

# OHIO FARM BUREAU

## Water Quality Status Report

**O**hio farmers are taking their responsibility for improving water quality seriously. By investing their own time and money, using Ohio Farm Bureau membership resources and supporting common sense rules and regulations, farmers are stepping up to make a difference. This water quality status report is the third in a series of reports Ohio Farm Bureau has produced to demonstrate this organization's commitment to water quality.

### Multi-million dollar partnership

In September 2014 Ohio Farm Bureau launched its Water Quality Action Plan. The project has now committed \$2 million of member funds to help farmers improve their knowledge and develop techniques that make sense agronomically and environmentally.

Other groups are doing their part, too. The Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences committed an additional \$1 million for its Field to Faucet initiative to identify challenges and practical solutions across the full water spectrum.

The farm community successfully supported the effort to bring nearly \$12 million in federal farm bill money to protect the watershed that feeds Lake Erie. Ohio Farm Bureau also led the Healthy Water Ohio coalition of conservation, business, academic and other interests that issued a long-term water strategy report.



# Ongoing Actions & Accomplishments

## Fertilizer Certification

In 2014 farmers supported a new state law that aims to reduce nutrient runoff. Under Senate Bill 150, anyone who applies fertilizer on more than 50 acres for agriculture production must be certified by 2017. To date 10,133 farmers, who manage more than 2 million acres, have completed continuing education classes in fertilizer application and been certified by the state of Ohio. Ohio Farm Bureau provided funding for fertilizer certification classes in 12 counties that did not have Extension educators so the training would take place in all 88 counties.



## Water Quality Action Plan

Ohio Farm Bureau's Water Quality Action Plan set the stage for the organization's long-term commitment to addressing the state's water quality challenges. The plan requires a high degree of cooperation and collaboration among farmers, universities and federal, state and local agencies. The ultimate goal is to protect the state's water resources and preserve farmers' ability to grow food.

The Water Quality Action Plan included the following components:

- Farm Bureau's staff water team, Dr. Larry Antosch, Jordan Hoewischer and Aaron Heilers, are leading water quality efforts on a variety of fronts. Antosch has been with Farm Bureau for 15 years when the organization became one of the first farm groups in the nation to hire a full-time water specialist. Hoewischer joined the team as director of water quality and research. In

addition, Heilers is coordinating demonstration farm projects. Hoewischer previously was a senior research specialist for Scotts Miracle-Gro. He received a bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and a master's degree in natural resources and environmental science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Heilers previously served as a nutrient management technician at the Auglaize County Soil and Water Conservation District. He is an Ohio State University graduate with a degree in agriculture.

- In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Ohio Farm Bureau, three demonstration farms were established in the Blanchard River watershed. The demonstration farms will showcase both traditional and innovative ways farmers can reduce and prevent nutrient runoff. The farms will be open to farmers, policymakers and the public.
- Ohio Farm Bureau is working with partners on details for the creation of a public-private Ohio Water Trust as proposed in a report released by Healthy Water Ohio, a coalition of water stakeholders.



(Left to right) Farm Bureau's staff water team, Dr. Larry Antosch, Aaron Heilers and Jordan Hoewischer are leading water quality efforts on a variety of fronts.

# COMMUNITY GRANTS

In 2015, Ohio Farm Bureau provided nearly \$150,000 in direct support to projects identified by volunteers that will help improve water quality in their communities. With additional matching funds from partnering organizations, these projects will provide more than \$700,000 in total resources. Ohio Farm Bureau's board has approved an additional \$200,000 for county water quality projects in 2016.

## 2015 PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



### **ONMRK app – Knox County**

A free mobile app is now available to help farmers statewide comply with new recordkeeping requirements. The Ohio Nutrient Management Record Keeper (ONMRK) was designed to help farmers comply with new fertilizer application regulations. Knox County Farm Bureau received \$30,000 that required a financial match from other groups. Partners on the project are the Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District, The Ohio State University and Muskingum Watershed Conservation District. The app is available at onmrk.com, Google Play and the App Store.

### **Canoe Watershed Tour – Fayette County**

A canoe watershed tour and educational workshop helped the community get a first-hand look at water quality issues.

### **Scioto Headwaters Exchange – Delaware County**

Local leaders and community influencers engaged in a workshop series on a broad range of water resource protection opportunities and challenges within the headwaters of the Scioto River Watershed.

### **EarthFest Education – Cuyahoga County**

Water Quality Ag Mags were distributed to area middle school science teachers to provide

accurate information about water quality issues and help educate how everyone can do their part to ensure a safe water supply.

### **Splash into Ottawa County**

Ottawa County Farm Bureau hosted a week-long water quality education tent and a one-day family fun day, known as Splash into Ottawa County, at the county fair.

### **Watershed Cover Crop Project – Hamilton County**

By helping farmers purchase and plant fall cover crops, a southwestern Ohio community hopes to see improved water quality in the Dry Fork/Howard Creek sub-watershed of the Whitewater River.

