R certification for applicators: More than 2.8 million acres and nearly 6,000 farm clients are serviced by fertilizer applicators who have earned the certification.

Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network: Three farms, five years, \$1 million investment, more than 1,000 tour participants.

Community investment: Ohio Farm Bureau and partner organizations have invested more than \$1 million in county water quality projects. 39 county Farm Bureaus have partnered with 130 groups on 43 local programs.

ONGOING ACTIONS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Water Quality Action Plan

Nearly four years ago, Ohio Farm Bureau announced its commitment to address the state's water quality challenges. In its comprehensive Water Quality Action Plan, Ohio Farm Bureau detailed a number of specific steps to be taken to protect the state's water resources and preserve farmers' ability to grow food. To date, Ohio Farm Bureau has invested more than \$2.5 million of member funds to the plan, which requires unprecedented cooperation and collaboration among farmers, universities and federal, state and local agencies.

Regulatory Support

In addition to voluntary measures, farmers and Farm Bureau have recognized the need to incorporate known best practices into law and create a stronger regulatory framework around nutrient use.

Ohio Farm Bureau supported Senate Bill 150, an Ohio law that requires farmers who apply fertilizer on more than 50 acres for agricultural production to be certified. For more than three years, Ohio Farm Bureau has actively promoted this certification as well as provided funding for some of the classes. To date, more than 17,493 farmers have taken the certification class, including some who are not required by law to be certified.

Ohio Farm Bureau also supported a 2015 law that put restrictions in place on nutrient applications in the Western Lake Erie Basin during certain times of the year that are more prone to nutrient losses.

MYTH BUSTERS

MYTH: Ohio farms and manure are not regulated.

FACT: Ohio has multiple regulatory systems in place including:

- The Livestock Environmental Permitting Program
- The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
- Certified Livestock Manager Credentialing
- The Ohio Agricultural Pollution Abatement Program
- Senate Bill 150, which requires fertilizer application training and certification
- Senate Bill 1, which restricts manure application to times when weather and soil conditions are safe (within the Western Lake Erie Basin)

Nutrient Management Plans

Ohio Farm Bureau and a dozen partners are working to expand the number of farmers who have Nutrient Management Plans, which identify ways to reduce nutrient and sediment loss as well as reinforce the responsible use of fertilizer. New research conducted by government, academia and the private sector indicates that nutrient runoff can be meaningfully reduced when farmers have accurate data on crop nutrient needs and then follow a detailed plan that simultaneously maximizes efficient production and minimizes nutrient loss. A series of workshops this summer will provide farmers with individualized Nutrient Management Plans using a program developed by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. These Nutrient Management Plans exceed state legal requirements.



Ohio Farm Bureau also helped provide funding for four Ohio State University Extension educators who worked for three years with farmers in the 24-county Western Lake Erie Basin to develop Nutrient Management Plans.



These organizations sent a letter to Gov. John Kasich explaining the new Nutrient Management Plan program and reminded him about the millions of farmer dollars invested in research.

Field Day with Jordan Hoewischer



Water quality was a popular subject on a new podcast series, Field Day with Jordan Hoewischer, which is hosted by Ohio Farm Bureau's director of water quality and research.

Over the past year, Hoewischer has talked with industry experts and leaders who are helping shape and secure the future of the state's agricultural industry. Topics have included precision agriculture, research related to manure application technology, Nutrient Management Plans and agriculture's impact on Lake Erie.

On-Farm Research

Ohio Farm Bureau is helping fund on-farm research being done by researchers at Ohio State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service and other groups. The goal is to identify how and when nutrients are leaving farm fields and what conservation measures are effective and still allow for productive farming. The state of Ohio has committed to reducing nutrient loading into Lake Erie by 40 percent by 2025. Ohio Farm Bureau supports this commitment made as part of the Western Lake Erie Collaborative agreement that was signed in 2015 and includes similar pledges from Michigan and Ontario, Canada.