### **Building a Better Lake – Logan County**

Local organizations are partnering to install a rain garden that will help protect the waters of Indian Lake from potential pollutants that run off from the impervious surfaces of the bike path and parking lots.

### **Cover Crops and Grazing Management – Adams County**

This project leverages federal funds to help farmers install conservation practices and plant cover crops to improve overall soil health, reduce erosion and prevent nutrients from entering waterways.

### **Nutrient Management for Cleaner Water – Darke County**

The Ohio Manure Science Review was held in the county, and water quality funding was

used to support and promote the event, which had record attendance. Results of on-farm research projects will be shared to help growers reduce their use of nitrogen and phosphorous while continuing to increase crop yields and profits.

### **Keeping Lucas County C.L.E.A.N – Lucas County**

The Collaborative Look at Evaluating Available Nutrients (C.L.E.A.N) project is helping farmers better understand the nutrient makeup of their soil and develop a nutrient management plan through the implementation of advanced soil scan technologies.



### **Farm 4 Clean Water – Wood County**

A billboard and social media campaign educated the public about agriculture, water quality and how local farmers are protecting Ohio's water sources.

### **Wetlands and Watershed Partnership – Madison County**

A wetlands feasibility study and equipment and support for water quality improvement techniques at Choctaw Lake are bringing together farmers as well as a suburban community. Two downstream state parks also stand to benefit from local efforts to improve water quality.

# HEALTHY WATER OHIO

An unprecedented coalition of Ohio water stakeholders issued its strategic plan for maintaining and strengthening the state's water resources in September 2015. The Healthy Water Ohio (HwO) coalition's recommendations aim to preserve Ohio's valuable water assets for those who rely on them for consumption, recreation, food production and commerce.

The HwO plan identifies specific needs in the areas of policy, research, infrastructure and education. It also proposes the creation of a public-private Ohio Water Trust, funded at \$250 million annually to help enact the plan's recommendations. A portion of the trust funding would be accrued through the sale of state bonds.

The Healthy Water Ohio coalition received input from more than 200 individuals and organizations with diversified interests in Ohio water. Its 16-member steering committee represents conservation, business, universities, water suppliers, agriculture, human health and others. Over its 21-month effort, the coalition hosted dozens of fact-finding events and discussion meetings, heard from subject matter experts, engaged with government leaders and collected public input via a statewide survey of more than 1,000 Ohio citizens.

The report's policy plan emphasizes the value of Ohio's existing watershed districts and recommends voluntary water quality and quantity management practices, encourages incentives and collaboration, calls for

equitable and reasonable regulations and advocates for improved coordination among government agencies.

The full report is available at [HealthyWaterOhio.org](http://HealthyWaterOhio.org).



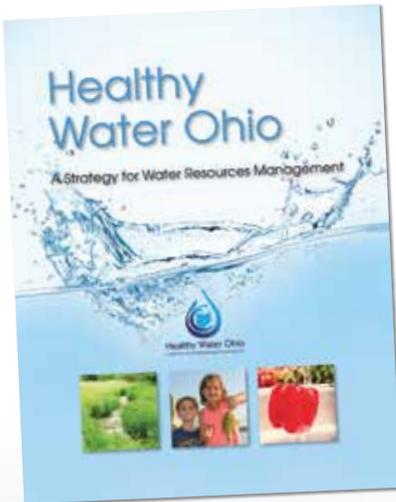
Healthy Water Ohio

A STRATEGY FOR WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT.

***“The Healthy Water Ohio collaboration has brought fresh insight and renewed energy to Ohio’s most valuable natural resource – abundant fresh water. The Nature Conservancy is proud to have contributed to this discussion by bringing new approaches to understanding and solving water quality problems that we and others have demonstrated in nutrient-challenged watersheds around the world.”***

~ Josh Knights

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio



## AG-LINK

At the suggestion of Ohio Farm Bureau, the state legislature passed a budget item that expanded the Ohio treasurer's low-interest loan Ag-LINK program after Senate Bill 1 went into effect. Called Ag-LinkNOW (for Northwestern Ohio Watershed), the new five-year program allows Western Lake Erie Basin farmers to apply for an interest rate reduction on a loan of up to \$500,000 to install a manure storage containment system or purchase equipment to incorporate manure into the ground.

## ON-FARM RESEARCH

Ohio Farm Bureau is helping fund on-farm research being done by researchers at The Ohio State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service and other groups. For example, edge-of-field testing equipment has been installed on 40 fields throughout Ohio as part of ongoing research to find ways to reduce nutrient runoff and to determine how to best update the Ohio Phosphorus Risk Index to address dissolved phosphorus.