Edge-of-field equipment installed on farms throughout Ohio is helping researchers determine what conservation measures help reduce nutrient runoff.

Edge-of-field testing equipment has been installed at two of the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms as well as 40 fields throughout Ohio. Scientists are capturing surface and sub-surface water samples 365 days a year and testing the amount of nutrients in the samples. This testing is helping researchers determine how applying different conservation methods to fields affects the amount of nutrients coming off farm fields.

The results helped researchers update the Ohio Phosphorus Risk Index. Farmers use this tool to assess their risk of phosphorus moving off farm fields and what management practice they can implement to reduce phosphorus loss. Phosphorus is an agricultural nutrient that can contribute to harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie and other freshwater bodies.

Research Results

Ohio farmers' voluntary conservation efforts are having a positive impact on water quality in the Western Lake Erie Basin. Farmers' conservation practices reduce sediment losses from fields by about 80 percent and the amount of sediment going into Lake Erie by about 40 percent, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The report states "farmers have been willing to listen to and respond to recommendations made by scientists and policymakers in order to help address environmental concerns around Lake Erie." Another USDA report showed 99 percent of cropland acres in the Western Lake Erie Basin are managed with at least one conservation practice.

An Ohio State University study found agricultural soil phosphorus levels held steady or were lower in at least 80 percent of Ohio counties from 1993 to 2015. Researchers looked at more than 2 million phosphorus soil tests and found that in 2015 the median soil phosphorus level was within the appropriate agronomic range in 87 of 88 Ohio counties.

“Ohio farmers have implemented voluntary conservation practices to reduce losses of nutrients and sediment because they care deeply about the land they farm and the water people drink.”

~ Terry Cosby, Ohio Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Well Water Testing

More than 750,000 households depend on their own well, spring or cistern for their drinking water. It is recommended that wells be tested if they are more than 20 years old; were dug rather than drilled; are shallow; soil is sandy; a chemical spill happened nearby, or they are near cropland, feedlots, landfills or industrial sites. In order to raise awareness and help homeowners ensure their well water is safe, Ohio Farm Bureau offered free nitrate testing of their well water. Hundreds of testing kits were sent to Heidelberg University's National Center for Water Research for analysis. Ohio Farm Bureau paid for the cost of the nitrate testing (\$25 per sample), and some homeowners opted to also have their water tested for pesticides and metals at their own cost.

WATER QUALITY GRANTS

Over the past three years, Ohio Farm Bureau and partnering organizations have invested more than \$1 million in county Farm Bureau-led projects to help improve water quality in local communities. In all, Ohio Farm Bureau has awarded nearly \$415,000 to county Farm Bureaus who in turn garnered more than \$640,000 in matching funds from outside groups that include businesses, universities, soil and water conservation districts, federal agencies and local park districts. Thirty-nine county Farm Bureaus have partnered with 130 groups on 43 programs. The 2016 county water quality grants program was honored with American Farm Bureau's New Horizon Award for its innovative approach to addressing water quality concerns.



OFBF President Frank Burkett, left, accepts the New Horizon Award from AFBF President Zippy Duvall.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

County Farm Bureaus receiving funding and their projects:

2017-2018 Highlights

Crawford County: A water quality learning area will be created to educate farmers, school groups, elected officials and the public about the positive measures farmers are taking to improve water quality by minimizing nutrient runoff. The area will be next to cropland and consist of a 1-acre surface-fed pond with a drainage ditch and small creek feeding into it.

Defiance, Fulton, Henry and Williams counties: The four county Farm Bureaus will partner with Farm Bureau counties in Michigan to buy radio and television advertising that promote the different measures agriculture is using to protect Lake Erie.

Fulton County: County Farm Bureau members will visit Ohio State University's water research center, Stone Lab, on Lake Erie as well as the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms to learn about water quality efforts.

Logan County: Water testing from subsurface tile and from surface waterways was done at local farms that have a permanent agricultural easement to demonstrate how they are good stewards of the land. More than 40 people attended a soil health and cover crop field day and another one is planned this year.

Lucas and Ottawa counties: Two tours of the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms will be offered to showcase conservation practices and research being done on the three farms. The first tour is for county Farm Bureau members, public officials and legislators. The second is for county FFA chapters, and students will have the opportunity to prepare for their FFA soil judging contests.

Mahoning County: This project will provide education to agricultural and residential landowners on proper soil testing and nutrient management.

Mercer County: Two different methods are being used to research the differences in soil health between a long-term no-till system and a minimum tillage system. Data will be collected for 16 months and followed up by community outreach.

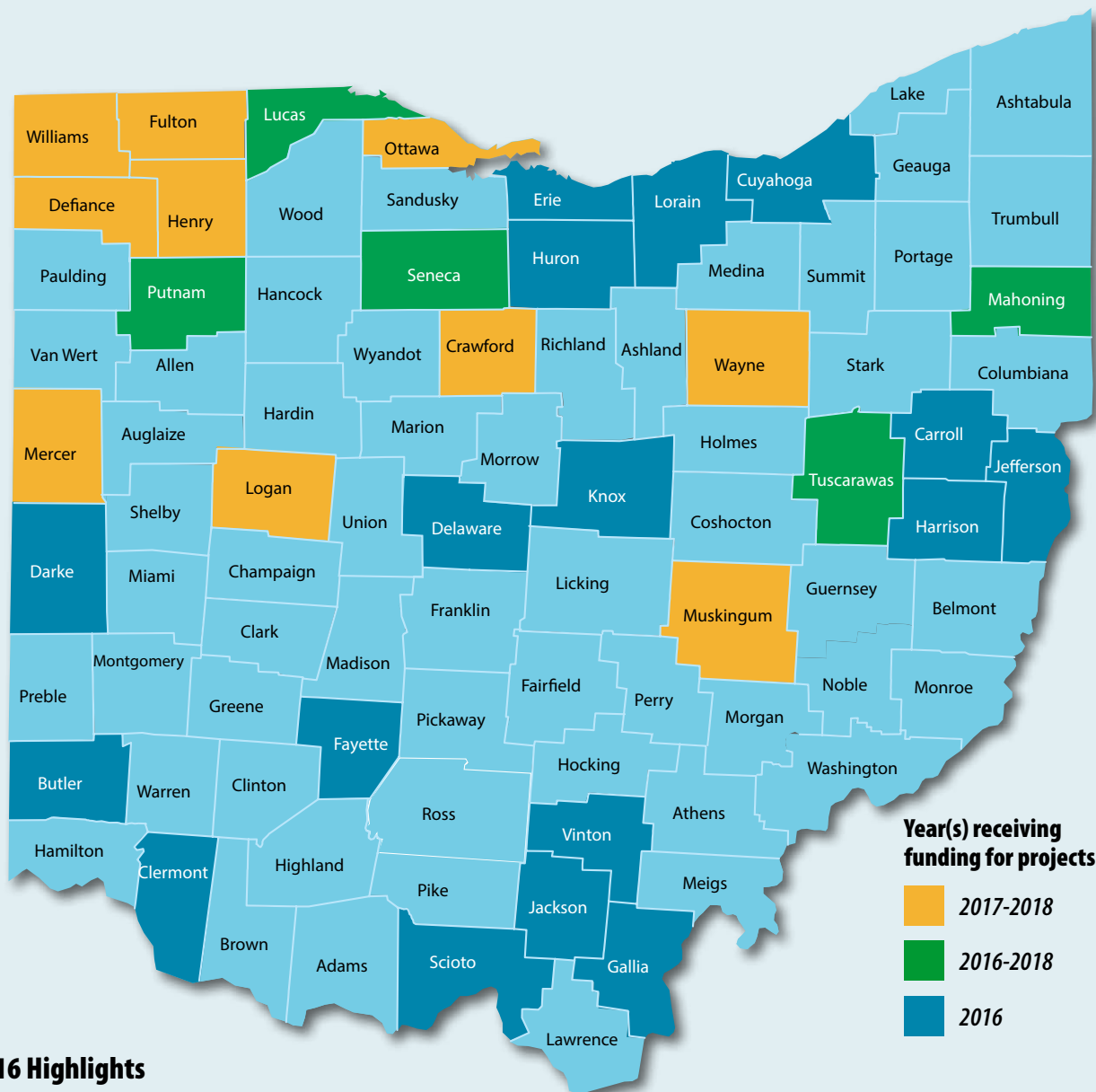
Muskingum County: In support of a two-year project to gather nutrient data, a video will be produced and informational meeting held to share with local farmers the results of the study. The research tracked soil test levels and tissue levels of crops throughout the season along with water samples from tile outlets. The project findings will help farmers when making nutrient management decisions.