## WORKING WITH NEIGHBORING STATES

Ohio Farm Bureau has been meeting with Indiana Farm Bureau and Michigan Farm Bureau to share information about each state's water quality programs and education outreach efforts as well as to help promote the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Tri-State Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

## SUPPORT FOR RCPP GRANT FUNDING

Ohio Farm Bureau has helped promote and provide in-kind contributions to the Tri-State Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The federal program is providing \$17.5 million to farmers in the Western Lake Erie basin who put in pollution-control measures.

## NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLANS

Ohio Farm Bureau provided funding for Ohio State University Extension to hire Tony Campbell, Linda Lauber and Jessie Schulze to develop Nutrient Management Plans at no charge for farmers in the 22-county Western Lake Erie Basin. Nutrient Management Plans provide fertility recommendations and help identify ways to reduce nutrient and sediment loss.

Ohio Farm Bureau has developed a brochure that details provisions of Senate Bill 1, including what the guidelines and restrictions are for applying manure and fertilizer and what exemptions exist.



A copy of this brochure can be downloaded at [ofb.ag/SB1Brochure](http://ofb.ag/SB1Brochure)



Campbell



Schulze



Lauber

# Blanchard River **DEMONSTRATION** FARMS NETWORK

A new partnership between Ohio Farm Bureau and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service resulted in the creation of a series of demonstration farms in the Blanchard River Watershed.

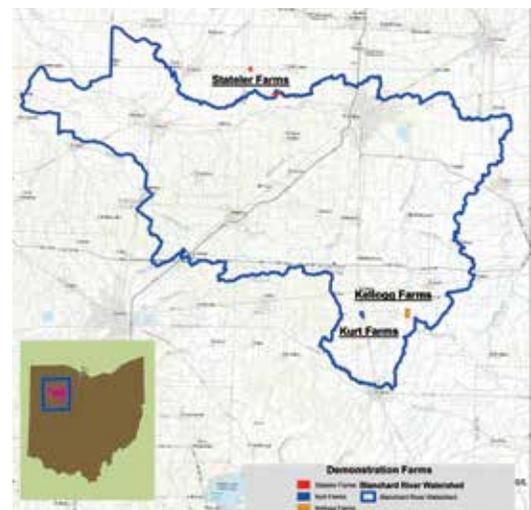
Through 2020, three demonstration farms will serve as models for new innovations that reduce and prevent agricultural nutrient runoff and those discoveries will be shared with local farmers, land management agencies and the public.

The project includes several crucial components:

- Edge-of-field monitoring – Monitoring stations will be established to measure changes in sediment and nutrient losses via surface runoff as well as drainage tile discharge. Water quality and quantity monitoring before and after the project implementation will provide the data necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the conservation practice.
- Economic analysis – The overall economic impact of the conservation practices on the farmer.
- Participation and attendance – The level of interest among farmers, stakeholders (i.e. how many visited the demonstration farm or participated in tours).
- Project replication – The frequency in which other farmers in the Western Lake Erie Basin replicate the conservation practices.

This project also will be supported by federal, state and local partners including:

- Hardin and Hancock Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Blanchard River Watershed Partnership
- Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- The Ohio State University
- USDA Agricultural Research Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Geological Service
- Ohio State University Extension
- Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
- Ohio Department of Agriculture
- The Nature Conservancy in Ohio



## PARTICIPATING FARMERS



Stateler Family Farms  
Duane and Anthony Stateler



Kurt Farms  
Chris Kurt



Kellogg Farms  
Bill and Shane Kellogg

# HAVING AN IMPACT

Thousands of farmers across the state have been proactive in their efforts for Ohio to have both clean water and productive farming. More than 10,000 farmers have taken fertilizer certification classes, representing over 2 million acres. They have put in cover crops, filter strips, two-stage ditches and other conservation methods with a goal of keeping nutrients on the fields and out of the water. They are developing nutrient management plans with the help of Ohio State University Extension educators to maximize nutrient use efficiency and minimize nutrient runoff. For the past three years, farmers have had researchers on their land doing edge-of-field research to determine the best methods for reducing nutrient loss and to help them update the Ohio Phosphorus Risk Index, a tool farmers use to assess their risk of phosphorus moving off fields.

These efforts were acknowledged when Natural Resources Conservation Services Chief Jason Weller stated the federal government is impressed by how farmers have been embracing best management practices—results show western Lake Erie farmers have reduced sediment loss by half between 2006 and 2012. He said an unprecedented 99 percent of Western Lake Erie Basin farms in northwest Ohio, northeast Indiana and southeast Michigan have adopted at least one water-conservation measure.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Can we have clean water without limiting our capacity to grow food? Is energy exploration and development possible without harming the environment? These and other public policy issues were the topic of discussion with Ohio Environmental Protection Agency Director Craig Butler during a recent edition of Town Hall Ohio.



EPA Director Craig Butler discusses clean water with OFBF's Jack Fisher, right.

***We need to have  
clean water without  
limiting our capacity  
to grow food.***



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](http://GrowWithFB.org) to learn more.

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