Putnam County: An agricultural tour showcased what farmers and the county are doing in regards to water quality. Stops included the Ottawa Wastewater Treatment Plant, a third generation dairy farm, a new hatchery, a hydroponic farm, a vineyard and stops to see solar panels and the Blanchard River.

Seneca County: Grant money funded several water quality educational activities including the Nutrient Bus Tour, Neighborhood Farm Chat, Clean Water Fest and Clean Creek Project at Miller Conservation Farm.

Tuscarawas County: Members of OFBF's Young Agricultural Professionals will be invited to canoe the Tuscarawas River to see the region's natural assets and learn about the different tributaries and riparian areas and how they relate to water quality.

Wayne County: Dairy manure application plots were set up and yield data collected to determine the effectiveness and best time to do side-dress application of manure, which is done after crops have started growing.



2016 Highlights

Butler County: A new 8-acre Agricultural Conservation Education & Demonstration area.

Clermont County: "Cover Crops for Southwest Ohio" booklet updated.

Cuyahoga County: A demonstration heavy-use site and riparian area installation.

Delaware County: Phosphorus loss monitoring on county farms.

Darke County: Design and building of a commercial 12-row dragline toolbar.

Erie and Huron counties: New equipment was purchased for volunteer monitoring of streams.

Fayette County: A canoe float down the Paint Creek Watershed let county residents explore local rivers while learning about water quality through educational stops along the way.

Gallia County: No-till drill rental at a discounted rate.

Jackson-Vinton counties: A multicounty fertilizer applicator certification training class.

Jefferson County: The Upper Ohio River Watershed Community Outreach Campaign .

Knox County: Improvements were made to the Ohio Nutrient Management Record Keeper (ONMRK) app, which helps farmers comply with state laws that dictate record keeping and weather restrictions for application of fertilizer and manure. Also, a joint venture was formed between Knox County Farm Bureau and Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District in which a board of directors was appointed to oversee future updates and nationwide expansion of the smartphone application.

Lorain County: Data is being collected of runoff water at dozens of sites throughout the county.

Lucas County: Collaborative Look at Evaluating Available Nutrients (C.L.E.A.N) project.

Mahoning County: Workshop series and two agricultural field days.

Putnam County: Agricultural bus tour.

Scioto County: Lime spreader rental at a significantly discounted rate. 4R Nutrient Program education.

Seneca County: Educational events series.

Tuscarawas, Carroll and Harrison counties: Riparian landowner workshops.



Ohio Farm Bureau Executive Vice President Adam Sharp testified in Congress about the conservation partnerships and programs Ohio farmers have voluntarily participated in that benefit water quality and environmental sustainability. Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry wanted to learn about the effectiveness of conservation measures as they examined federal funding of conservation programs. Sharp testified that between 2006 and 2012, farmers had voluntarily reduced phosphorus applications in the Western Lake Erie Basin by more than 13 million pounds, citing a NRCS study.

Support for Water Quality Funding

Ohio Farm Bureau continues to support and advocate for adequate funding of Ohio State University Extension, Ohio Sea Grant, Heidelberg University's National Center of Water Quality Research and other key groups and programs that work to protect the state's waterways.

“We need a healthy lake, but we need a healthy and robust ag industry in Ohio.”

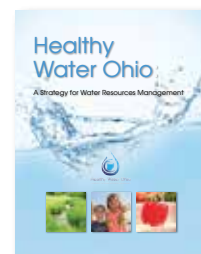
~ Chris Winslow, director of Ohio Sea Grant

Ongoing conservation projects included the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network partnership between Ohio Farm Bureau and the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, as well as conservation tools provided through the farm bill such as

the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Healthy Water Ohio

In 2017, Ohio Farm Bureau worked with partners on education and outreach recommendations made by Healthy Water Ohio (HwO). Ohio Farm Bureau led this coalition of conservation, business, academic and other interests who met for 1 1/2 years to create a long-term water strategy report. Input came from more than 200 individuals and organizations with diversified interests in Ohio's water. Read the coalition's findings and recommendations at HealthyWaterOhio.org.



4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program

Now in its fifth year, the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program is a concentrated effort by the agriculture industry to significantly reduce and prevent applied nutrients from running off farm fields. Administered by the Ohio AgriBusiness Association, this voluntary program is focused on the 4Rs (using the Right source of nutrients at the Right rate and Right time and in the Right place).

Program participants must go through an annual, independent, third-party audit and demonstrate they not only understand 4R principles but also follow them. Rolled out in the Western Lake Erie Basin, the program expanded to the rest of Ohio in January 2017 and has inspired other states and regions to explore adopting the certification program for their geographies.

Today, approximately 2.8 million acres — about 1.9 million in the Western Lake Erie Basin — and nearly 6,000 grower customers are serviced by the 47 facilities in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio that have earned 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification.

4Rs



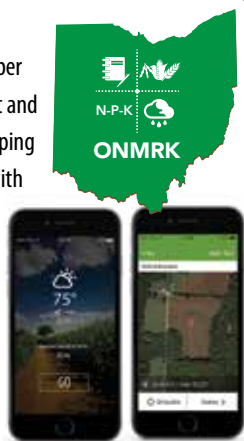
Blanchard River **DEMONSTRATION** FARMS NETWORK

In the northwestern corner of Ohio, three farms are serving as real-world teaching laboratories, showcasing both new and existing on-farm conservation practices that farmers can implement to improve water quality. Called the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network, the five-year, \$1 million project in partnership with U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service is helping farmers find the right combination of practices that reduce nutrient and sediment loss while minimally affecting their financial bottom line. The demonstration farms serve as a hub for scientific, reliable and first-hand information that is distributed to a wide audience. The goal is to show how clean water and productive agriculture can coexist.

Through on-farm tours and off-farm presentations, project managers have communicated with thousands of people about how actively engaged the agricultural community is in helping find solutions for Ohio's water quality issues. Over the past year, the farms have installed new conservation measures, including a large wetland and pollinator area, a composting facility for dead livestock and phosphorus removal beds. The Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network was recently honored with American Farm Bureau's prestigious New Horizon Award,

ONMRK App

The Ohio Nutrient Management Record Keeper (ONMRK) is the state's only weather forecast and fertilizer and manure application record keeping app. It allows farmers to be in compliance with state manure and fertilizer regulations. This free tool was developed by the Knox County Farm Bureau and Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District with additional funding from Ohio Farm Bureau. To date, it has been downloaded more than 2,000 times.



Ohio Farm Bureau and Legacy Cooperative teamed up for an April 13 FFA Career Day where over 150 students from around the state were at Stateler Farms to learn about all the various careers in agriculture and participate in a farm decision game to learn more about the environmental and economic effects of farming practice decisions throughout the growing season.

which recognizes new and innovative state Farm Bureau programs.

Demonstration farm visitors have included community stakeholders such as county commissioners, environmentalists, Rotary clubs, Sen. Rob Portman, farmers, county Farm Bureau members, media, Toledo Mayor Paula Hicks-Hudson and students studying water quality at Ohio State University's Stone Lab. An FFA Career Day at the demonstration farms drew more than 125 students who learned about the proactive, voluntary conservation measures farmers are taking to improve water quality as well as possible careers in the agriculture industry. A series of short educational films on each conservation practice on the farms will debut this summer.

To learn more, visit blancharddemofarms.org

Stateler Family Farms

Stateler Family Farms is located in McComb in Hancock County and is owned and operated by Duane and Anthony Stateler. The Stateres farm corn, soybeans and wheat on approximately 600 acres and also operate a 7,200-head wean to



Stateler family

finish swine operation. The Stateres have committed 243 acres to the demo farms project and love sharing their story with visitors while they get up close with the pigs via their specialized viewing room.



Kellogg family

Kellogg Farms

Bill and Shane Kellogg own and operate Kellogg Farms in Forest in Hardin County. The farm consists of 5,000 acres of corn and soybeans. The Kelloggs have committed 305 acres to the demonstration farms project and showcase their subsurface nutrient placement toolbar, which allows for precise placement of fertilizer while putting it under the soil, providing an efficient method for ensuring nutrients stay in place.

Kurt Farms

Chris Kurt owns and operates Kurt Farms, a 470-acre corn and soybean operation in Dunkirk in Hardin County. Kurt has committed 168 acres to the demonstration farms' project and is always eager to try new conservation practices on his farm. Previously, he worked with The Nature Conservancy and Hardin Soil and Water Conservation District to construct a two-stage ditch on the demonstration farm site.



Chris Kurt and sons

MEDIA OUTREACH

THE BLADE

PAGES OF OPINION

Toledo, Ohio SUNDAY, MAY 6, 2018 Section C, Page 4

Farm Bureau is committed to Lake Erie

The Blade's April 26 editorial "Lake Erie Shame" correctly stated that "farmers are not our enemy" in working to clean up Lake Erie, which is why more than 62,000 farmer-members of the Ohio Farm Bureau are irritated each time a Blade editorial misrepresents their organization and their actions.

The Blade characterized the Farm Bureau as obstructionists. This is untrue. Ohio recently enacted two new laws to reduce farm nutrient runoff. Farm Bureau was engaged and supportive of these measures.

Saying the Farm Bureau has delayed progress on improving the lake is also false. In recent years, more than

\$2.5 million of Farm Bureau member money has provided farmers with new knowledge and spurred action in reducing nutrient loss. Millions more is being spent by other farm organizations. We're not slowing progress; we're driving progress.

The Blade's statement that "we already know what to do to reduce the pollution that is killing Lake Erie" also misses the mark. A lack of knowledge is precisely the problem. Why, how, and when are nutrients escaping farm fields and how do we reduce the problem? These questions, and many more, need answers before writing new regulations. We are not saying go slow, we're saying be

smart.

The Farm Bureau agrees with The Blade's conclusion that farmers need help in solving the problem. For years, the Farm Bureau has sought the "real help from Columbus" The Blade recommends.

Rather than judge our organization by what farm critics tell you, come see our farms, meet our members, and see that the Farm Bureau is an active and willing partner in protecting Lake Erie.

ADAM J. SHARP
Columbus, Ohio

Editor's note: Mr. Sharp is the executive vice president of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

Most Ohioans learn about agriculture's relationship to water quality from their local media. Ohio Farm Bureau is a resource for media to help them communicate about farmers' work to improve water quality. The letter to the editor above appeared in a May edition of The Blade in Toledo. Farm Bureau regularly talks with or provides first-hand experiences for the media about farming practices, scientific research and policy issues. Much of this work involves connecting reporters with farmers.

Working together to protect water quality and food production in Ohio is just part of the work Ohio Farm Bureau members do every day. That work is supported by membership dollars and member engagement. We invite you to support our effort by joining, renewing or inviting others to join.

Visit GrowWithFB.org to learn more.



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